

The Seven Secrets to Getting Unblocked

By Ann Weiser Cornell

Are you blocked? Can't get yourself to do what you need to do? Can't even get yourself to pursue what you love?

Maybe you're like Shana, who got so tired of not having time for her writing that she took three months off and rented a house at the beach to really work on that novel. Two months into her special time, all she had to show for it was a great collection of shells. Or maybe you're like Claire, who walked by the piles of papers on her desk day after day, turning her head away, and finally shoved them into a desk drawer so she wouldn't have to see them.

Whether it's something you want to do, or something you have to do, it's tough to be blocked. You want to change, get moving, get it done... but you don't. You make a plan, a resolution: Finally, this time, you're going to do it. You're tired of all the excuses, you're sick and tired of how bad it feels when it doesn't happen.

And then it doesn't happen... again.

I remember so well the torment of being someone who just didn't do what I needed to do. The more important a task was, the less likely I was to do it. The organizing people say: "Start your day by doing your most important project." Oh, yeah? For me, the most important was the last thing I'd be likely to do.

Writing was the worst. If someone asked me to write something, a letter, a proposal, an article, I was in deep trouble. First, I would cheerfully say, "Sure, no problem." Then I would not do it. Day after day, not doing it, thinking I should, feeling bad about not doing it, hearing the voice of shame and blame in my head get louder and louder, until I was avoiding the whole topic because I didn't want to hear that voice.

And the funny thing was, I really wanted to write. I wanted to write a book, to be an author. I had wanted to be a writer ever since I was a kid. So what I most wanted was what I wasn't doing.

And that's a mystery, isn't it? How can that be, that we don't do what we want to do? Self-sabotage? Fear? Those are the obvious answers. But they didn't help me. Calling the problem self-sabotage or fear didn't move me in the slightest. Criticizing myself didn't work at all. Nor did clever tips on writing or going to writing workshops (though they were useful once the block had released). What did help? What is the secret?

Because my writer's block did indeed release... and now I write easily. I'm the author of two books, one a bestseller. I've written countless articles, and a popular weekly e-zine that goes out the door every Tuesday without fail. If I need to write a paragraph in order to get onto a conference program, it's done in twenty minutes.

And I now teach workshops and classes in Releasing Blocks to Action, teaching people the method I used for myself.

For you, I've boiled the method down to the essence: seven secrets to getting unblocked.

One. Stop trying to think your way through the block.

You're no dummy. If thinking your way through was all this problem needed, it would have been solved already. No question. So you're going to need something else besides figuring out and thinking up solutions.

Two. Clear out your assumptions.

What are you assuming? The biggest block to getting unblocked is thinking you already know "why" you are blocked. Shana thought the reason she wasn't working on her novel was that she was scared of being a failure. It turned out to be something quite different.

Three. Get into your body.

Your conscious mind holds about one-tenth of your intelligence. Your whole body, including your mind, holds all of it. Most of us cut off the full power of our brilliance by walking around cut off from our bodies. Take some time to feel your feet, your seat, your breathing.

Four. Something in you doesn't want to do it.

If you're not doing something that's well within your power to do, there must be something in you that doesn't want to do it. That's the one assumption we're going to make. You can sit down and organize your papers — you aren't doing it — therefore, something in you doesn't want to.

Five. Don't judge it; get curious instead.

The first temptation is to judge: "It's just the lazy part of me that doesn't want to." But wait—don't judge! Being judgmental is going to shut down the lines of communication that we need to have open. Instead of judging, get curious. The truth is, you don't know what or why this part of you is not doing the action. Let your genuine curiosity awaken.

Six. Listen.

Listen to the part of you that doesn't want to do the action. How? By allowing it to show up as a bodily felt sense. Take some time, sense into your body, and invite this part to show up. Maybe it will come as a tightness in your chest, or a constriction in

your throat. Take time; be patient. Once you can feel it there, you can ask it: What are you worried about? What are you trying to help me with?

Seven. Be open to transformation.

Shana called me in a panic. She was two months into her three-month writing break and all she had to show was a great collection of shells. "I know it's just fear," she told me. "I'm afraid to find out I'm a failure."

I suggested she set aside her assumptions for a while, and approach the situation with curiosity. "Maybe that's what it is," I said, "but let's find out."

When Shana got quiet and brought her awareness into her body, she could feel the not-wanting-to-write in her chest, like a drawstring pulling tight. I guided her in a process of sensing what it was worried about, and what it was trying to help her with. After about fifteen minutes, she felt a shift. Her breathing deepened and the feeling in her chest released. "Wow," she said. "It says it feels I have something precious inside, and it doesn't want that to get trampled on." I suggested she let it know she heard it. "Yes, I can do that," she said, smiling.

Shana's whole body posture had changed. Her shoulders were up and her eyes were bright and relaxed. "This feels really different," she said. Later I found out that in her last month in the beach cottage, she wrote every day, enjoyed herself, and finished three chapters of her novel.