



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 54

THE RECURRING COLLAPSE

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Identify a cyclical longitudinal pattern in which performance repeatedly deteriorates at approximately the same stage.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Jonah

Goal: Maintain a regular fitness program

Commitment: Three workouts per week

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Across four months, Jonah's pattern has been:

CYCLE 1

Weeks 1–3: three workouts

Week 4: one

Week 5: zero

Restart.

CYCLE 2

Weeks 6–8: three workouts

Week 9: one

Week 10: zero

Restart.

CYCLE 3

Weeks 11–13: three workouts

Week 14: one

Week 15: zero

Jonah repeatedly describes the collapse as:

“I fell off again.”

INTERACTION 1

Accountabili-Buddy: This is the third time we have had roughly three good weeks followed by a sharp drop. Do you notice anything that changes around that point?

Jonah: I usually start really motivated.

Jonah: Then by the third or fourth week it starts feeling repetitive.

4. PROVISIONAL FORMULATION

Declining engagement as the routine becomes repetitive may contribute to the recurring deterioration.

Jonah’s report makes this a reasonable working hypothesis.

It does not yet establish that declining motivation or loss of novelty is the primary mechanism producing the collapse.

5. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

Other possibilities include:

- accumulated fatigue;
- overly aggressive training;
- recurring scheduling changes;
- an all-or-nothing response to the first miss.

The cyclical timing identifies a recurrent transition point.

It does not by itself establish the cause.

INTERACTION 2

Accountabili-Buddy: What usually happens after the first missed workout?

Jonah: I tell myself I will make it up.

Jonah: Then if I miss another one, I kind of decide the week is shot and I will restart Monday.

6. UPDATED FORMULATION

Two linked processes may now be contributing:

1. Engagement appears to decline as the routine becomes repetitive.
2. One or two misses trigger a restart response that accelerates the collapse.

The second mechanism now has stronger direct support.

Jonah reports that after additional non-follow-through, he stops treating the remaining week as recoverable and postpones further action until a new week begins.

The vulnerable point may therefore be less about initiation than about what happens after the first disruption in an otherwise successful cycle.

7. RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION

The accountability strategy should target the collapse point rather than simply initiating another cycle.

The Accountabili-Buddy can:

- challenge the conclusion that an imperfect week is no longer worth continuing;
- focus accountability on resumption after a miss rather than restarting after abandonment;
- help Jonah establish a client-owned commitment for what he will do after an early miss.

The Accountabili-Buddy should not assume that changing the exercise program itself is necessary without evidence that the program is contributing to the pattern.

8. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“Getting started does not appear to be the main problem. You have done that successfully three times. The vulnerable point seems to come when the routine starts feeling repetitive and the first misses happen. You have also told me that once you miss another workout, you tend to treat the week as lost and wait for Monday. I think that part of the pattern deserves our attention. If you miss one next week, what do you want your commitment to be for resuming within the same week?”

INTERACTION 3

Week 4 of the next cycle:

Jonah: Missed Tuesday.

Jonah: Normally I would write the week off, but I went Thursday and Saturday.

9. FINAL FORMULATION

The recurring collapse appears to be maintained partly by an all-or-nothing restart response after early lapses. Declining engagement as the routine becomes repetitive may also contribute.

The revised intervention produced an important early result.

At the familiar vulnerable point, Jonah missed a workout but resumed within the same week rather than abandoning it.

This strengthens the formulation that the restart response had been contributing to the collapse.

It does not yet establish that the broader cyclical pattern has been resolved.

The role of declining engagement also remains plausible but less firmly established than the restart mechanism.

10. WHY THIS CASE MATTERS

Without longitudinal tracking, every collapse could be treated as:

“another bad week.”

The repeated timing transforms isolated misses into a meaningful pattern.

The relevant accountability question becomes not only why Jonah misses, but **where in the cycle ordinary non-follow-through becomes a larger collapse.**

The intervention can then target that vulnerable transition point.

The outcome of the intervention becomes additional evidence about whether the formulation was accurate.

11. WEAK ACCOUNTABILITY-BUDDY RESPONSES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“Let’s restart Monday.”

Problem: Reinforces the restart pattern that appears to contribute to the recurring collapse.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"You always lose motivation after three weeks."

Problem: Overstates the evidence. Jonah reports declining engagement as the routine becomes repetitive, but the longitudinal evidence also identifies a more specific restart mechanism after early misses.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"Increase the workouts so you stay challenged."

Problem: Assumes that greater difficulty will address the reported repetition, may worsen an untested fatigue or calibration problem, and moves into prescribing Jonah's exercise structure.

WEAK RESPONSE D

"Great. We fixed it."

Problem: Treats one successful interruption of the pattern as proof that the broader cycle has been resolved.

12. RECORD / UPDATE

Pattern: Approximately three strong weeks followed by sharp deterioration and restart

Initial Hypothesis: Declining engagement as the routine becomes repetitive may contribute

New Evidence: Early misses trigger week abandonment and a Monday restart

Updated Formulation: All-or-nothing restart response appears to contribute substantially to the recurring collapse; declining engagement may also contribute

Intervention: Accountability focused on same-week resumption after a miss

Early Outcome: Jonah resumed within the same week during the next vulnerable period

Evidence Update: Outcome strengthens the restart formulation but does not yet establish that the broader cycle is resolved

Next Step: Continue tracking subsequent vulnerable periods

13. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- identify the repeated cycle;
- analyze the transition point rather than isolated misses;
- distinguish a recurrent pattern from its still-partially-uncertain cause;
- avoid overstating novelty or motivation as the established explanation;
- identify the restart response as the more strongly supported mechanism after Interaction 2;
- recognize that multiple linked mechanisms may contribute;
- target accountability at the vulnerable transition point;
- avoid reinforcing repeated restarting;
- preserve Jonah's ownership of the specific commitment;
- use Interaction 3 as evidence supporting the revised formulation;
- avoid treating one improved week as proof that the entire pattern has been resolved.