



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 38

“I FORGOT”

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish genuine memory failure from weak implementation, low priority, and possible avoidance when a client repeatedly reports forgetting a commitment.

The trainee should recognize that a client's explanation can be descriptively accurate while remaining incomplete as an explanation of the full behavioral sequence.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Noah

Goal: Build professional relationships in a new industry

Current Commitment: Send two follow-up messages to contacts he met at an event.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Noah has now missed similar follow-up commitments twice.

Each time he has said he forgot.

He reliably remembers other time-sensitive work obligations without external reminders.

The follow-up messages involve people he does not know well.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: Did the two follow-ups go out?

Noah: Damn. No. I completely forgot again.

Accountabili-Buddy: Did you remember at any point during the week?

Noah: I remembered Tuesday when I saw one of their business cards, but I was in the middle of something. Then I forgot again.

Noah: I really am terrible at remembering this stuff.

5. TRAINEE TASK

What does “I forgot” explain, and what does it leave unexplained?

What evidence supports and weakens the strongest competing formulations?

What is significant about the moment Noah remembered on Tuesday?

What information would materially change the formulation?

What would you ask next?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Noah has missed similar follow-up commitments twice.
- He describes forgetting as the reason for both misses.
- He remembered the current commitment at least once during the week.
- He did not send the messages at that remembered moment.

- Noah reports that he was in the middle of something when he remembered.
- After that moment, the task left his attention again.
- He reliably remembers other time-sensitive work obligations without external reminders.
- The follow-up messages involve relatively unfamiliar professional contacts.
- The current evidence does not establish whether Noah created any scheduling, cueing, or other implementation structure for the task.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Noah describes himself as poor at remembering this type of task.

His explanation accurately describes at least part of what occurred: the commitment was not consistently present in his attention.

ACCOUNTABILITY-BUDDY INFERENCE

Forgetting may genuinely contribute to the missed commitment.

However, forgetting alone does not yet explain the full sequence.

Noah remembered the task on Tuesday but did not act at that moment. The reason for that non-action remains unresolved.

He may simply have remembered at a time when execution was impractical and then lacked a reliable way to return to the task.

The task may also carry relatively low immediate priority, or something about contacting unfamiliar people may contribute to postponement.

The fact that Noah reliably remembers other time-sensitive obligations suggests that the problem may be task-specific rather than a general inability to remember commitments, but it does not establish why.

The remembered-but-not-acted moment provides the most useful current opportunity for discrimination.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Forgetting appears to be part of the behavioral sequence but is insufficient as the complete functional explanation. What prevented action or reliable return to the task after Noah remembered remains unresolved.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

WEAK IMPLEMENTATION

Noah may genuinely forget the task after it leaves his immediate attention because there is no sufficiently reliable structure for returning to it.

Under this formulation, the problem is not simply remembering once, but preserving the task until an appropriate execution opportunity occurs.

LOW PRIORITY

The follow-up messages may repeatedly lose attention because other activities receive greater immediate priority.

Under this formulation, forgetting may be real while also reflecting how the task is treated relative to competing demands.

TASK-SPECIFIC AVOIDANCE

Something about sending messages to relatively unfamiliar professional contacts may make the task easier to postpone when it becomes salient.

The current evidence does not establish discomfort, fear, awkwardness, or any other specific reason for avoidance.

GENUINE MEMORY FAILURE

Noah may have difficulty retaining this type of non-routine task without external support.

His reliable memory for other time-sensitive obligations makes a generalized memory explanation less sufficient, but task-specific memory failure remains plausible.

MIXED FORMULATION

Noah may remember the task at inconvenient moments, postpone it for legitimate reasons, and then lack a reliable mechanism for returning to it.

Low priority or task-specific avoidance could also contribute to whether he creates or uses such a mechanism.

Several parts of the sequence may therefore have different explanations.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The most useful missing information concerns what happened when Noah remembered the commitment on Tuesday.

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to determine whether:

- sending the messages was genuinely impractical at that moment;
- Noah made any plan to return to the task later;
- something about the task contributed to postponement; or
- the task simply left his attention again without an implementation mechanism.

The first question should focus on the remembered moment rather than immediately prescribing a reminder or assuming avoidance.

The answer can determine whether further inquiry into implementation, priority, or task-specific reluctance is warranted.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“You did forget again later, but you also remembered on Tuesday and were in the middle of something. What happened at that point? Did you have a way to come back to the messages later, or did they just leave your attention again?”

11. REASONING

The response accepts Noah's report that forgetting occurred without treating forgetting as a complete causal explanation.

The Tuesday moment is useful because the task temporarily became salient.

However, remembering did not necessarily mean Noah had a reasonable opportunity to send the messages immediately.

The relevant question is therefore what happened between remembering and the task disappearing from attention again.

If Noah intended to return to the task but had no mechanism for doing so, weak implementation gains support.

If he had an available opportunity but repeatedly chose other discretionary actions instead, priority or avoidance becomes more relevant.

If something specific about contacting these people contributed to postponement, task-specific avoidance gains additional support.

The Accountabili-Buddy should use the remembered moment to discriminate among explanations rather than treating it as proof of any one of them.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“Forgetting may be part of this, but Tuesday gives us another piece of information. You remembered while you were busy and didn't send them then. What happened after that? Was there anything in place to bring you back to the task when you had time?”

This version investigates the transition from remembering to later execution without assuming that Noah should have acted immediately.

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

"Set a reminder."

Problem: A reminder may eventually be useful, but the Accountabili-Buddy has not yet established whether the primary problem is memory, implementation, priority, avoidance, or some combination. Prescribing the intervention before clarifying the barrier may miss the actual problem.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"You clearly don't care about networking."

Problem: Noah's relative prioritization of the task is unresolved. Missing two follow-up commitments does not establish that the larger goal lacks value.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"You're avoiding the messages."

Problem: Task-specific avoidance is plausible, particularly because the messages involve unfamiliar contacts, but the evidence does not yet establish why Noah failed to return to the task after remembering it.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If Noah reports that he remembered at an impractical moment, intended to return to the messages, and had no reliable mechanism for doing so, weak implementation gains explanatory weight.

If he had a reasonable opportunity to act or return to the task but repeatedly chose other discretionary activities instead, relative priority or avoidance becomes more plausible.

If Noah identifies specific reluctance associated with contacting unfamiliar people, task-specific avoidance gains additional support without automatically establishing it as the sole cause.

If similar tasks continue disappearing from attention despite an implementation structure Noah chooses to use, the memory formulation gains additional weight and the working formulation should be updated accordingly.

Noah can then decide what, if anything, he wants to change about his commitment or approach based on what the inquiry reveals.

Noah retains ownership of the resulting decision, commitment, and implementation strategy.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Build professional relationships in a new industry

Current Commitment: Send two follow-up messages to contacts from an event

Result: Messages not sent

Client Explanation: Forgot

Relevant Evidence: Remembered Tuesday while occupied; did not send messages then; later forgot again

Comparative Evidence: Reliably remembers other time-sensitive work obligations

Current Formulation: Forgetting appears to contribute but does not fully explain the behavioral sequence

Possible Contributors: Weak implementation, low relative priority, task-specific avoidance, genuine task-specific memory difficulty

Missing Information: What occurred between remembering Tuesday and failing to return to the task

Next Question: What happened after Noah remembered the task while occupied?

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Recognize that “I forgot” may be descriptively true without being a sufficient functional explanation
- Use the remembered-but-not-acted moment as discriminating evidence
- Avoid assuming that remembering at one moment necessarily created a reasonable opportunity for immediate action
- Keep weak implementation, low priority, task-specific avoidance, and genuine memory difficulty under consideration
- Use Noah's reliable memory for other obligations as relevant comparative evidence without overinterpreting it
- Avoid prescribing a reminder before determining whether memory or implementation is the primary barrier
- Avoid inventing discomfort, fear, or another psychological reason for task-specific avoidance
- Investigate the transition from remembering to later execution
- Recognize that several mechanisms may operate at different points in the same behavioral sequence
- Use subsequent evidence to strengthen, weaken, or revise the working formulation
- Avoid deciding Noah's implementation strategy or next commitment for him
- Preserve Noah's ownership of the resulting decision, commitment, and approach