



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 51

THE MOVING BARRIER

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Determine when a sequence of individually plausible barriers should begin to raise concern about a broader maintaining process.

The trainee should learn to evaluate each barrier on its own evidence while also recognizing when the longitudinal pattern changes the meaning of repeated preparation.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Kendra

Goal: Begin applying for senior-level jobs

Commitment: Submit two applications per week

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND

Kendra says she wants to leave her current role within six months.

INTERACTION 1

Kendra: I could not apply because my résumé was outdated.

This is a plausible barrier. An outdated résumé may reasonably interfere with beginning a job search.

INITIAL INTERVENTION

Kendra changes the immediate commitment to:

Update résumé by Wednesday.

Kendra completes it.

At this point, there is not yet sufficient evidence to treat résumé preparation as avoidance.

INTERACTION 2

Accountabili-Buddy: Two applications this week?

Kendra: No. My LinkedIn profile does not match the résumé, and I think recruiters will notice.

This is also plausible.

The concern may represent legitimate preparation rather than avoidance.

INTERVENTION

Kendra changes the immediate commitment to:

Update LinkedIn by Friday.

Kendra completes it.

INTERACTION 3

Accountabili-Buddy: Now that the résumé and LinkedIn are aligned, did the applications start?

Kendra: Not yet.

Kendra: I think I need better examples of leadership accomplishments before I start applying.

4. UPDATED EVIDENCE

Each individual preparation concern may have legitimate value.

Kendra has also followed through successfully on the preparatory commitments she has made.

However, a longitudinal pattern is now emerging:

- the original target behavior is submitting applications;
- the résumé concern was resolved;
- after the résumé was resolved, the LinkedIn concern became the next prerequisite;
- after the LinkedIn concern was resolved, stronger leadership examples became the next prerequisite;
- each preparatory task has been completed;
- application submission has still not begun;
- each resolved prerequisite has been followed by another reason preparation must continue first.

The individual barriers should not automatically be dismissed as excuses.

At the same time, they should no longer be evaluated entirely in isolation.

The repeated outcome across changing explanations is now relevant evidence.

5. PROVISIONAL REVISED FORMULATION

Possible productive avoidance through serial prerequisites.

The longitudinal pattern raises concern that useful preparation may also be functioning to postpone application submission.

This does not establish that Kendra's current concern about leadership examples is unnecessary.

The Accountabili-Buddy therefore needs to distinguish:

a genuine prerequisite for an application Kendra wants to submit

from

another potentially useful improvement being treated as something that must happen before any application can begin.

6. TRAINEE DECISION POINT

Should the Accountabili-Buddy simply accept leadership-example development as the next commitment?

Not without examining whether it is actually necessary before application submission.

The concern may be legitimate.

But the accumulated history now makes its function decision-relevant.

The Accountabili-Buddy should test necessity before participating in another round of preparation.

7. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“The résumé issue was real enough to address, and then we addressed the LinkedIn issue. Now that both are done, another preparation step has become something that needs to happen before you apply. I don't want to assume the leadership examples are unnecessary, but I do think the pattern matters. If you looked at a senior-level opening you would otherwise want to apply for, what specifically would prevent you from submitting an application that meets its requirements now?”

This response does not dismiss Kendra's concern.

It uses the longitudinal history to determine whether another preparatory step is functionally necessary before accepting it as the next accountability target.

INTERACTION 4

Kendra: Probably nothing.

Kendra: I think I am nervous that I am going to find out I am not competitive for the roles I want.

Kendra: As long as I am preparing, I do not have to find that out yet.

8. FINAL FORMULATION

Productive avoidance of external evaluation maintained through serial preparation.

Interaction 4 substantially strengthens this formulation.

Kendra explicitly identifies a function of continued preparation: while she remains in preparation, she does not have to encounter information about how the market responds to her candidacy.

This does not mean the earlier preparatory tasks were fake, unnecessary, or worthless.

The résumé update had legitimate value.

The LinkedIn update may also have had legitimate value.

The important longitudinal finding is that useful preparatory behavior has also become a means of postponing the more consequential behavior connected to the stated goal.

The stable function becomes clearer only across time.

9. RECOMMENDED NEXT INTERVENTION

If Kendra continues to endorse beginning the senior-level job search, the Accountabili-Buddy should recommend that the next commitment include actual application behavior rather than another universal preparation prerequisite.

For example, Kendra might choose:

Submit one application for a suitable senior-level opening.

Further résumé, LinkedIn, accomplishment, or application preparation can still occur when genuinely needed for a particular opportunity.

It should not automatically become a reason that no applications can begin.

The Accountabili-Buddy can help Kendra evaluate whether a proposed preparatory step is actually necessary for the commitment she is considering.

The Accountabili-Buddy does not determine whether Kendra is professionally competitive, write her application materials, or provide job-search consulting outside the accountability role.

10. WHY THIS CASE MATTERS

A weak longitudinal response would conclude too early:

“Every new obstacle is an excuse.”

That would ignore the possibility that individual preparatory needs are legitimate.

The opposite error is evaluating each new obstacle independently forever.

When each barrier is resolved but the target behavior remains absent and another prerequisite repeatedly appears, the sequence itself becomes evidence.

Tier 3 reasoning therefore asks not only:

Is this particular preparation task reasonable?

It also asks:

What has happened each time a reasonable preparation task was completed?

In Kendra's case, the surface explanation changes while the behavioral outcome remains stable.

Résumé preparation ends.

LinkedIn preparation begins.

LinkedIn preparation ends.

Leadership-example preparation becomes necessary.

Applications remain at zero.

The longitudinal pattern warrants testing whether preparation has acquired a stable delaying function.

11. ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Serial prerequisites are not inherently evidence of avoidance.

Suppose Kendra encountered a finite sequence of objectively required steps before submitting a particular application, such as:

- obtaining required license verification;
- updating required application materials;
- providing a mandatory portfolio;
- completing an application with specified documentation.

Completing those steps in sequence could represent straightforward progress toward submission.

The concern in this case arises because potentially useful preparation repeatedly becomes a condition for beginning any application, and the next prerequisite emerges after the previous one has been resolved.

The pattern becomes substantially clearer when Kendra herself identifies that continued preparation allows her to postpone external evaluation.

12. WEAK ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY RESPONSES

WEAK RESPONSE A

"Good point. Let's work on leadership examples."

Problem: Accepts another preparatory commitment without examining the longitudinal pattern or determining whether the new preparation is actually required before application submission.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"Everything you say is an excuse."

Problem: Overgeneralizes the pattern and invalidates preparatory work that may have had legitimate value. The Accountabili-Buddy should distinguish function from legitimacy rather than declaring every barrier false.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"Just apply before you're ready."

Problem: Assumes that Kendra is sufficiently prepared without establishing what a particular application actually requires. Professional challenge does not require dismissing legitimate readiness requirements.

WEAK RESPONSE D

"You finished everything I asked you to do, so the accountability process is working."

Problem: Confuses successful completion of preparatory commitments with progress on the stated goal. Kendra is following through, but the target behavior of application submission remains absent.

13. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Begin applying for senior-level jobs

Original Commitment: Submit two applications per week

First Reported Barrier: Outdated résumé

Intervention Outcome: Résumé updated

Second Reported Barrier: LinkedIn profile inconsistent with résumé

Intervention Outcome: LinkedIn updated

Third Reported Barrier: Need for stronger leadership examples

Longitudinal Pattern: Each resolved preparatory prerequisite is followed by another prerequisite while application submission remains at zero

Provisional Revised Formulation: Possible productive avoidance through serial prerequisites

Discriminating Inquiry: Determine whether another preparatory step is actually required before a suitable application can be submitted

New Evidence: Kendra reports that continued preparation protects her from learning whether she is competitive for desired roles

Final Formulation: Productive avoidance of external evaluation maintained through serial preparation

Next Accountability Direction: If Kendra continues to endorse the goal, recommend that her next client-owned commitment include actual application behavior rather than another universal preparation prerequisite

14. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Acknowledge that individual preparatory barriers may have been legitimate

- Avoid retroactively labeling all previous preparation as avoidance
- Track what happens after each barrier is resolved
- Detect the serial-prerequisite pattern across interactions
- Recognize the stable absence of application behavior despite changing surface explanations
- Treat the longitudinal sequence as new evidence
- Test the functional necessity of another preparatory step before accepting it as the next commitment
- Use Kendra's later report to strengthen the formulation of productive avoidance
- Recognize that useful behavior can simultaneously serve an avoidance function
- Distinguish preparation that is required for a particular application from preparation treated as a universal prerequisite for beginning
- Shift accountability toward actual application behavior if Kendra continues to endorse the goal
- Preserve Kendra's ownership of the next commitment
- Avoid providing job-search expertise or application consulting outside the Accountabili-Buddy role
- Update the formulation based on the pattern rather than judging each interaction in isolation