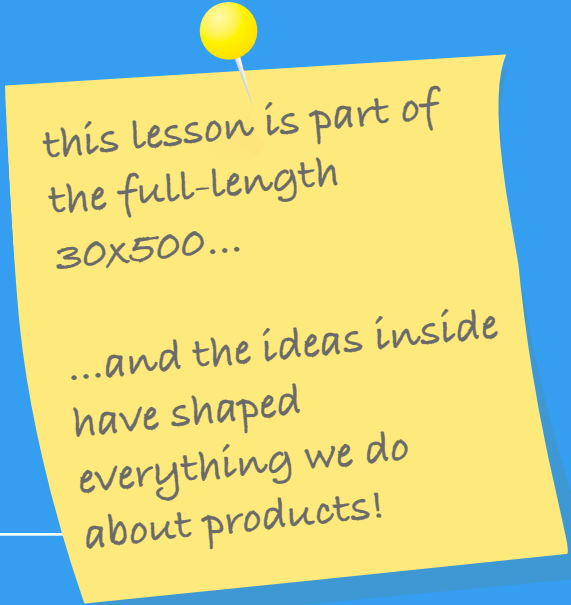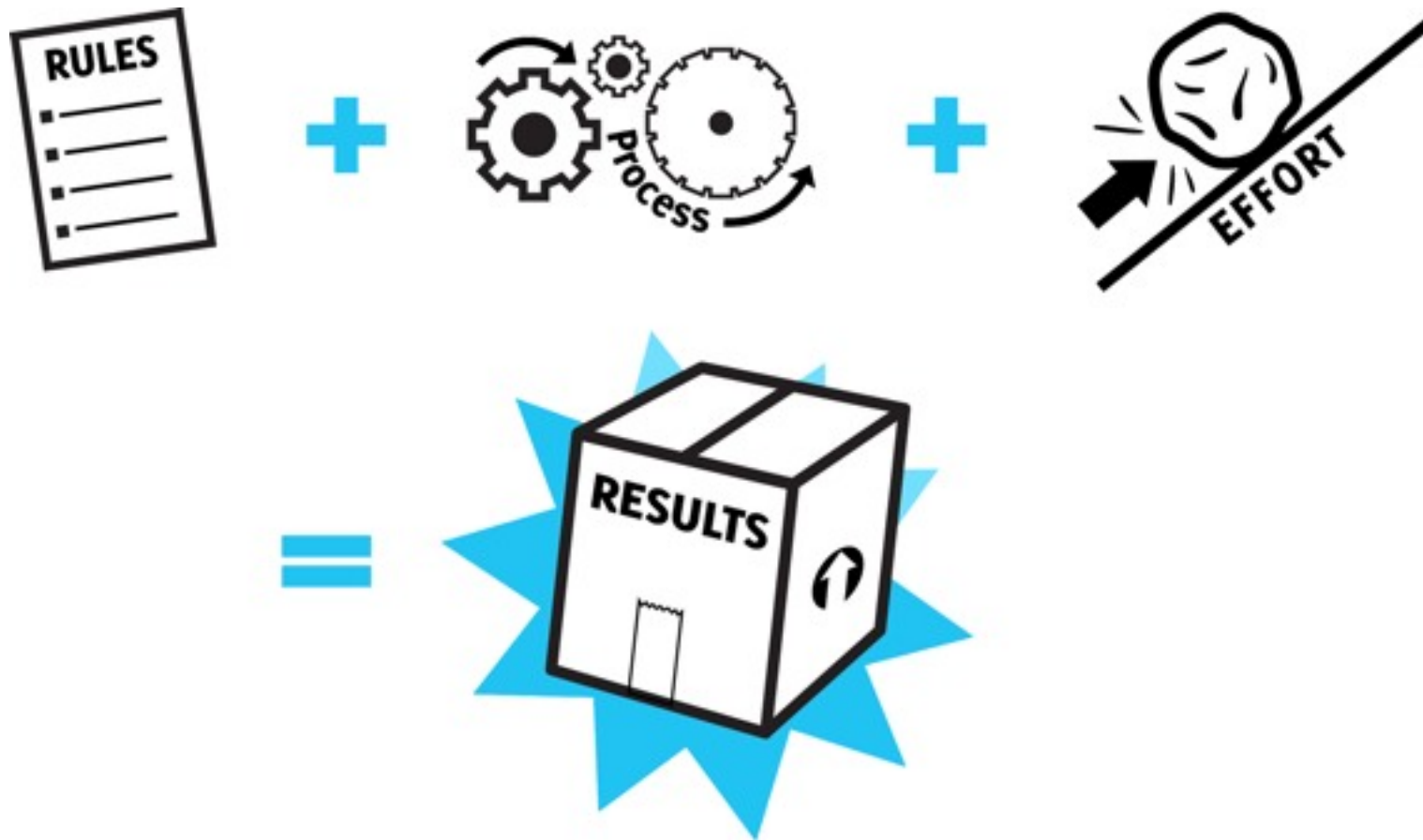# Escape the Ravenous Bear of Failure with Backwards Planning

this lesson is part of the full-length 30x500...

...and the ideas inside have shaped everything we do about products!

The 30x500 Philosophy

When you're building products on the side, every second counts. You don't have the *time* to make all the same mistakes as everyone else. No, you need to ensure that every decision you make — from the very outset! — will take you closer to your goal, with the least amount of doubt & flailing.

That's what 30x500 gives you: a solid, repeatable system to help you maximize your effectiveness & your chances of success. A way of thinking that changes your whole life.

Glossary & Study Notes So Far!

Hello and welcome to this delicious excerpt from 30x500! This PDF is two lessons rolled into one: first, the introduction to the concept of worldviews, then a workbook to help you put it in action. These 2 lessons come near the end of 30x500, and so you'll want to keep this little study notes page handy to get yourself up to speed!

1   ### Audience
Finding and choosing an Audience is one of the first things you do in 30x500. The Audience is the group of people you're targeting with a product. Audience is much, much broader than a niche. 30x500 will help you discover & pick one of your own.

2   ### Sales Safari
Sales Safari is half market research, half in-depth analysis. The Sales Safari forms the basis of everything you need to do to ship a product that will earn you money from day 1: choosing the Audience, locating their hangouts, analyzing their worldviews, and then turning that research into a big list of potentially profitable products. Your Sales Safari research also teaches you how to communicate with & market to your Audience, and how to pitch your product effectively! It's a big deal! *This ENTIRE process is covered with step-by-step systems in 30x500.*
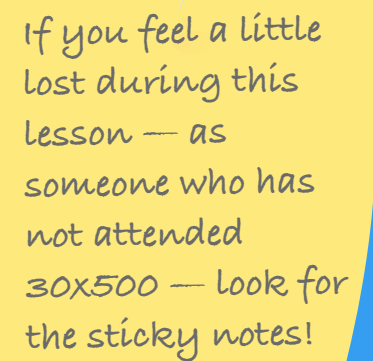
3   ### Creative Atom
The Creative Atom is how you get your product out the door: by stripping it down to its barest, indivisible essence. It's not just a question of "ship a minimum viable product." No, Creative Atom is a system that helps you figure out *what* that tiniest essential building block *is*... and along with Backwards Planning, helps you get there, even if you're not used to working on big projects by yourself.
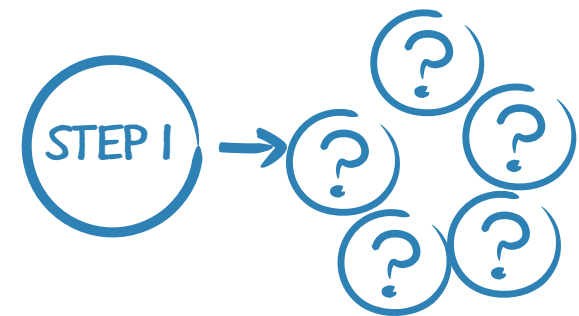
__What's 30x500 mean?__
30x500 is a formula, and a way of thinking!

Have you ever thought about the fact that to earn $180,000/yr, you only need to create $30 of value for 500 customers — in the whole world — every month?

Without further ado...

If you feel a little lost during this lesson — as someone who has not attended 30x500 — look for the sticky notes!

The Bassackwards Plan

Okay, so I've got a Creative Atom. But how the hell do I get from here to there?

Frankenstein, & the Beauty of a Bassackwards Plan

Let's see, where were we?

Oh, yes... You've committed to the idea of creating a product that actually earns you money—a real business. You identified Audiences you can grok, who pay for things, who are good for you. You hunted 'em down online and learned their ways. You've worked up Pain Killers and/or Money Multipliers into a Pitch.

You've brainstormed a huge list of potential features. You've brutally cut 'em down—or you're working on brutally cutting 'em down—to define your Creative Atom.

Well done, you! That is a lot — and I mean a *lot* of work. It's worth it, because it'll get you where you want to go. But it's still a lot of work and **you deserve a cookie**.

Seriously. Treat yourself before moving on. Take a break! Drink some champagne. You're done with the most brutal

Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.

— General & President Dwight D. Eisenhower

part. (Building the product is *so totally not* the brutal part!)

Okay, I'm out of champagne. Now What?

Now it's time for you to craft your plan. Your actual, honest to god, *here's what I have to do today and here's what I have to do next week to get where I wanna go* plan.

When you feel distracted, or demotivated, or just plain incapable of making a decision, you'll look at your plan and *know* where you stand and what to do next. Your plan will tell you what to do. This plan is the general to your army. Your plan is gonna be awesome.

Planning is also fun—the absolute best part of building a product, other than counting your piles of money!

Planning, the World's Second-most Boring Verb!!!

What do you mean, *'that sounds like an unreasonable level of excitement?'* No, we're not on drugs!

You're not peeing your pants in joy, just imagining all the fun,

hard work ahead?

You're not alone. Planning has a bad rep. It ranks, in most people's dictionaries, as the second-most boring verb ever—right after "curling" (the sport). (Sorry, Canadians, Bavarians, and Austrians... and whoever else curls on purpose.)

But the reason planning doesn't get the average person lathered up... is because the average person was never shown the beauty of planning. Nobody teaches it right. Hell, almost nobody teaches it at all.

Instead, they rely on cliché — and productivity tips.

Stop Me If You've Heard This One

When most people consult those aforementioned dictionaries for planning, they find meatless, vapid phrases such as:

"Just get started."

"Just put one foot in front of the other."

"Eyes on the prize."

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

And, Amy's personal least favorite:

"Break it down into small tasks."

These are street vendor hotdogs of advice, when what you really need is a t-bone steak with a side of broccoli and a caesar salad.

You can't argue with them—yes, you do have to get started. *But on what?* Yes, you do have to put one foot in front of the other, otherwise you're standing still or walking backwards. *But which foot do you start with?* Yes, you have to keep your eyes on the prize—but *what prize?*

And yes, the journey of a thousand miles does begin with a single step—duh, Lao Tzu—but *where the hell are you going*?

And, of course, *nobody* can argue with the concept of breaking big tasks down into smaller tasks.

But that particular little currywurst, like all the others, is all

fat and gristle and delicious, delicious sugar—and no substance. Because, like the currywurst itself, its subject has a mysterious provenenace: **Where does that big task come from?**

How do you know what the big task should be? How do you know you chose the right one?

Almost all the planning advice you'll find out there, on the internet, in seminars, in courses, in books, and in bathroom stalls, it all relies on a simple assumption that simply isn't true for you:

Somebody else is dictating the shape of your work.

And if you've ever found yourself wondering why you can get on so splendidly at your day job, even for your clients, while never getting around to your own projects... **that's it, in a nutshell.**

You may have *never ever* made a big plan before where the outcome was entirely optional, where you didn't have to do anything.

Where *nobody* would care or even know if you *never did it at*

all. Where the whole shebang rests entirely on your shoulders.

You're in fine company there, of course, along with billions of other people today who have their work dictated to them (however politely or co-creatively).

Of course, just because there are billions of people stuck there along with you doesn't make it a fun place to be.

You, you lucky dog, stay in that unfun place only because you have yet to break out of it. You already have the *skills* to create products that can help people who will gladly help you back by stuffing your pockets full of money.

You have the desire, too—which, of course, is why you enrolled in this course.

So it's time to kick some planning butt.

Why planning is, in fact, totally awesome

In short: **Planning is a method of transforming brainwaves into reality.** It's about taking a dream, and making it *alive*.

ALIVE!

Which brings us to our metaphor of the week: Frankenstein's monster.

How could anything associated with practicing needlepoint on human body parts, channeling electrical storms, and cackling henchmen *not* be awesome?

But let's pivot for a moment.

The traditional approach to planning, & why it sucks currywurst

If you sat down right now and tried to formulate a plan for creating your product, your attempt would probably go something like this:

You'd start at the beginning, which is natural, obvious... and wrong.
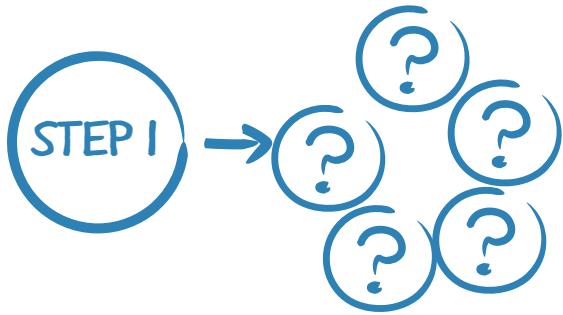
It's the easiest mistake in the world to make, starting at the beginning. That's where everybody tells us to start.

The problem with beginnings is this:

You're starting with a blank slate. **Your first step could be anything.**

Is it research? Is it finding customers? Is it writing the introduction to your ebook? Recording yourself typing some code? Is it writing a login system? Finding a way to process credit cards? Hiring a designer to create a banner ad? Figuring out where/how to hire that designer?

If you think you already know your first step, rock on. But every time you determine the next step after that, you have to choose again from a million potential actions, and hope that each choice is right (enough) to get you closer to your goal instead of tripping all over your one foot that you just put in front of the other.

Phew! It's enough to drive you completely bonkers.

Let's illustrate this with our metaphor of the week, shall we?

In Frankenstein-speke...

So, imagine Dr. Frankenstein, pencil tucked behind his ear, humming happily to himself, crafting his plan. What's his first step?

Procure body parts? Practice an evil cackle? Figure out how to harness lightning? Locate a second-hand tilting table? Browse Craigslist for the perfect spiderwebbed hilltop manse? Learn a mean cross-stitch? Shop Amazon.com reviews for lug nuts? Place a Help Wanted ad for a reliable henchman? Invent Pitchfork-B-Gone?
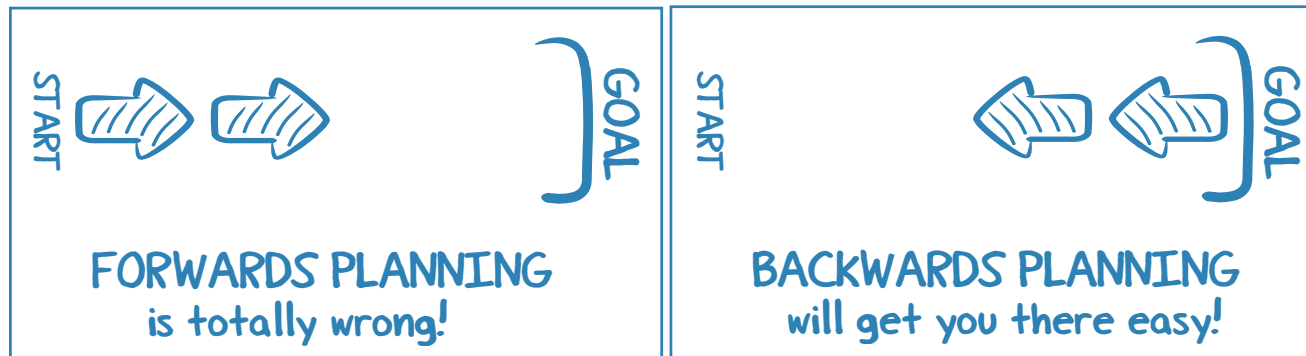
Even if Dr. Frankenstein did choose a first step, what's the next step after that? There are so many variables, so many unknowns, so many branching decisions.

In short: infinite choice is infinite.

And, believe it or not, infinite choice is a terrible thing.

The right way? Do it backwards

Luckily, there's a simple way to eliminate all that unnecessary choice—and avoid a slow, painful death by analysis paralysis:


START → → GOAL

FORWARDS PLANNING
is totally wrong!

START ← ← GOAL

BACKWARDS PLANNING
will get you there easy!

Plan backwards.

Yep, that's right, start from the final result and work your way

back. All you need to get started is your desired endpoint. You don't have to make any choices at all.

How do you get your desired endpoint?

We thought you'd never ask! **Your desired endpoint is what you've been working on: your Creative Atom.** Hey, how 'bout that!
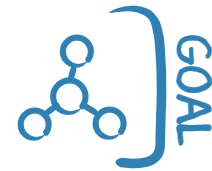
How bassackwards planning works

There are three, and only three, steps to bassackward* planning:

1. Find your endpoint
2. Ask "Can I do this tomorrow? If not, what do I need to get here?" and write it down (repeat until you run out of things that you need)
3. If you hit a problem, don't give up! Ask yourself "How can I get X?" and "How can I get to my goal without X?"

Pretty easy, huh?

For the uninitiated: bassackwards is a play on "ass backwards," which is, well, a fratboy way of saying "things are totally screwed up."

In fact, the absolute hardest part of creating your bassackwards plan is keeping yourself from thinking *too* hard. The trick is to take it one (backwards) step at a time.

Compared to creating a normal, start-from-the-beginning, forward plan outta thin air, *that's* as easy as stealing candy from Steve Ballmer!

Dr. Frankenstein teaches you how to bring your dreams to life

Remember that panoply of potential things the eager Frankenstein could start with? Let's take a quick look at it again, for the purposes of contrast:

Procure body parts? Practice an evil cackle? Figure out how to harness lightning? Locate a second-hand tilting table? Browse Craigslist for the perfect spiderwebbed hilltop manse? Learn a mean cross-stitch? Shop Amazon.com reviews for lug nuts? Place a Help Wanted ad for a reliable henchman? Invent Pitchfork-B-Gone?

Now, Dr. Frankenstein is a man who knows how to get things done. So he doesn't make the mistake of trying to plan from

the beginning.

CREATING LIFE!
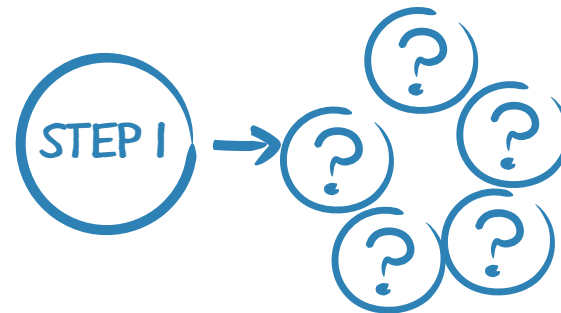
Instead, he starts at the end:
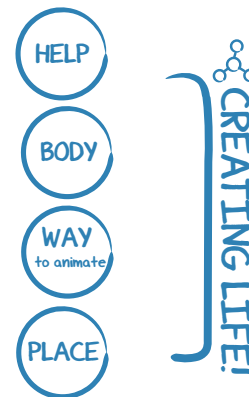
Dr. Frankenstein then chews thoughtfully on his pencil, looks at his end point, and asks himself, *"What do I need to get here?"*

He knows it's crucial to avoid getting bogged down in details early on, so he sticks to the big ticket items or tasks:

- A body
- A way to breathe life into the body
- A place to do it
- An evil henchman

START

HELP

BODY

WAY
to animate

PLACE

CREATING LIFE!

Now *that's* starting to look like a recipe!
Dr. Frankenstein allows himself a celebratory evil chortle, and moves on to the next step.

How do I get a henchman? Or, Zeroing in on Step 2

He takes one of those level 1 items (*Henchman*) and asks himself, *"What do I need to get a henchman?"* and *"How do I get **that**?"*

He treats Evil Henchman as its own end goal, and applies the process again—again, being sure to focus on the *last thing* he'd have to do or have before he reaches that goal:
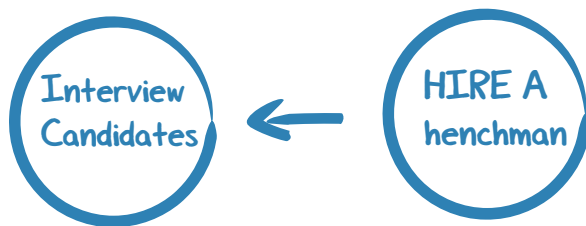
Naturally, before he can hire a henchman, he has to *choose* one. He assumes he'll want to interview 'em first.

Rinse and repeat, with the bassackwards planning steps:
What does Dr. Frankenstein *need* to perform interviews? *Candidates*, naturally. *How* can Dr. Frankenstein *get* candidates?

Dr. Frankenstein comes up with one way immediately: he can place a Help Wanted ad in the Evil Minions section on Craigslist. More is better, though, so after a few moments of nailbiting, he decides he can *also* ask his imaginary friends for recommendations—or hold an evil job fair.

Dr. Frankenstein surveys his work and scratches his mercifully bolt-free temple. **Can he do any of these steps tomorrow?** If so, he's done with this branch of his bassackwards plan.

Since he *can't* hold an evil job fair tomorrow, so he goes another step backwards—*What do I need to hold an evil job fair? How can I get it?*

And so on, til he's got some tasks he can easily complete tomorrow.

Now, other than penciling in a brainstorming step for his Craigslist ad, he's good and clear for the henchman branch of his bassackwards plan! **Awesome!**

But what about when it doesn't go so easy? What about when you hit a brick wall and what you need
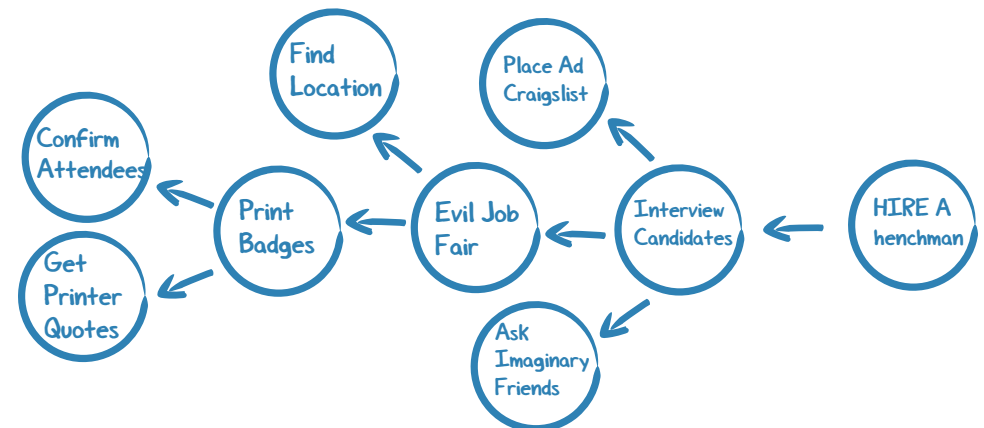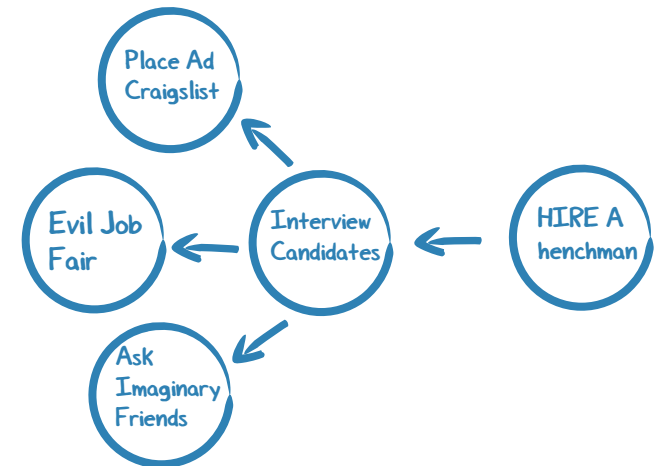
—or need to do—seems impossible?

I need a corpse, and Other Roadblocks

A body isn't something you can buy on any street corner—so the body poses a problem to Dr. Frankenstein. It's a roadblock, but it's not the end of his grand plan.

So, because he's hit this roadblock, Dr. Frankenstein asks himself those two problem-busting questions:

1. *How can I do it without a body?*
2. *How can I get a body?*

When you hit a roadblock like this, these questions kick off a lightning round of brainstorming.

Don't brainstorm on the same piece of paper as your plan— grab some scrap paper, and have at it, like Dr. Frankenstein did.

Go as wild as you can go:

- **_How can I do it without a body?_** Bring a bowl of petunias to life. Bring something entirely inanimate to life, like a metal sculpture or cloth doll. Does it have to be a HUMAN body? Could animate a squirrel.
- **_How can I get a body?_** Ask for one nicely. Buy one from a real medical doctor. Kill someone and use theirs. Hire a graverobber. Try a skeleton stuffed with steaks and wrapped in sausage casing for skin. Hmm, that's an interesting idea. What about body parts?

No idea is too crazy to write down, because there are lessons inside the craziest of crazy ideas. How else could you come up with the (crazy but workable) idea of creating a body from parts?

That's a pretty crazy idea. So crazy it just might work!

Having come to the conclusion that he doesn't need a whole body, that he can make the body itself just one more part of his creative process, Dr. Frankenstein writes "create body from parts" on his bassackwards plan—and asks himself,

What do I need? and *How can I get it?*
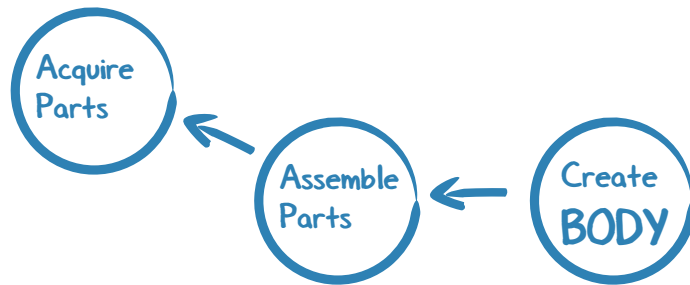
Like an annoying 5-year-old, he just keeps on asking *What do I need?* and *How do I get it?* And if he doesn't know—for example, he hasn't begun to think of all the places he could find parts—**he just puts in a question mark**, to remind himself to explore it later.
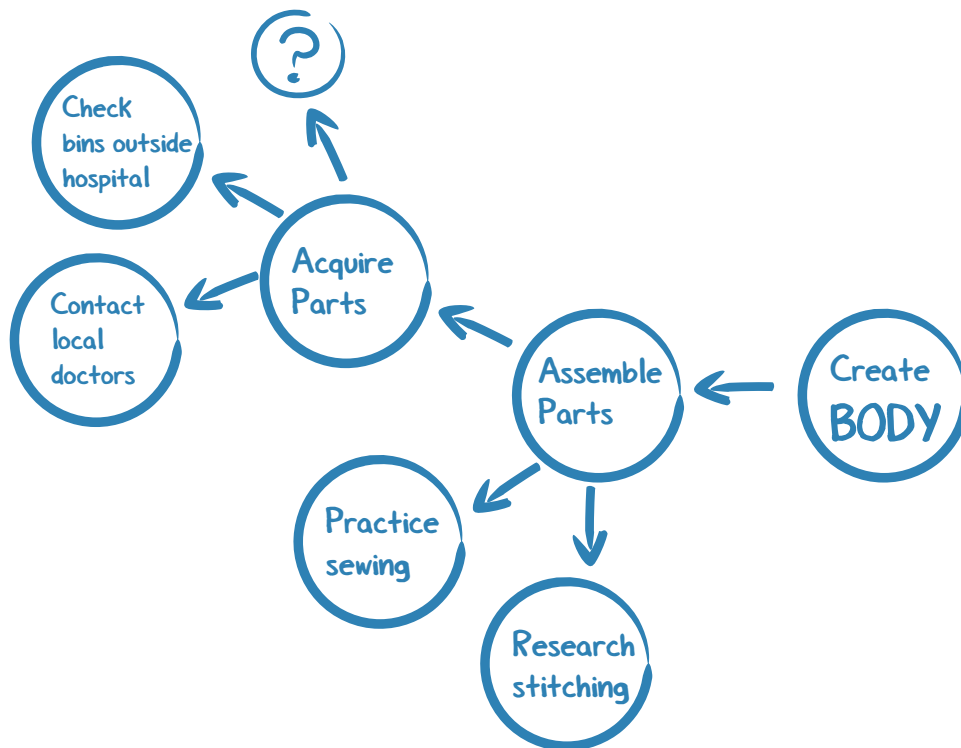
You'll undoubtedly hit a roadblock like this one in *your* bassackwards plan, so be sure to ask yourself **How can I get there *without* X?** and **How can I get X?** And be prepared to think out of the box.

(But at least you won't have to deal with rigor mortis.)

Sometimes a Roadblock is Just an Illusion

In this case, the roadblock was a real requirement—and Dr. Frankenstein figured out how to route around the difficulties in acquiring one.

But sometimes you'll find that your roadblock is, in fact, *not* a real precondition, and there are other ways to get to your end goal.

If, for example, your goal was to sail around the world on a yacht, you wouldn't *really* need to buy your own yacht (and therefore wouldn't need a million bucks first)—though it's *tempting* to say you would.

And, if your Creative Atom was an ebook, you don't *really* need to be able to afford Adobe Creative Suite in order to

create the layout and PDF. You could...

- make do with Pages, or PowerPoint—even Word or TextEdit, in a pinch.
- hire a person to lay it out for you.
- teach somebody in exchange for laying it out, for "free" instead of cash.
- make your ebook in HTML.
- make it a learning application instead of an ebook.
- make it a screencast or "webinar" instead of an ebook.

And on and on and on. You get the picture. It's all about the hustle!

Creating is all about hustling. And hustling is about finding a way, no matter what.

Which is why smart hustlers always ask themselves, *"How can I get here **without** X?"*

Now—back to the plan.

The Plan's Looking Pretty Hot

Dr. Frankenstein's plan is multiplying like bunny rabbits—but that's not a bad thing, it's a great thing.

Every step of the way, he's asked himself *Can I do this tomorrow? If not, what do I need to get here? How can I get that?* — and that's resulted in a lot of steps.

But they all purposefully lead right to where he wants to go—because he worked bassackwards.

Dr. Frankenstein *never* again has to wonder what he should be doing. All he has to do is survey the real, concrete possibilities on the tail end, and *pick one*. At random, even, if he feels decision-challenged at the time.

Now, Dr. Frankenstein is *prepared* to keep his eyes on the prize, just get started, put one foot in front of the other.
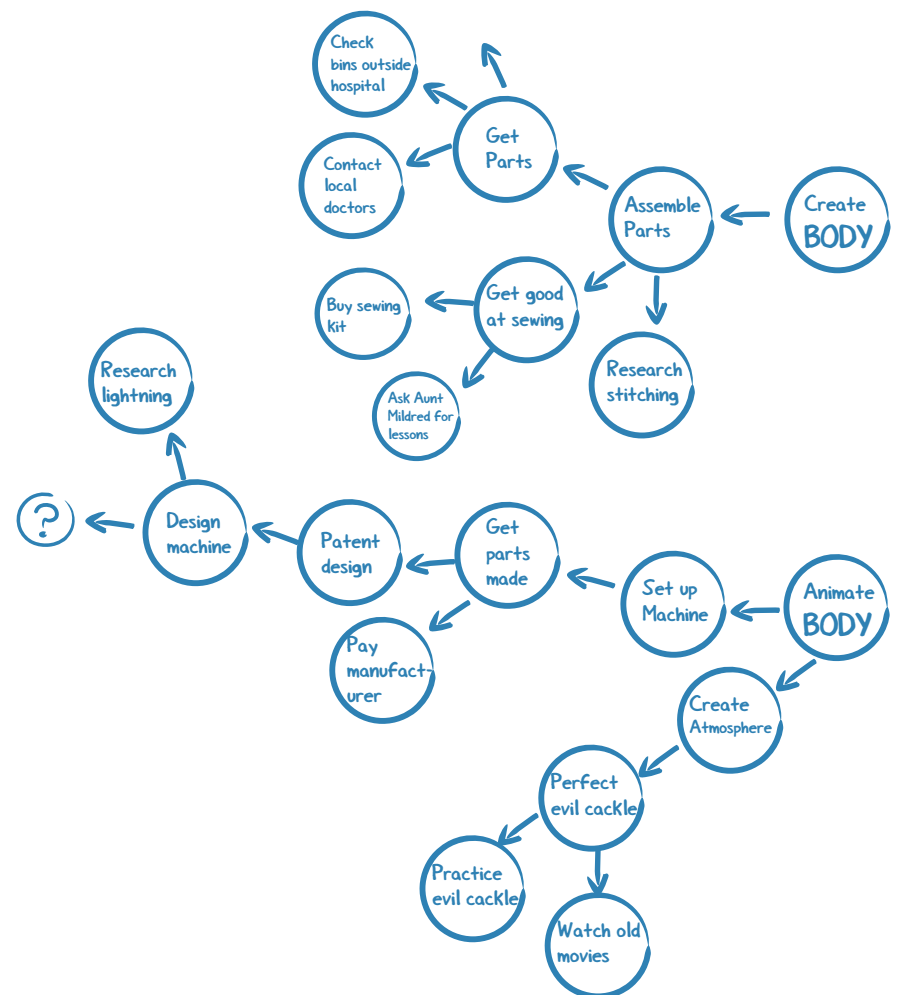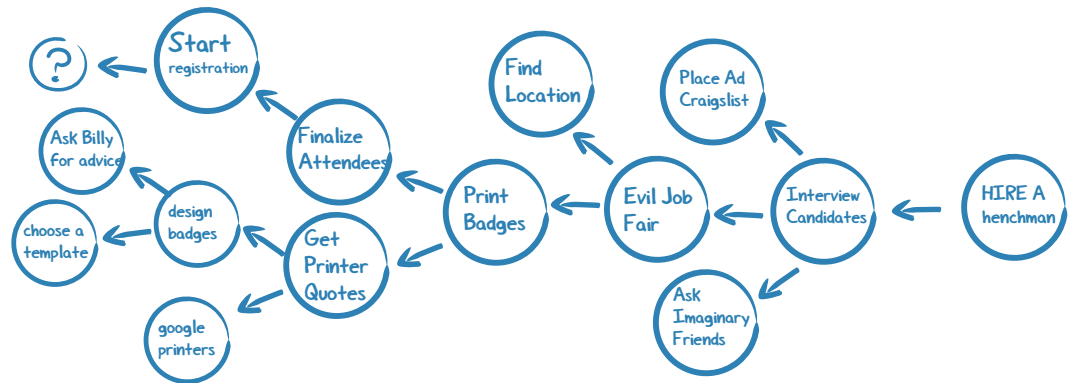
And he can feel confident doing the work because he knows it gets him one step closer to that glorious moment when his patchwork quilt of a corpse sits up and says "Daddy!"

Backwards to Forwards… *Hey, that looks familiar*

Since you're a smart cookie, you've noticed that some of those steps on the crazy left-hand side look pretty familiar. Some of those we named in our dizzying panoply of potential first steps, when were talking about the wrong way to plan.

This is the perfect illustration of why normal, beginnings-first planning fails: If you'd started with *just one* of those first steps, the moment you hit a branch, you'd be derailed. You'd realize you should have *also* been doing something else all along.

And that feeling blows chunks. That feeling is a big reason why people are hesitant to make plans to begin with. And if they hesitate to make plans, well, they don't end up making anything.

Bassackwards Plans are the Only Plans

Work isn't linear, no matter how tempting the idea is. And so a linear plan will rarely get you where you want to go.

Planning bassackwards respects the true nature of work: broad at the beginning, narrow at the end.

That's yet another reason why it works so damn well.

It's the only way to fry... bodies.

Congrats! You made it to the end of this lesson

And hopefully the Dr. Frankenstein story didn't wear too thin.

Working through this lesson was enough for today!

On Friday, you'll get a cheat sheet to help you walk through the process (over and over again!). You'll learn more about how to figure out what you need at each step, and how to handle the problems that inevitably arise.

BROAD ⟶ NARROW
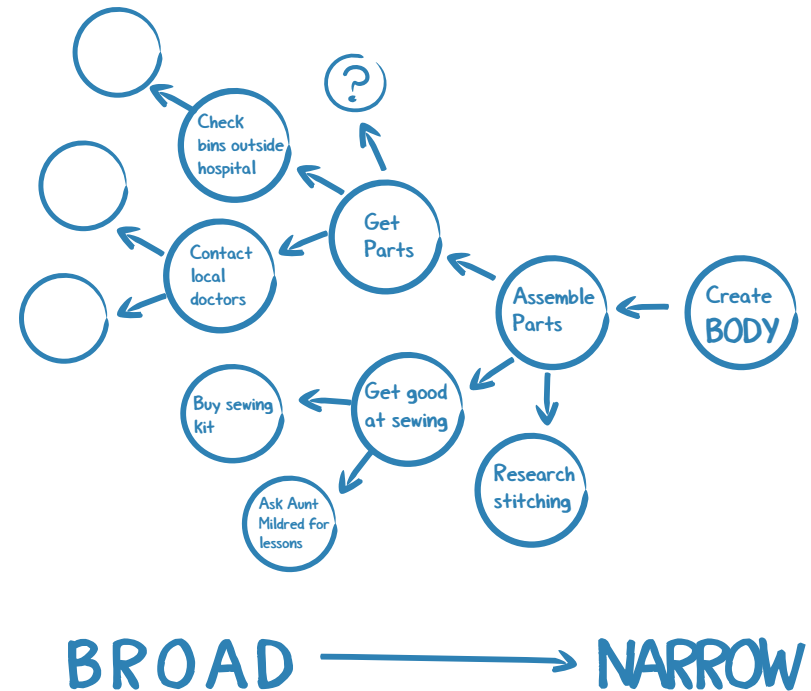
Now, all that's left for you today is to take a quick review of your Creative Atom... and take a nice walk outside, or a relaxing bath, or sit in a sunny corner and have a cup of coffee. And just chill.

That's an order!

☑ **Learning lesson**

◯ **Implementing lesson**

Planning Cheat Sheet

An irreplaceable companion on your path to successful bassackwards planning.

Your Bassackwards Plan

So, hopefully by now you've had a chance to read the last lesson. If not, now is a great time to catch up. It may look like a doozy, but it's super easy to read. There's just one point and lots of examples! It's not gonna put your brain through the ringer like the first two lessons in the course.

This workbook is all about the *process* of creating that plan.

You're about to learn the exact steps you have to take to create your own bassackwards plan—complete with handy cheat sheet to hang up near your workspace.

Remember: The best plan is a backwards plan!

Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.

— General & President Dwight D. Eisenhower

START → → GOAL
FORWARDS PLANNING
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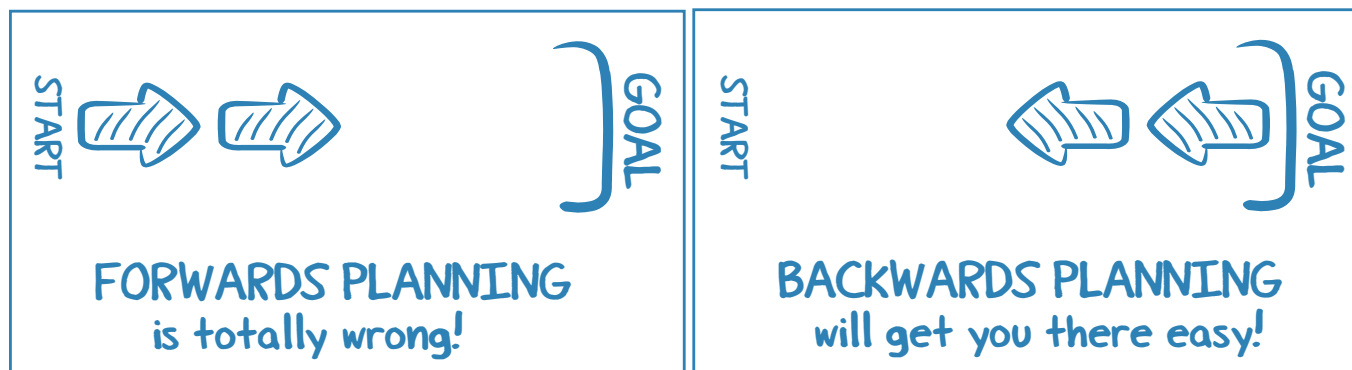
Write Down
Your Destination
(Creative Atom)

→

WHAT do I need? (?)

(?) Can I do it tomorrow?

(?) What do I need?

(?) How do I do it?

(?) How can I get by without it?

(?) How can I get it (by any means)?

Pick a part, or a problem

(?) Can I do it (or get it) tomorrow?
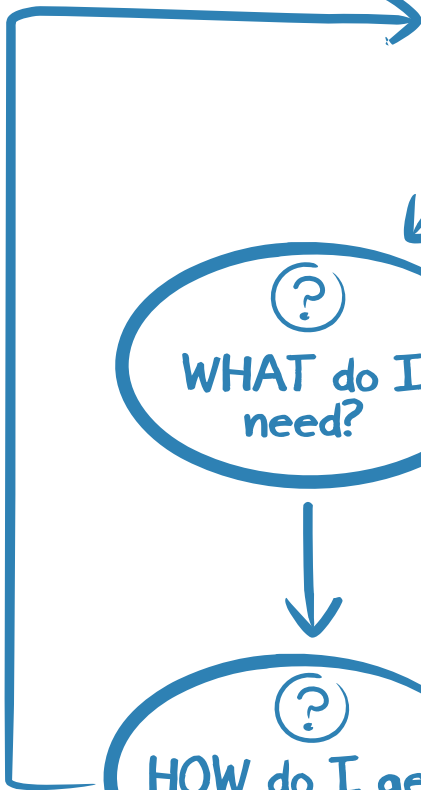
No

Yes

NEVER! HELP!

WHAT do I need? (?)

DON'T PANIC, BRAINSTORM!

HOW do I get it? (?)

HOW can I get by without it?

HOW can I get get it?

That's All There is to It!

Feeling like you haven't had a proper chance to digest the whole enchilada? No problemo, compadre. Here's a slightly more verbose step-by-step guide.

#1: Define your destination

Start at the end: your goal, your end result—your Creative Atom, earning money for you.

#2: What do you need to get there?
Big things, tasks, or problems

List out your roadblocks, problems, final steps, or big needs. These are, essentially, your sub-projects.

This step can be a little bit confusing until you get the hang of it, so here are some examples for different types of products:

1. **subscription software**: you'll want to invite your beta members; you'll want to have a way to collect feedback; you'll want to have certain parts/areas/components of your software to a certain point (each component can
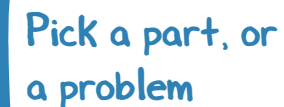
Write Down Your Destination (Creative Atom)

? WHAT do I need?

be its own bubble on your chart); don't forget promotion and billing!

2. **eBook, screencast, or other info product**: you'll want to break out sales and promotion mechanisms; you'll want to have your ebook laid out, or your screencast with the final cut and audio and music added in; you'll want to prepare any bonus or follow-along materials

3. **class, teleconference, training session, etc**: final review/practice of your teaching materials; printing and hole-punching; payment for & confirmation of your location (in-person) or teleconference service (remote); processing payments; finalizing your attendees' details; food/refreshments/projectors (in-person), etc.

#3: Dissect each need

Then take a look at each one of those items and ask yourself, *Can I have/do this tomorrow?* And if the answer is no, ask yourself *Why not?*

Write down the last thing(s) that has to happen before you have *that* thing.

Pick a part, or a problem

Rinse, repeat, til you have something you can do tomorrow

Then keep iterating. Ask yourself, *Can I have/do that tomorrow?* If no, ask yourself *Why not?* and write down the last thing that has to happen before you have that thing. Or multiple last things, if you're branching out.

You'll know you can stop when you have a full suite of tasks you could do tomorrow.


No
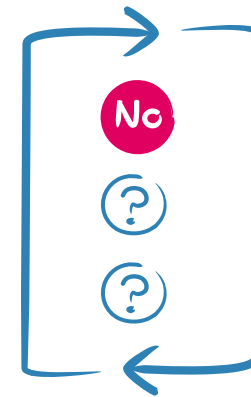
What's with the "do tomorrow" rule?

The trick about the *Can I do it tomorrow?* question is that it doesn't refer to your time, availability, or inclination. It doesn't refer to the size of the task, either (although if it's big, break it down further!).

What it refers to is **readiness**.

Think of it as shorthand for *Is there any more preparation or groundwork for this task that has to happen first? Do I need to buy something? Call someone? Read something? Google for something?*

When you can get started at any time, then you know you've come to a place where you can pause on that track—and start again with your analysis, on a different thread.

Can I do it (or get it) tomorrow?
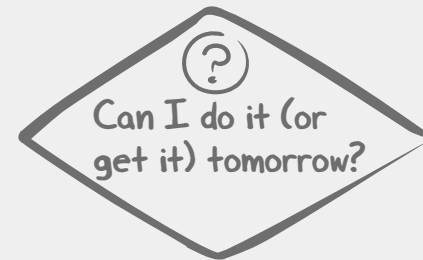
On Problems & Roadblocks

There are two types of problems you'll come across in this process:

- strategic
- emotional

A strategic problem can always be solved, one way or another, with time, money, effort, tools, and connections. The second problem is more of a big deal.

If you really don't want to do it — not because you're tired, burnt out, or overburdened, but because you *really don't want to* — you should pause and think. Are you doing this project because it's something you'll really enjoy in some capacity? Or do you just think you *should*? Or are you just resisting because it's a change?

I**f you deeply don't want to do it**, and it's not a passing thing, take a break and re-evaluate your goals. **You don't lose anything by throwing out a plan that makes you unhappy.**

(And by "deeply don't want to do it," I don't mean small tasks like "I really don't want to have to set up this ticketing system." Because that, you'll get over. That's just the nature of work. There will be things you don't want to do. But if your core project doesn't make you happy—and worse, if it actively makes you unhappy—even those little annoyances will make you feel like you're being screwed by life. So know the difference.)

… And How to Solve Them

If you think you have a need that's insurmountable — like a million bucks or a body — it's time to brain-volcano.

- **How can I get by without it?**
- **How can I get it?**

These might look the same as the other questions at first glance. But they're different, because you're in brain-volcanoing mode.

When you think you've hit a brick wall and you ask yourself, *How can I get by without it?* then you should be looking for the craziest answers you could think of. Same goes for when you ask yourself, *How can I get it?*

No answer is off the table: theft, murder, debasing,

streaking naked through a football stadium, leaping on stage at an event and pulling a Kanye, begging, anything. It's not as if writing them down (or even thinking them) will make them come true.

Interrogate Your Crazy Ideas

Once you've got your list — no matter how crazy — it's time to analyze each one. Ask:

- *Could I (legally, morally, factually) do this?*
- *Why or why not?*
- *What is the core usefulness I can extract?*
- *What did I learn from my reaction to this idea?*

When you apply these simple steps, you'll realize that even an idea like *robbing a bank!* or *blackmailing this celebrity so he'll help me!* have useful nuggets buried inside, whether it's looking to get aid from an institution or a person, or crazy ways to get publicity, or alternative ways to look at the thing itself.

It'll also show you what you are and aren't willing to do, in case you ever worry that the moment you earn some money directly, you'll turn into an evil, conniving mini-corporation.

Your Homework

Your homework for today is to follow all these steps and create your plan.

If you hit a bump in the road, bring it to the email list! Or email me.

AND THAT CONCLUDES YOUR FREE-VIEW

- ✓ **Learning lesson**
- ✓ **Implementing lesson**

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- ◯ **How to use the same research, & your pitch, to craft compelling marketing materials your audience will want to share!**