



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 6

OVERWHELM

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Recognize overload created by too many simultaneous commitments and competing demands, and avoid responding merely by subdividing every task.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Marcus

Active Goals and Demands: Exercise regularly, finish a professional course, update his website, organize tax documents, prepare a presentation, clear out his home office, and begin applying for new jobs.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Marcus added several of these goals over the previous month.

Each was individually reasonable when discussed.

Few have been explicitly paused or closed.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: What do you want to commit to this week?

Marcus: I honestly don't know.

Marcus: I need to do the course. The website is overdue. I haven't been to the gym. Taxes need to get done. I have that presentation for work. I need to start applying for jobs, and my office is such a mess I can barely work in there.

Marcus: Every time I pick one, I start thinking about the other six things I'm not doing, and then I end up doing none of them.

5. TRAINEE TASK

What is the primary accountability problem?

What should happen before another set of commitments is created?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Marcus identifies seven goals or substantial demands currently competing for his attention.
- Several compete for the same available time and attention.
- He reports difficulty selecting among them.
- Attention to one activates concern about the others.
- The result is reduced initiation across the set of goals and demands.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Marcus describes himself as unable to determine where to start.

ACCOUNTABILITY-BUDDY INFERENCE

The principal problem is not that each individual task is necessarily too large.

The number of simultaneously active demands is interfering with prioritization and execution.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Overwhelm caused by excessive simultaneous priorities and demands.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

Some individual goals may also involve avoidance or poor calibration.

Those should not be assumed yet.

The immediate system-level problem is that too many goals and demands are competing for active attention.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to distinguish among demands that are:

- Externally time-sensitive or fixed
- Genuinely important to Marcus now
- Appropriate to defer or pause
- Optional

This information is necessary before Marcus can determine which goals should remain active during the current accountability period.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“Before you make another commitment, let's sort out what actually needs to be active right now. Which of these has a real deadline, and which one or two matter most this week?”

11. REASONING

Adding detailed plans for all seven would increase the number of demands Marcus is trying to manage simultaneously and would not resolve the prioritization problem.

The intervention should first distinguish fixed demands from discretionary goals and reduce unnecessary competition among active priorities.

The Accountabili-Buddy structures the prioritization process without deciding Marcus's priorities for him.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“The problem right now doesn't look like seven separate failures. It looks like seven things competing to be first. Let's sort out what has to happen now, what you want active, and what can wait.”

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“Let's break each goal into one tiny step.”

Problem: Marcus would still have seven goals or demands competing for active attention. Reducing task size does not resolve the portfolio-level prioritization problem.

WEAK RESPONSE B

“Just start with whatever feels easiest.”

Problem: Ease may have little relationship to actual priority or external time sensitivity.

WEAK RESPONSE C

“You need a better productivity system.”

Problem: This introduces a solution before establishing whether the principal issue is prioritization, scheduling, or system design.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Marcus should distinguish obligations that cannot reasonably be deferred from goals over which he has greater discretion.

He can then identify a limited number of goals or commitments to keep active during the current accountability period.

Other discretionary goals can be explicitly deferred, paused, or placed outside the current accountability period.

Later review can determine whether particular goals remain difficult once overall priority competition is reduced.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Current Issue: Seven competing goals or substantial demands

Result: Difficulty initiating across the set of goals and demands

Current Formulation: Overwhelm through excessive simultaneous priorities and demands

Next Step: Distinguish fixed demands from discretionary goals, then reduce and prioritize the active goal set

Pattern to Watch: Addition of new goals without closing, pausing, or deliberately deferring existing ones

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Identify portfolio-level overload
- Avoid treating seven goals or demands as seven independent execution problems
- Distinguish fixed obligations from discretionary goals before reducing the active set
- Prioritize before planning
- Reduce unnecessary competition among active commitments rather than merely reducing task size
- Preserve client ownership in determining priority

