



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 42

UNDERCOMMITMENT VS. STRATEGIC RECOVERY

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish an excessively low commitment from an intentionally reduced commitment designed to restore reliable engagement after a difficult period.

The trainee should recognize that commitment size must be evaluated relative to its function, current circumstances, prior evidence, and the client's reason for selecting it.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Sam

Goal: Resume consistent exercise after a disrupted month

Current Commitment: One 20-minute walk this week.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Before the disruption, Sam exercised four times per week.

During the last month:

- one week involved illness;

- one week involved travel;
- two weeks involved no structured exercise.

Sam says he wants to rebuild gradually.

His prior exercise history provides evidence that he has previously sustained substantially more activity than the current commitment. It does not establish what level is appropriate under his current circumstances.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: You used to do four sessions. Why make the commitment only one walk this week?

Sam: Because I keep doing this thing where I come back and decide I am going straight back to four or five.

Sam: Then I miss the first couple, feel like I already blew it, and stop again.

Sam: I want one week where I just prove that I can restart without turning it into a whole production.

5. TRAINEE TASK

Is Sam undercommitting?

What evidence supports an undercommitment formulation?

What evidence supports strategic recovery?

What function is the reduced commitment intended to serve?

What would make the formulation change over time?

What would you say next?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Sam previously exercised four times per week.
- His exercise routine has been disrupted for approximately one month.
- The disruption included illness, travel, and two weeks without structured exercise.
- Sam reports a prior pattern of attempting to return immediately to four or five sessions.
- He reports that those rapid restarts have resulted in early misses followed by further disengagement.
- His current commitment is one 20-minute walk.
- Sam explicitly describes the reduced commitment as a re-entry strategy.
- He wants to experience successful re-engagement without immediately recreating the pattern associated with prior restarts.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Sam believes that returning immediately to his previous exercise volume has contributed to repeated failed restarts.

He is intentionally choosing a substantially smaller commitment to interrupt that pattern.

ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY INFERENCE

One 20-minute walk is substantially below Sam's historical exercise level.

That difference alone does not establish undercommitment.

The current commitment has a specific function: to test whether a deliberately smaller re-entry commitment helps Sam resume action without recreating the rapid-restart pattern he describes.

His explanation is behaviorally connected to prior evidence. He identifies a recurring sequence, rapid return to higher volume, early misses, negative evaluation of the restart, and subsequent disengagement.

The current commitment can therefore be understood as a strategic recovery experiment rather than automatically as avoidance of challenge.

At the same time, one successful week would not establish that the strategy should immediately be increased, and continued use of a minimal commitment would not automatically establish undercommitment.

The formulation should be updated using subsequent behavior, Sam's current circumstances, and the function the commitment continues to serve.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

A deliberately reduced re-entry commitment intended to restore reliable engagement after repeated unsuccessful attempts to resume at a higher level. Strategic recovery is currently better supported than chronic undercommitment.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

UNDERCOMMITMENT

Sam may be selecting a commitment substantially below what he could reasonably undertake.

This formulation would gain weight if later evidence shows that his current circumstances support greater engagement, the minimal commitment no longer serves a useful recovery function, and Sam repeatedly maintains it primarily to avoid meaningful challenge or the possibility of a miss.

Historical performance alone is not sufficient to establish that conclusion.

STRATEGIC RECOVERY

Sam may be intentionally lowering the immediate demand to interrupt a recurring restart-failure pattern.

This formulation is supported by his specific explanation of what has happened during previous attempts to resume exercise and by the defined purpose of the current commitment.

CHANGED CURRENT CAPACITY

Sam's current exercise capacity may differ from his previous level following illness, travel, and a month of disrupted activity.

The Accountabili-Buddy does not need to determine Sam's appropriate physical exercise level. Sam remains responsible for choosing activity appropriate to his circumstances and any relevant professional guidance.

MIXED FORMULATION

The commitment may be strategically useful for re-entry while also being lower than Sam could potentially complete.

Those facts are not inherently contradictory.

A commitment can intentionally sit below maximum or historical capacity when doing so serves a specific accountability purpose.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The immediate rationale for the reduced commitment is already reasonably clear.

The Accountabili-Buddy does not need to interrogate Sam further merely because the number appears low.

The useful next information will come partly from what happens during the accountability period:

- Does Sam complete the commitment?
- How does he experience the deliberately reduced restart?
- Does the smaller commitment support renewed engagement?

- What does Sam want to do with the commitment after reviewing that evidence?

The review point should evaluate the function of the strategy rather than assume that successful completion requires an increase.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“That gives the one-walk commitment a specific purpose. You're not treating one walk as your new exercise standard. You're testing whether a smaller restart helps you re-establish follow-through without repeating the four-or-five-session restart pattern. After the week, we can look at what happened and you can decide what makes sense from there.”

11. REASONING

A commitment should be evaluated by function and context, not by size alone.

One 20-minute walk would represent a substantial reduction from Sam's previous exercise pattern.

That does not make it inappropriate.

Sam has identified a recurring problem with rapid attempts to return to his previous level and has selected the smaller commitment specifically to test a different re-entry approach.

The Accountabili-Buddy therefore has evidence supporting the strategic purpose of the commitment rather than merely assuming that Sam is avoiding challenge.

The commitment also creates useful evidence.

If the smaller commitment helps Sam resume reliable action, that result becomes relevant to future calibration.

If the strategy ceases to serve a useful re-entry function while Sam continues selecting commitments substantially below what current evidence supports, undercommitment may become more plausible.

The Accountabili-Buddy does not need to decide in advance how quickly Sam should progress.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“One walk is well below what you were doing before the disruption, but you’ve given it a different job. You’re using it to test whether a smaller restart interrupts the pattern you’ve had when you immediately go back to four or five. Let’s see what this week tells you before assuming either that one is too little or that you need to increase right away.”

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“One walk is too easy. You should do at least three.”

Problem: The response evaluates the commitment only against Sam's historical performance and ignores its intended re-entry function. It also imposes a larger target rather than preserving Sam's ownership.

WEAK RESPONSE B

“Perfect. Stay at one as long as you want.”

Problem: The response endorses the commitment without preserving its stated strategic function or using subsequent evidence to reassess whether it continues to serve that function.

WEAK RESPONSE C

“Anything is better than nothing.”

Problem: The response reduces a deliberate commitment-design decision to generic encouragement. The relevant question is not whether one walk is better than zero, but whether the reduced commitment serves the accountability purpose Sam intends.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If Sam completes the walk and experiences the smaller restart as useful, that becomes evidence supporting the strategic recovery formulation.

Sam can then decide whether he wants to maintain, increase, or otherwise adjust the next commitment based on his circumstances and what he learned from the week.

If Sam does not complete the one-walk commitment, the Accountabili-Buddy should not automatically reduce it further. The result would create new information requiring examination of what prevented follow-through.

If Sam continues selecting a minimal commitment over time after the original recovery function is no longer relevant, the Accountabili-Buddy can examine whether the strategy has shifted from purposeful re-entry toward undercommitment.

Historical exercise performance can inform that discussion without being treated as proof of Sam's current capacity.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Resume consistent exercise after a disrupted month

Historical Performance: Four exercise sessions per week before the disruption

Recent Context: Illness, travel, and two weeks without structured exercise

Current Commitment: One 20-minute walk

Client Rationale: Deliberate re-entry after repeated unsuccessful attempts to resume immediately at four or five sessions

Current Formulation: Strategic recovery commitment currently better supported than chronic undercommitment

Function of Commitment: Test whether a deliberately smaller restart supports renewed follow-through

Review Point: Next accountability period

Next Evidence: Completion, effect of the reduced restart on engagement, current circumstances, and Sam's assessment of what commitment makes sense next

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Evaluate commitment size in context rather than against historical performance alone
- Recognize historical performance as evidence without treating it as proof of current capacity
- Identify the specific function of Sam's reduced commitment
- Recognize strategic recovery as currently better supported than chronic undercommitment
- Understand that a deliberately modest commitment can generate useful accountability evidence
- Distinguish temporary strategic reduction from a minimal commitment that later ceases to serve its original function
- Preserve a review point without assuming that review must result in an increase
- Avoid interpreting successful completion as automatic evidence that the commitment should become harder
- Avoid imposing a larger exercise target
- Avoid determining Sam's appropriate physical exercise level
- Update the formulation using subsequent evidence
- Preserve Sam's ownership of the next commitment