

Practice “Just Because I Choose To”

Another great way to strengthen your commitment skills is always to have at least one slightly difficult thing you are doing “just cuz.”

When we commit to values our minds sometimes e-value-ate those choices in ways that miss their deeper point. The mind can easily turn a value into another cudgel for beating ourselves about the head and ears.

A playful way to get around this, is to practice commitment behaviors that are established “just because I choose to” without any possible reason to give. Again, you should start small with these. Examples might include:

- Go a week without a preferred food, just cuz.
- For a month go to bed an hour earlier than usual and get up an hour earlier, just cuz.
- Deliberately embarrass yourself by wearing something slightly off (e.g., a loud and unattractive shirt, mismatched socks) each week, just cuz.

When I was walking out of panic disorder I did longer and longer exercises of this kind: first hours, then days, then months. One of the final commitments was to go for a year without dessert – not because that was important, but precisely because it wasn't! I slipped once (I put a spoonful of ice cream in my mouth before remembering and spitting it out) but with that exception, I met the goal. I began to trust that I could do what I said I would do and that, in and of itself, was a huge benefit to me.

Why does this help? It undercuts the tendency to slip into the judgmental frame of mind that we must keep our commitments because doing so *is important*, rather than because it's our choice and habit. Suddenly, the judgmental voice of the Dictator begins to speak, telling us "*I have to be someone who keeps my commitment*" or "*I am bad if I don't keep my commitment*" (conceptualized self) or "*I will feel guilty if I don't keep my commitment*" (experiential avoidance).

Before we know it, we're "committing" based on the usual robbers' den line up of guilt, shame, self-loathing, self-criticism, compliance, and emotional avoidance. By committing to some actions "just cuz" we stay more aware when these other motivators are raising their ugly heads.