Environmental Modifications

The table below links Executive Skills, common resulting behaviors, and strategies to mitigate obstacles that result from Executive Skill struggles. Everyone can use these environmental modifications! Coaches can introduce participants to these strategies during goal setting, when thinking about designing incentives, modifying the environment in your program, or in any coaching conversation.

How We Organize	
Organization	• Do something fun while you're organizing • Start VERY small in terms of time, space, or task • Work off a checklist • Establish/label a set place for items (e.g. your paystub always goes into a specific folder in your desk) • Trade off with someone who is good at organization
Time Management	• Make a deal with a colleague that includes a reward for being on time • Practice time estimation with colleagues—start with small tasks, and then practice larger tasks • Set your watch ahead to "trick yourself" • Ask for help—a colleague to cue you or send you a reminder about a deadline • Use cell phone stopwatches or alarms
Planning/ Prioritization	• Use a planning template or calendar • Use post-it notes to identify steps that can be easily re-arranged • Ask for help from someone who is good at planning and prioritizing • Practice the skill by starting with something fun to plan (e.g. a lunchtime potluck with colleagues)
How We React	
Response Inhibition	• Remove/sequester temptations such as a phone • Create a cueing system as a reminder to use self-control • Build in routine and automatic "wait time" • Allow a small reward in exchange for giving up a big one • Announce your goal in advance to a colleague or supervisor
Flexibility	• Preplan to minimize surprises—and have a back up plan in case something doesn't go to plan • Avoid situations that require flexibility • Learn to recognize your physiological cues and put in place a default strategy • Create an If...then plan to rehearse for potential disruptions
Emotional Control	• Practice mindfulness meditation • Use calming and affirmative self-talk • Avoid situations that trigger poor emotional control • Use a relaxation strategy in the moment • Rehearse in advance how you will handle an anticipated emotionally-charged

	situation
Stress Tolerance	• Reduce environmental inputs -- disruptive noise, scents, clutter -- or go to a different environment all together that does not include the stressful cues • Add calming sensory inputs such as peaceful music, a gentle calming scent, touch a soft blanket or pillow • Take a break from the situation by doing an activity that requires some attention but is not too difficult or taxing (a puzzle, wash dishes, etc) • Tense and relax individual muscles: clench your jaw and release, curl your toes and release, and so forth • Repeat a mantra, prayer, meditation or use deep breathing when encountering a stressor
Metacognition	• Create a system for analyzing mistakes (ex. monthly reflections with supervisor) • Learn to ask for feedback from others, the more immediate the better • Use a problem solving template • Journal on a set day/time of week
How We Get Things Done	
Task Initiation	• Postpone a pleasurable activity until the task is started or done, or even pair the pleasurable activity with starting the task • Suspend access to distractions, such as a snooze alarm or time limits • Keep the degree of required effort low • (e.g. limit the time spent on the aversive task)
Sustained Attention	• Set a "Personal Best" goal • Limit access to distractions (e.g. shut down access to time-wasting websites) • Screen out unpredictable distractions (e.g. listen to quiet music on headphones) • "Temptation bundle": Pair the aversive task with something pleasant or a established habit (e.g. drink hot coffee while entering data)
Goal-Directed Persistence	• Use mental contrasting, implementation intention and process visualization • Identify potential roadblocks and systematically eliminate them • Build automaticity (do the same thing at the same time every day) • Post visual reminders of the goal and why it is important
Working Memory	• Create a checklist • Put visual cues in the environment • Have a duplicate set of items/documents (home & work) • Use apps/technology (i.e. Evernote, phone reminders, Tile) • Mentally rehearse what you need to remember