



Start Where You Are, Use What You Have, Do What You Can



Introduction – This quote (the title of this exercise) has always been a favorite of **Taking the Escalator** because it really defines and outlines how the change process takes place. We need to get started, utilize whatever we have at our disposal and then make an effort to do what we can do, just as it says in the quote. Following this simple plan can really empower and motivate us to achieve our goals with just a little time and effort at first. This exercise breaks down this amazing quote into three phases that can strengthen the change process and help us make progress with substance use and coexisting mental health issues and any other related life goals

***Note for counselor/group leader** – There is a lot of material here so depending on the length and depth of discussion you may consider breaking up the sections if there is a lot of discussion

Part 1 – Start Where You Are

Read: Why “Start Where Your Are”? – What’s the point? – The point is that we have to start somewhere and what better place to start than where we are right now. Otherwise, waiting for the perfect opportunity may never come.

Discussion – “Oriented x3”

Did you know that when assessing someone’s “mental status”, one basic clinical assessment is to make sure that the person being assessed is oriented to **Time, Place and Person**?

- **Time** – The person knows what date and time it is
- **Place** – The person knows where they are right now
- **Person** – The person knows their name and who they are



Using this basic assessment, as a group discuss how to **“Start Where You Are”**

Discuss the following:

Time – What “time” is in in your life? In other words, make a statement about what stage you are at chronologically and related to your own self-assessment of maturity level today.

- For example – “Right now I am in my early 30’s, new in recovery, struggling with a lifelong anxiety and a substance use disorder, doing my best to stay employed and take care of my family and resolve my legal issues at this stage of my life”

Follow Up Question – How can the concept of “I’ll start tomorrow” be a trap that can hurt progress? – Why is NOW the best time to get started in changing your life for the better (or if you have already started, why keep going NOW)

Place – Where are you living right now and where do you want to be?

- Example – “Right now I am living in a boarding home which I am not too happy about, but I see myself staying away from drugs and eventually getting my own apartment at some point

Follow Up Question – Even if a person is living in a negative environment where change may be challenging, why is it still worth it to try to **“start where you are”** anyway?

Person – In a one or two sentence statement, try to answer the question: **“Who am I today?”**

- **Today, I am....**

Follow Up Question 1 – Life is best lived as a constant process of growth for everyone. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with feeling like you are not fully yet the person whom you want to be. Everyone can make improvements. With that said in a sentence or two discuss: **Who do I want to be?**

Follow Up Question 2 - It is better to start now even if we are not yet the person whom we want to be. Why can waiting be a problem? (For example: Imagine someone with a substance use problem saying – “I’ll stop using drugs once I become employed and learn to manage my anger first, then I’ll quit”)



Part 2 – Use What You Have

Read: For this section everyone will do a self-assessment of what they have. Be open minded about your strengths as just about anything can somehow be useful in the change and recovery process.

For example, someone may identify one of their natural abilities to be having a good sense of humor. Someone may then question: “How can a sense of humor help me in recovery?” The truth is that having a sense of humor can be extremely helpful. For instance, there is solid research shows that laughter lowers stress, improves mood and even helps relieve pain. All of these benefit the recovery and positive change process

Try to identify a few things about yourself for each area below. Examples provided to help

Qualities and Natural Abilities – (For example: I am... Smart, determined, a good listener, patient, friendly, good at carpentry, strong, a good parent, understanding, open-minded, creative, good at guitar, etc.) – List your own:

Learned Skills (Example – “I now know how to manage stress effectively” or “I can manage cravings”) – List your own:

Supports and Resources (Example: “I have a case manager who is helping me” or “My parents live close by, and they are there for me when I need someone” or “I own my own home which is a resource” List your own:

Other (Anything that you have that is helpful that was not already mentioned) – List below:

Closing Question – How can you personally “**Use What You Have**” to make progress and achieve your goals?



Part 3 – “Do What You Can”

Read – So now you’ve assessed and discussed starting where you are and using what you have but now comes the most important part: Doing what you can. The first two parts of this exercise don’t matter as much if we don’t take action to make positive changes and actively strive toward our goals

Discuss the following: Even if you are not yet where you want to be and who you want to be, what are some things you can start doing today to make positive change happen in your life? Try to list at least five “concrete” things you can do. (What is meant by “concrete” these things are realistic and tangible rather than abstract)

Example

- ***“I can start being a better person today”*** – Although this sounds great, it is too abstract and difficult to define and measure. A more concrete version of this could be something like:
- **‘I am going to work on managing my anger and learn to speak in a calmer, nicer way with other people even when I am annoyed or upset so I will get into fewer fights and arguments’** – This is much more specific, personal, realistic, and measurable

To close out this exercise: Come up with some concrete ways that you are going to “Do What You Can” to achieve your goals:

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Similar thought - “One part at a time, one day at a time, we can accomplish any goal we set for ourselves.” — Karen Casey