

# Take Control Module 2

## Identify The Source



### Objectives

You will identify where your clutter is coming from by:

- Defining your acquisition pathways for physical clutter
- Studying how you use your time
- Understanding how unhelpful beliefs may be the source of your mental clutter

*“It's not what you look at that matters, it's what you see.”*

Henry David Thoreau

## Instruction

We are going back to the source. Like single drops of water flowing together to form streams, rivers and oceans, we will work back to the beginning to understand where your clutter is coming from.

### **Physical Clutter: Acquisition Pathways**

“How things come into our lives,” is a simple definition for acquisition pathways. In the book, Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring, authors Tompkins & Hartl define acquisition pathways as, “the multiple ways your loved one brings items into his home....”<sup>1</sup> In this section we are going to talk about how things come into our spaces and where they come from. This is the “source” of your physical clutter. But, whether or not you define an item as clutter, it still comes to you by a specific path.

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<sup>1</sup> Tompkins, Michael and Tamara Hartl. Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring. Oakland, CA. 2009. pg 85.

**What is coming into your space?** Take a moment to list all the things that come into your space. Below are a few examples to get you started. Cross off the ones that do not apply and add to the list all the other items that do. You may think in broad strokes at this point.

**Refine Your List.** Of the items that you listed, circle the specific items that you define as clutter and identify **Where** these items are coming from:

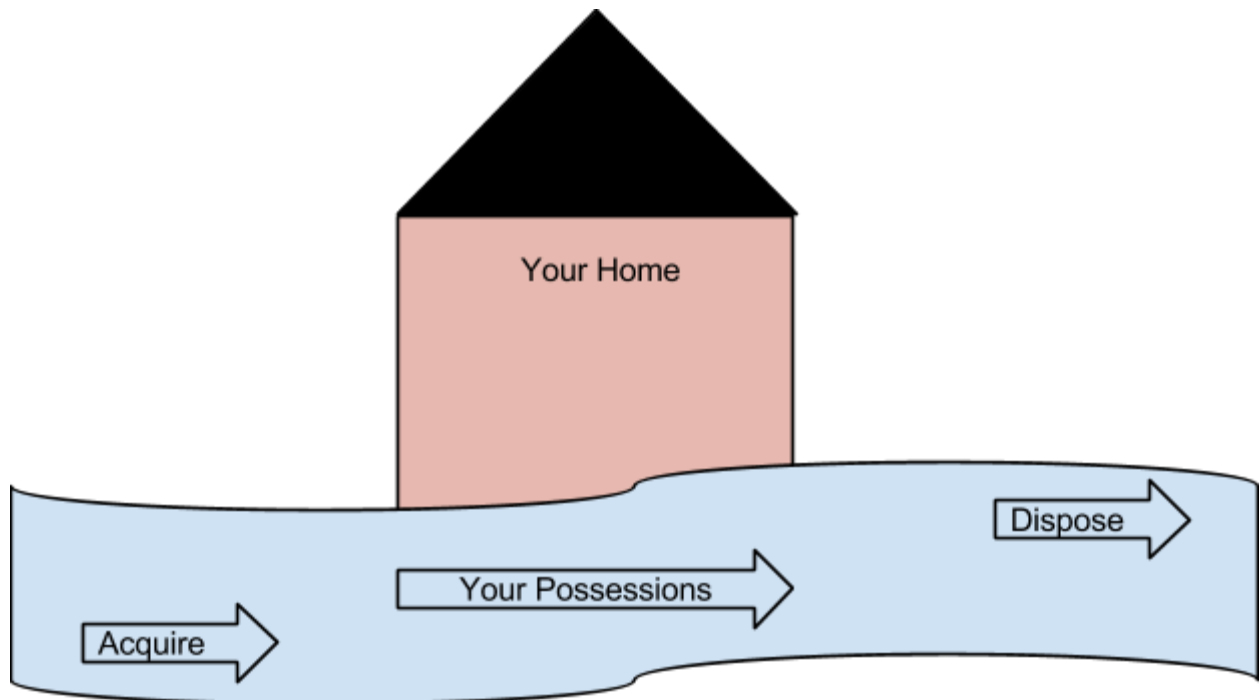
What is coming in?	Where is it coming from?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mail</li> <li>○ Books from the library</li> <li>○ Groceries</li> <li>○ Hand me down clothing</li> <li>○ Gifts</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul>	

**Review.** Do you notice any trends on your list? Are there a few specific pathways where most of the clutter you identified is coming from? List three.

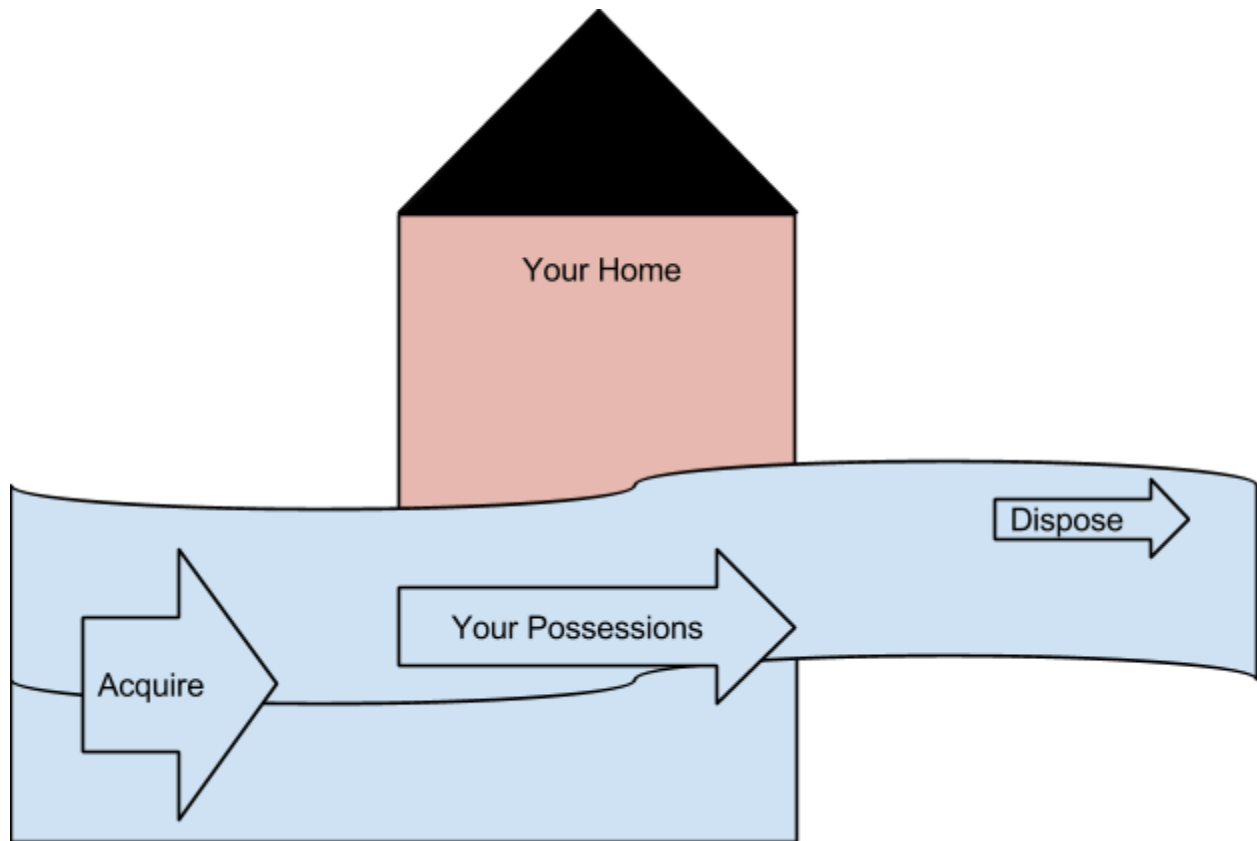
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## The River of Possessions

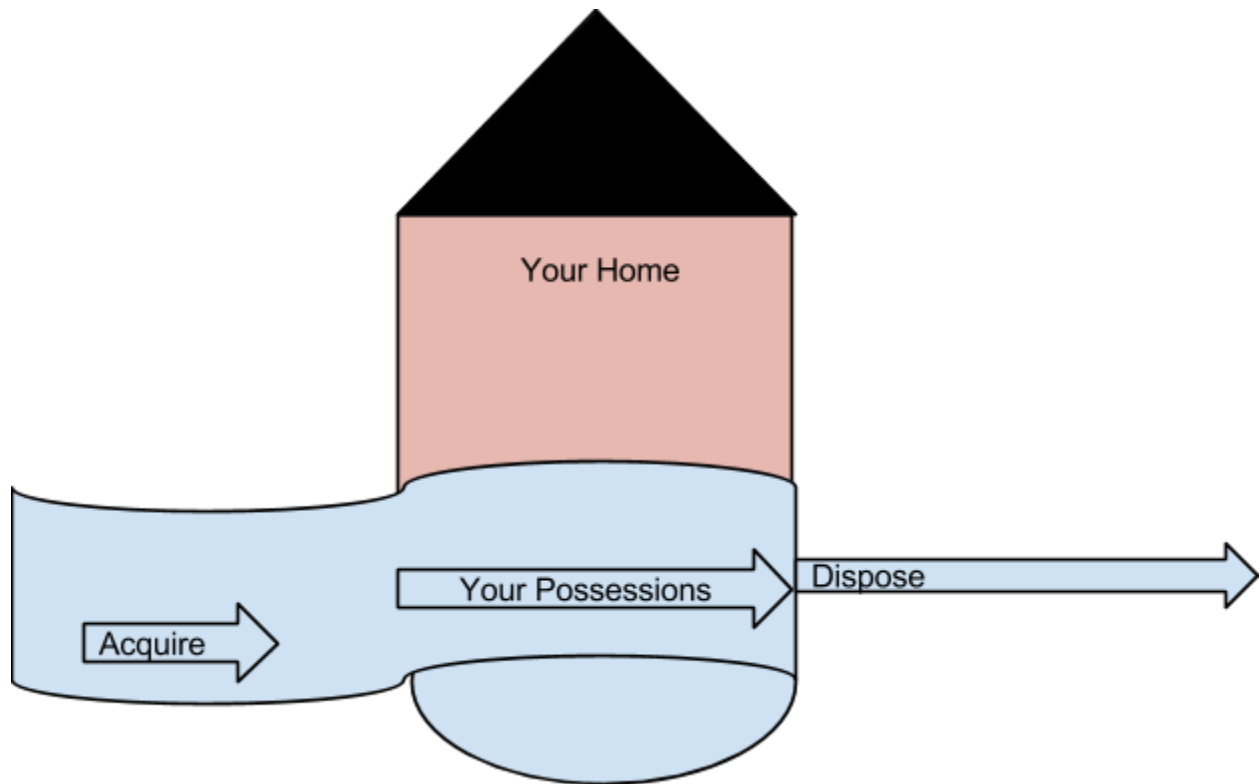
Another way we can think about how things come into our lives is to imagine a river. This river is comprised of all the things in your life and it is flowing right through your home. The river only flows in one direction.



When your river is healthy, you are acquiring and disposing of items at an equal rate. Your river is flowing smoothly.



If you are acquiring more and more, even if you are still disposing of items at a normal rate your river will become unhealthy and your home will fill with these possessions.



If your acquisitions remain the same but you stop disposing of items, you will create a reservoir of possessions in your home and it will fill even more. You have created a dam in your river and it will stop flowing altogether.

In order to keep your river healthy you must keep the acquisitions and dispositions at an equal rate. You can do this by letting go of one item for every one item that comes in. However, if you already have a reservoir in your home, you will need to increase what you are letting go of to remove the blockage that is creating a dam and help your river move freely again. Even if you consciously let go of 2 items for every 1 that comes in, you will quickly make a change in the flow of your river of possessions.

## Time Clutter: Time Study

Just as we looked at the flow of possessions into your home, we are now going to look at the flow of your time.

Do you know how you spend your time? I mean REALLY know how you spend your time? Are you familiar with a time study?

You are going to complete a time study for the next 7 days starting today. You will write down everything. Do not feel the need to continue beyond 7 days as it will become tedious. This is how you do it:

- Gather your tools

Do a Google search for Emergent Task Planner or follow this link

<http://davidseah.com/node/the-emergent-task-planner/>

Download the file and print 7 copies.

*If paper is not your thing, you could use Toggl, an app that is available for mobile and desktop to track your time. Keep it simple and don't get bogged down with this step!*

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**ORGANIZE YOUR DAY AS IT HAPPENS! QUICK START:** Use 3 things to estimate time in 15-min blocks. Fill bubbles to track time. Use Day One (left side) for scheduling. Keep notes on the right.

**THE EMERGENT TASK PLANNER**  
Instructions available at davidseah.com/peceetp

**▼ THREE MAJOR TASKS FOR TODAY**  
Realistic expectations equals consistent daily productivity!

01 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

02 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

03 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

Tackling more than three major tasks? Clear your mind and go for it.

04 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

05 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

06 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

More than six major tasks? Reserve some energy for tomorrow.

07 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

08 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

09 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

**▼ WHAT ELSE IS GOING ON TODAY?**  
Life just happens. Use this area to keep notes on the unexpected. Use numbers to abet day grid as needed.

10 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

11 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

12 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

13 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

14 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

15 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

16 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

17 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

18 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

19 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

20 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

21 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

22 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

23 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

24 | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

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- Set up your planner

1. Enter the Date
2. Add the hours of your day along the left side.  
You can see that each hour is divided into 15 minute increments.
3. You may also choose to write down 3 goals/tasks to accomplish along the right side.
4. Lastly, there is space for notes on items that come up through the day

- Use the planner. Follow your tasks, everything you do throughout the day in 15 minute increments for 7 days.

You may be tempted to censor what you write down because it looks different in black and white. **Resist this urge.** You may also tend to change your behaviour because you will be more aware of it. Try to resist this as well.

Write down everything. At the end of 7 days you will look at this list and see, truthfully and honestly, what is going on.

In Module 3, you will analyze your result. You will ask questions and look for trends. Here is a sample of the questions you will consider in the next step:

- What groups can you lump your time into?
  - This is the time when I like to get out the colored pencils and highlighters. Pick 4 colors and match them to 4 categories such as work, personal, driving, family - What will your categories be?
- What are you spending the most time on?
  - Look for the big chunks of time.
- What surprised you?
  - Are you being interrupted a lot?
  - Are you reaching your goals set for each day or is your time being commandeered?
  - Is something taking more or less time than you expected?
- Where are your time wasters or drains?
  - Before you even start this experiment, think about where you think your time is being sucked away then at the end, check to see if your hypothesis was correct. What time wasters can you think of now?



## My Analysis - My Results

I personally do a time study every time things start getting wonky in my life. You know what I mean, I am sure. In those moments when your to-do list is longer than Santa's 'Good' list, you feel pulled in a million directions and nothing seems to be getting done.

One time study stands out for me and I talk about it often. My kids were all very small, 3 under the age of 4 years old and my husband was in school and working. The dinner hour was particularly difficult. I was planning my days but we would hit the afternoon/evening and everything would fall apart. I committed to tracking my time for a week. What I found was that although I was planning to start dinner at 5pm, and eat by 5:30, that was not what was actually happening. In addition, I hadn't allowed time to actually eat dinner or clean up! And often there were times when a child needed me.

I found that I needed about 1 hour to cook dinner, it usually took us only about 30 minutes to eat but it also took about 30 minutes to clean up. I adjusted my schedule to start dinner by 4pm, eat between 5:15 and 5:30 and clean up around 6pm. Our dinner hour was a lot longer, but it also became more peaceful as my expectations aligned with reality.

It is my hope that you will also find points where you can adjust your schedule and expectations and find peace.

## Mental Clutter: Unhelpful Beliefs

Sometimes the source of our physical and time clutter is actually how we think. Are unhelpful beliefs causing your physical and time clutter, and then leading to mental clutter like stress and overwhelm?

In the book, Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding authors Tolin, Frost and Steketee identify unhelpful beliefs that may cause people to hold onto or acquire more than they need.<sup>2</sup> Here are just a few unhelpful beliefs they describe that you may have experienced:

- ❑ **Beliefs About Usefulness** - You acquire, or feel that you cannot part with, an item because you feel it is useful.
- ❑ **Perfectionism and Fear of Making Mistakes** - You cannot part with an item because you are afraid of making the wrong choice about where it should go or if it should go. You may also have elaborate systems for parting with items.
- ❑ **Beliefs About Responsibility** - You feel you have a responsibility to items and the way that they are handled. For instance, ensuring the items are sent to a 'good' home or recycled. You feel you should acquire an item because you are taking responsibility for it.
- ❑ **Beliefs About Attachment** - You attribute feelings to inanimate objects or attach emotions to objects which remind you of people or memories.
- ❑ **Beliefs About Objects as a Source of Identity** - You connect your identity with the items and fear that letting go of an item will change who you are. For example, holding on to teaching materials because you were a teacher prior to retirement.

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<sup>2</sup> Tolin, David, Randy Frost and Gail Steketee. Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding. Oxford Press, New York. 2007. pages 47-51.

- ❑ **Underestimating Memory** - You keep things where they are visible because you are afraid you will otherwise forget to take action at the correct time.
  
- ❑ **Beliefs About Control** - You hold onto things or acquire items because you can, because you are in control, and no one is going to tell you how to handle your stuff.

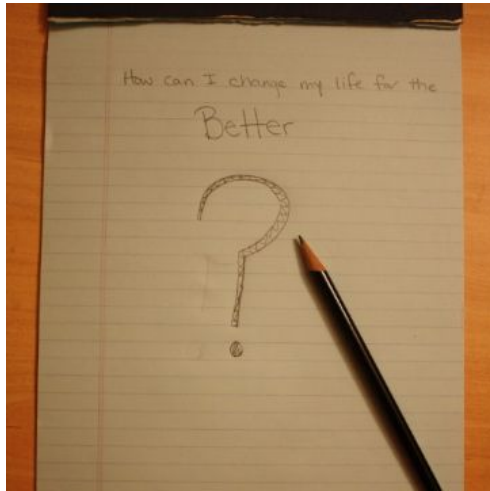
Any of the above beliefs are ok and normal in moderation. However, if any of these beliefs are keeping you from living the life you desire, keeping your space the way you would like or having time for the activities that are important to you, then they have moved into the area of 'unhelpful beliefs'. Put a checkmark next to any of the thoughts or beliefs you have experienced. In the chart that follows, rate how often you experience each type of belief and how that belief impacts your daily living.

<b>Belief</b>	<b>How often you experience the belief</b> (never, occasionally, sometimes, often, all the time)	<b>Impact on your daily living</b> (low, moderate, high)
Beliefs About Usefulness		
Perfectionism and Fear of Making Mistakes		
Beliefs About Responsibility		
Beliefs About Attachment		
Beliefs About Objects as a Source of Identity		
Underestimating Memory		
Beliefs About Control		

Note: If you find that certain thoughts are occurring all the time and have a high impact on your daily living, I would encourage you to seek outside help from a therapist that is educated in the technique of cognitive behavioral therapy.

## Special Section: Where Are You Getting Stuck?

by Nettie Owens, published SappariSolutions.com, 2011



Question: *If there was one thing that you could do to change your life for the better, what would it be?*

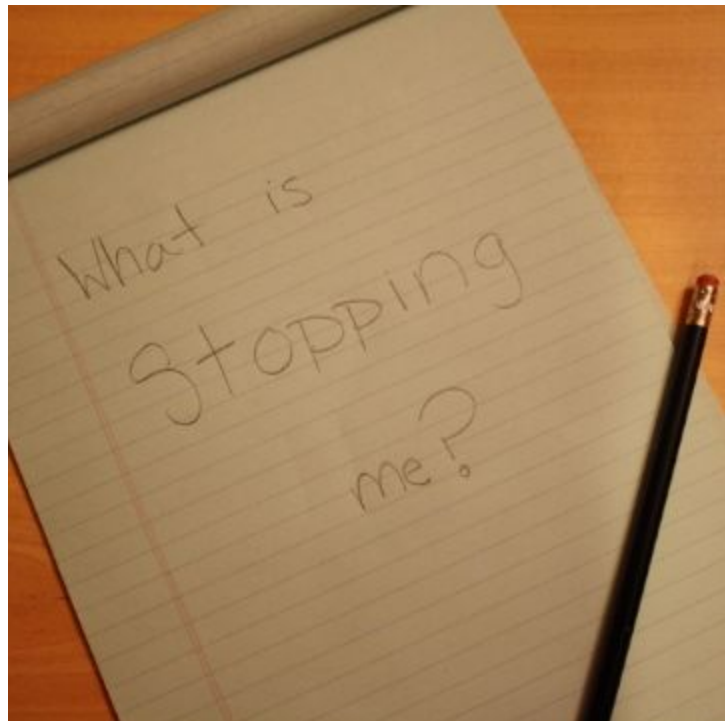
You may be one of those people that has the world by the tail, has it all together, and wouldn't change a thing, but for most of us, there is something that we are striving for that we want to be able to say that we have achieved.

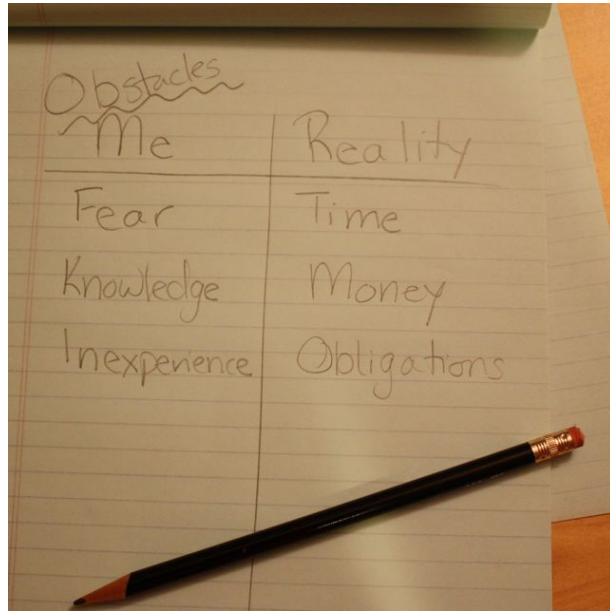
Think about it for awhile. Give yourself some time to really mull over where you are and what you are doing with your life, as opposed to where you want to be. It's OK to dream, it's OK to think big. When you find that dream, write it down.

Now, after you have identified something, answer this question:

*What is stopping you?*

Really. Get a piece of paper and write down all the obstacles to fulfilling that achievement.





Now, divide up the things you've written down into two groups. "Me" and "Reality".

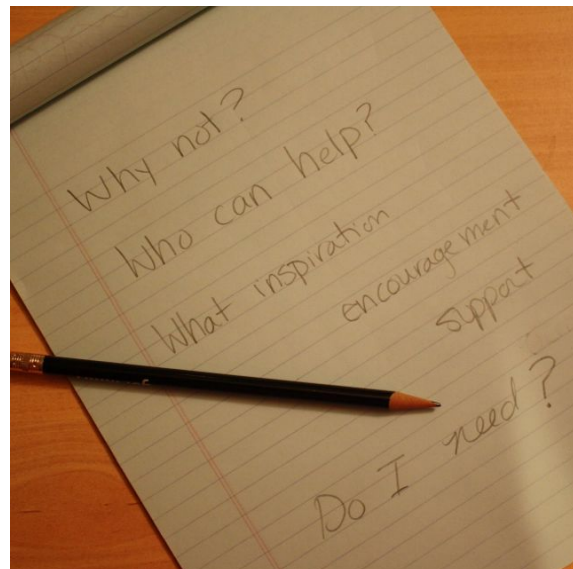
If, for example, you have always wanted to buy a house in the country and raise your own food, what are the things that are keeping you from that goal?

If one reason is that you lack experience with farming, put that under "me". If another reason is that you would need more money to buy a place, write that down under "reality". Maybe you are hesitant to make a move that is that life-changing. That goes under "me".

Now, you can go about conquering these obstacles with a focus on understanding their source. The ones that you are putting up for yourself may be the hardest to overcome, actually, but once you get over the first of the hurdles, you will find that you are encouraged to try and get over the next one.

Ask yourself, "Why not?" Why shouldn't I step up to my dreams and attempt to make them reality? Who can help? Find people that have done what you want to do and ask them how they did it. Take a class.

Even if reality steps in and keeps you from the ultimate goal, you will find that you have become energized and engaged by the process. You have become more of what you want to be than what you were. You are an achiever!



## Tasks

- ❑ Complete chart to define your acquisition pathways (page 3)
- ❑ Complete a 7 Day Time Study Using the [Emergent Task Planner](#) or [Toggl](#)
- ❑ Use the chart to analyze the impact of unhelpful beliefs in your daily living (page 12)
- ❑ Complete the Module 2 Review - [Online Link](#)