

Three

Crafting I:
Plotting the Path
To Your Goal

Hard Times clears the mind the way a thunderstorm clears the air. After a good gripe session the oppressive haze is gone, far things look near, and you're in the mood to come up with practical strategies for getting there. When you start plotting the actual steps to your goal, you'll understand why it was so important first to discover your emotional investment in "It can't be done." Because here's where you find out that it *can*.

I'm a down-to-earth woman, and this is a down-to-earth book. It's not about castles in the air—it's about the nuts and bolts and plans and principles of engineering that get castles built here on earth. But if there's one section of this book that comes close to being about miracles, this is it.

Down-to-earth miracles, that is.

Right now what you've got is a clearly-defined target and a list of the strategic problems that stand in your way. By the end of this section, you will have a step-by-step *plan* for getting to your goal—a bridge of actions connecting that distant dream to your doorstep. In other words, we're going to start turning obstacles into stepping stones.

What accomplishes this transformation? There are no magic wands, it's true. But you have two perfectly ordinary, absolutely priceless resources in your possession right now that can do as much as any magic wand in any fairy tale you care to name. One of them is in your head. The other is in your address book.

They are called *human ingenuity and human community*—or in plain English, a head full of brains and a room full of friends.

These two between them really have the power to move mountains. They can get you a million dollars, or they can get you what you want for \$5,000 or \$500—or for free. They can get you an introduction to Mikhail Baryshnikov. They can get you a working farm with six Holstein dairy cows. They can get you a job in a new field without having to go back to school; they can get you into school and through it without a dime. They can get you the capital and know-how to start your own business. They can get you unstuck from a low rung on the corporate ladder. They can get you married. And I'll be showing you exactly how in the course of this section.

The technique for liberating ingenuity is called *brainstorming*. The technique for mobilizing community is called *barn-raising*. They are specific antidotes to the two mainstays of “hard reality”: *conventional “wisdom”* and *pathological individualism*.

Conventional “wisdom” is the attitude that says, “It’ll never fly.” Then it goes on to say things like, “Only rich people can travel around the world first-class.” Or, “You have to have an M.B.A. to get a good job in business these days.” Or, “You can’t make a living in the arts unless you’re already famous.” Or, “You can’t make a successful business out of what you love.” *All true winners are people who have taken conventional “wisdom” as a sporting challenge, instead of a pronouncement of defeat.* They assume that its rules were made to be broken, so they don’t even stop to ask “Can it be done?” They just ask, “How?”

Answers to that question start turning up as soon as you suspend all rules of conventional “wisdom” and look at each problem with pure, playful creativity, as if it had never been seen on earth before. That’s brainstorming, and with its help you’ll discover that some of the things you thought you needed to reach your goal—the really tough ones, like a lot of money, or a Ph.D.—may not even be necessary. You can invent alternative routes that are not only quicker and more direct, but closer to your path and a lot more fun.

Brainstorming will give you a wealth of ideas for the steps to your goal. But if a page full of good ideas were enough, everyone who’s ever had a fit of inspiration—and that means everybody—would be rich and famous. So once

you've pitted your native wit against conventional "wisdom," you will have to do the second thing enterprising people have always done: get help.

If this book has one single most important purpose, it is to mount a full-scale attack on the most destructive piece of conventional "wisdom" there is: "You've got to make it on your own." Nobody can. Nobody does. And yet we often hesitate to ask anyone for help, advice, or even instructions to the corner store for fear that it means we're "dependent." I know a grown woman, the mother of three children, who wanted to go back to college but couldn't sign up, because when she got to the campus she didn't know which building the registration office was in! She wouldn't ask anyone, because she thought she should know how by herself and was afraid she'd look like a fool.

That's what I call *pathological individualism*. I don't mean the marvelous *individuality* that makes each of us unique. I mean the cultural disease of extreme "self-reliance" that has cut us off from the most potent resource we have for achieving our goals: each other. The best ideas, the ones that really work magic, are the ones that draw on the knowledge, skills, and contacts of other people. I'm going to show you how you can mobilize your human resources to help you meet your goal. I call the technique "barn-raising," after the way people in pioneer communities pitched in to get each other's barns built in a day. A barn-raising is the closest thing I know to a magic wand. It turns the most "ordinary" group of people—friends, family members, co-workers, even strangers—into a gold mine of helping hands and minds.

Brainstorming and barn-raising together will give you the steps to your goal—steps you can start taking *tomorrow*. But you also need a way of organizing those steps into a map of your path you can actually follow. As you work through Chapters 6 and 7, you will learn to draw a special kind of visual plan called a *flow chart*—the heart of your Portable Success Support System. It is the tool that turns the dream in your head into a *structure outside yourself* that will guide your actions step by step and keep you on the track. Once that's been done, it takes only one more step to bring you to the threshold of action: setting *target dates* and putting your plan into a *time frame*. We'll be doing that in Chapter 8.

Brainstorming

You need three items before you're ready to start brainstorming: a pad of paper, a couple of pencils—and a problem.

Right now the problems on your list are probably stated in a form something like this: "I can't because I don't have *X*." For instance, Jill, 30, wants to move up to a management position in the accounting firm where she's worked as a secretary for four years. But she can't see any way to take that step without going back to school and getting an M.B.A.—which would take another two years she doesn't want to wait and \$8,000 she hasn't got. Alan, a 28-year-old Chicago editor, wants to start his own small publishing firm, but he doesn't have the capital. Joyce, a 43-year-old mother, wants a paying job as a fund-raiser, but she has no previous job credits to put on her resume—just one experience as a volunteer.

Credentials, experience, and money are among the most common obstacles conventional "wisdom" places in our paths—and often enough, when we look at the world around us, conventional "wisdom" just seems like common sense. But now that we've gotten the negativity out in Hard Times, you're ready to look at each of those obstacles in a more positive light: as a challenge to your ingenuity. And that change in attitude is as simple as a change in grammar.

"I can't because I don't have *X*" is a dead end. Your brain can't work with it. To turn it into a form your brain just loves to work with, take that one flat statement and turn it into a pair of leading questions:

1. How can I get it without *X*?
2. How can I get *X*?

Either of those questions can be the takeoff point for brainstorming. But it's almost always a good idea to start with question No. 1. Because the point isn't just to get to your goal by any means at all. It's to get you there by the quickest, most direct, most personalized route—one that will get some of the rewards of your goal into your life right away. When we talked about choosing a first target in terms of your touchstone, I told you that I want you to start doing what you love tomorrow—not five years from now, when you've made a pile of money or finished your Ph.D. This is the operative principle to keep in mind throughout your planning. Never take the long road if you can find a shorter one that will get you to the same place.

In the language of goals, this means that the only time to go straight into brainstorming with question No. 2—"How can I get *X*?"—is: one, if you're 150 percent sure that *X* is the only way to your goal (there's really no alternative to medical school if you want to become a doctor); or two, if *X* itself is something you love for its own sake, like wealth or scholarship or professional standing. Then it's not really an obstacle at all—it's one of your touchstones! With those two exceptions, never assume that conventional "wisdom" is correct until you've tried question No. 1.

For example, you may be depressingly certain that you have to have an M.B.A. to get a good job in business . . . or an M.S.W. or Ph.D. to do responsible therapy . . . or an M.A. in education to teach. In our ever more credential-happy society, there appear to be fewer and fewer doors you can walk through without a piece of paper, which will cost you thousands of dollars and thousands of hours. Well, I'll tell you something. At a conservative estimate, 75 percent of the conventional "wisdom" about credentials is pure gobbledygook.

In case you didn't know it, school is a big business. It's also a safe haven for those of us who just love to be in rehearsal. We can go to school until we're ready, and then go to school some more until we're *really* ready, instead of jumping in the water and starting to swim. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against higher education. I think everybody should go to college and study art and philosophy as an end in itself—like sending your mind to summer camp. But if you are heading for a specific goal and you're considering school as a means to that end, check your situation out carefully.

Is a degree an integral part of what you want to do—like becoming a research scientist or a history professor? Or is it an absolute necessity to get where you want to go? If you're in any doubt about this second question, do a little role-model research on the careers of the most interesting people in your field. Did the journalists you admire most go to journalism school? (Not likely.) Did all the male executives in your office or your business get hired with M.B.A.'s? (Ask around discreetly and remember that nothing that's not required of a man can now be legally required of a woman.) Does your favorite poet or painter have a Master's in Fine Arts? If the answer is "no," the chances are excellent that you don't need a piece of paper to do what you want to do, either, and that you shouldn't waste your time and money getting one. Instead, grab yourself a plain old piece of blank paper and ask yourself, "How can I get it without *X*?" —*X* being more school.

Just this once, I'm going to give you some ideas to get the juices flowing. There are ways that I and people I know have achieved our goals outside the academy, and they all revolve around the idea that the best, directest, most exciting way to learn most things is by doing them.

CREATIVE HOOKY, OR: FIVE WAYS TO LEARN—AND EARN—BY STAYING OUT OF SCHOOL

1. Nerve. Otherwise known as talking your way through a door with nothing going for you but talent, cheek, and desperation. If you know what you'd be good at, there's nothing lost—and often much to gain—by just walking into wherever you want to be and presenting yourself. It's a little hard on the nerves, but you'll get plenty of help with that in the last section of this book.

This is the way my own career got started. When I came to New York I had a B.A. in anthropology. Now there is nothing on earth more useless for getting a job than anthropology. You find me an ad that says "Wanted: B.A. in anthropology." I'd like to see it. I was what you might call highly unemployable. But I had to find a job that would feed my kids, and I was naive enough to hope for one that wouldn't starve my soul. I had the intuitive feeling that I would be good at working with people. So I screwed up my small supply of courage and answered one of those ads that said "Experience Preferred." I noticed that it didn't say "Required," and anyway I figured that the experience of walking around on earth for thirty years ought to count for something. The job was as a counselor in a drug program, and I talked my

way into it—probably because they needed manpower as badly as I needed the job.

I walked in there at nine the first morning with my knees shaking. By 5:00 P.M. I knew I hadn't been wrong. I might be green, but I was in my element. From there, one thing led to another. While I was still working at that job, I started group therapy. Within a year I had become an assistant-trainee of the head therapist. And then four of us split off from him and started Group Laboratories. Over the next eleven years I made a tidy living doing group and individual counseling; I was a consultant at three medical schools, teaching their psychiatrists and psychologists; and I got invited to speak and give creativity workshops all over the country. None of this happened because I had a piece of paper. It happened because I found the right swimming pool, squeezed my eyes shut, and jumped in. To this day, I have never gotten one unit of academic credit over the 108 units required for that B.A. in anthropology.

2. *Volunteering.* In a world of professionalism, where money is the measure of seriousness, volunteering has gotten something of a bad name. It's supposed to be amateurish, dilettantish, the sort of half-committed playing-at-work that society matrons do on alternate Tuesdays. I want to set the record straight right now. Volunteer work is one of the best ways there is to get your feet wet and gain experience in a new field—whether it's in a zoo, a hospital, a school, a museum, a neighborhood newspaper, a political campaign office, or a family farm. You don't need credentials or prior experience. You don't have to pay them a cent for your training. But what's best is that volunteering gets you started doing what you love right away, even if it's only once a week. Or—if you're trying out a tentative goal—it lets you get the living feel of a profession before you commit yourself to full-time work or training. And it equips you with experience, contacts, and references that will be useful if and when you do decide to make that commitment.

Volunteer work is the great cure for the classic vicious cycle, "Can't get experience without a job; can't get a job without experience." If you think unpaid experience doesn't count on a resume, think again. If Joyce has done volunteer fund-raising while her kids were in school, then she's been a fund-raiser—and she should neither hide nor overemphasize the "volunteer" part when she applies for a paying job. *Experience is experience.* If you're like 22-year-old Jack, who spent a year of Saturdays and one summer vacation

working with handicapped kids and had letters of reference to show for it, then you've got something at least as valuable to offer as an M.A. fresh from the books.

True, the M.A. may get paid a higher starting salary than you do—if she or he gets hired. On the other hand, you may get hired where an M.A. may not! Jack did. With a B.A. in English, he is now working as a resident counselor at a school for special children. Pieces of paper come a dime a dozen these days. People who've cared enough to get firsthand experience aren't. If the time comes when Jack decides he does want that piece of paper, his track record will make him a first-rank candidate for graduate school admission and financial aid.

Three years ago, Diane was a 24-year-old secretary with a B.A. in nothing special. Her secret dream was to be a city planner. She was totally unqualified; all she had going for her was a passionate love for New York City. She loved to walk around and savor the flavors of different neighborhoods, and she wished everyone could see and appreciate the city the way she did. But that special quality of vision wasn't going to get her into graduate school, and in any case, she couldn't afford to quit her job and study full-time. Even night-school classes were beyond her pocketbook. For the clincher, New York City happened to be going broke just then, and the city planning department was firing people, not hiring them.

That's a pretty staggering list of obstacles. Nonetheless, today Diane has an M.A. in city planning and a high-paying job with a major corporation. She works for the relocation office, introducing recently transferred executives and their families to the resources and delights of their new home. How did she do it?

In a brainstorming session, Diane came up with something she could do right away, and for free: take part in local planning-board meetings. She was so outspoken and enthusiastic in those meetings that within a few months everyone from block association leaders to city councilmen was calling her for ideas and advice. By the time she felt ready to apply for school, she knew most of the people who really make things happen in the city, and they all wrote her recommendations. She was awarded a full-tuition scholarship to Hunter College!

Diane's boyfriend was so thrilled for her that he offered to pay her rent so she could quit her job. But after one semester, she was hired into a teaching assistantship that paid her way. Diane was now not only studying *and* teaching city planning—she was already *doing* it every week on those local committees. And by the time she finished her Master's, her contacts and reputation were so widespread that she was offered a job in the first corporation she walked into.

That's how you take what you love most in the world and turn it into a career. Diane isn't "exceptional." She made a hit with local pols, professors, and potential employers simply because she was in her element. Her energy and imagination were irresistible, and yours will be too as soon as you're on your path. Volunteering is one of the best ways to get out there *now*.

3. The Sorcerer's Apprentice. The most ancient and natural way to acquire skills and knowledge is by hanging out with someone who's got them—watching, asking, helping. Before schools were invented, doctors, lawyers, and great painters all learned their trades this way. Psychoanalysts and carpenters still do. It's how I learned to be a therapist. There's an element of apprenticeship in any good education—but in many fields you can set up an apprenticeship for yourself.

My feeling is that there's hardly a person on this planet you couldn't walk up to and say, "I've followed your work for a long time, and I'd really like to learn from you. I won't cause you any trouble. I'll empty your wastebaskets, I'll clean up your workshop, I'll carry your gear. I just want to be near your mind." It's a rare curmudgeon who wouldn't be flattered and receptive. Most highly accomplished people want to share what they know with other eager minds. Seriousness of interest and a willingness to help out are the only real qualifications. A young potter named Juan Hamilton has become the assistant and close companion of the great painter Georgia O'Keefe. Agnes Nixon, reigning queen of the soaps and creator of (among others) "All My Children" and "Another World," got her start sharpening pencils for Irna Phillips, who pioneered the soap opera form with classics like "Love of Life" and "Guiding Light." Young writers send their work for criticism to established writers they admire, and sometimes a close mentor-protégé relationship develops.

There are formal programs that have been set up to connect willing "masters" with would-be apprentices. The architect Paolo Soleri always has

a staff of young paying guests who help him cast wind bells and build his “arcologies,” or experimental desert cities. Writer May Sarton and others took part in a Union Graduate School program in which they acted as advisors for independent student projects. (For further information about apprenticeships see the “Resources” appendix at the end of this book.)

But you don’t need a formal program to put you in touch with someone whose work you love. You don’t even have to go in cold with a letter that may or may not be answered. In the next chapter you’ll learn how you can get an introduction to just about anyone on earth you want to meet.

4. Starting from Scratch: The Independent Alternative. Another way to start out on your path without a degree is simply to sit down, draw up a plan for a mime class, political seminar, walking tour, art-therapy group, or editing service, and put ads in your local paper. That’s the wonderful thing about doing what you love: you can do it wherever you are, because your resources are really inside yourself. All you need is talent, personal experience, love—and a carefully worked-out idea, or *program design*. How do you think *Weight Watchers* got started? Jean Nidetch wasn’t a doctor or a nutritionist. She was a lady who wanted to be thin. She designed a package for other people like herself and turned it into a multimillion dollar business.

Whether what you want to be rich and nationally known or just to hold a weekly discussion group in your living room, remember that the key to survival and success for any independent program is *an angle*. What you’ve got to do is find and fill a specific need that nobody else has thought of filling. That’s what Jean Nidetch did. That’s what I’ve done with Success Teams. A therapist I know designed a series of seminars called “Who Takes Care of the Caretakers?” for therapists, counselors—and mothers! Two of the most successful small bookstores I know specialize in children’s books and murder mysteries. Jake, a marine biology freak who didn’t want to go to grad school, started a seaside nature museum for kids and got a grant from his city.

Just starting from scratch, you can develop involvement, competence, and authority in your field without one extra day of school. That’s how it worked out for me. But once again, if you decide to go to school later on, you’ll go in with two great advantages: a track record and hands-on experience.

5. *The Generalist/Popularizer*. I wish I could think of a better name for this one—maybe “the go-between.” It’s a strategy for anyone who’s fascinated by the poetry of a technical field but hasn’t got the knack or the patience for technical training.

Many professional people can use help communicating their ideas to the public. They’re specialists in physics or nutrition or international law, not in the graceful use of the English language. And sometimes they’re even too specialized to talk to each other. If you can write, or even just organize ideas, you can get up to your ears in any field without a degree. I know a man who spent ten years putting together the first textbook to coordinate psychology with brain physiology. Until he came along, the mind-and-behavior people had barely been speaking to the brain people, and vice versa. And I know a woman who got a large foundation grant to pull together all the far-flung branches of research on the learning disability called dyslexia. Her only qualification was that she was dyslexic herself, and cared desperately about finding a solution. A 20-year-old college English major who wanted to be a member of the first space colony decided to start by doing magazine interviews with scientists like Carl Sagan and Gerard O’Neill. A housewife interested in nutrition developed a newsletter for the food industry on federal labeling regulations. Writing, editing, interviewing, starting a specialized newsletter or a cable-TV talk show with a theme—any of these could be a wonderful way to gain admission to a world you love without the expensive ticket of a Ph.D.

Those are just a few examples of the kind of direct, ingenious route to your goal you can dream up if you take conventional “wisdom” as a challenge instead of a finality. We’ve been talking about credentials and schooling, but the same goes for any obstacle that looms large on your Problems List. I can’t brainstorm every kind of goal and problem for you, or this book would go on for two thousand pages. But I don’t have to. You have the prime source of all the ideas you’ll ever need right between your ears. All you need is a tool for getting them out and putting them into organized form.

BRAINSTORMING TECHNIQUE

The brainstorming technique I’m about to teach you is a two-stage process. The first stage will be familiar to you from Chapter 5. You suspend reality and bat the problem around from here to the land of Oz, accepting every idea

with uncritical delight, until you've come up with some really fresh thinking. I call Stage 1 "Woolgathering," and the wilder and woolier the better. This time you'll have the option of doing it either alone or with a little help from your friends—imaginary and real.

The second stage is something new. It brings the best of your windfall of wild ideas down to earth and puts them into practical, doable form. You could call Stage 2 "Bridge-building," because that's exactly what it does: bridges the Grand Canyon between dream and reality, inspiration and action.

As a working example, I'm going to take what is probably the single most universal and exasperating obstacle conventional "wisdom" places in our paths. A woman in one of my seminars put it succinctly: "I just see a mountain in front of me, and its name is Money."

Now, money is a very peculiar substance. It doesn't behave according to the laws of physics. Any amount you *don't* have—whether it's \$5,000 or \$500,000—will appear to be a mountain. Almost any amount you do have will not appear to be enough to pay next month's bills! Money often seems to be an emotional substance—the very incarnation of "I can't." So, just to take a properly defiant attitude toward this obstacle of obstacles, let's start with a really big mountain—a million dollars. It will be a good warm-up exercise for your own brainstorming, because if you can stretch your mind around this one, your own money problem isn't going to give you too much trouble no matter how big it is.

Just suppose your goal happened to be to sail around the world on your own yacht. That would be a pretty far-fetched fantasy for most of us, and a natural item on your Problems List might be, "Only millionaires can afford yachts." ("I can't because I don't have *X*—I'm not rich.") So your question No. 1 would be, "How can I get a yacht (or access to one that would satisfy me) without a million dollars?" And question No. 2 would be: "How can I get a million dollars?"

Now, should you go into brainstorming with question No. 1 or question No. 2? That depends on only one thing: the *touchstone* hidden in your goal. I see three possible touchstones here:

1. Being rich for rich's sake
2. Owning your own yacht
3. Sailing around the world in style

Only if actually being rich is your touchstone should you start your brainstorming on Question No. 2!

I'm not saying you wouldn't like to be rich, mind you. Who wouldn't? But if what you're saying is, "If only I were rich, I could do this, and this, and that"—if, in other words, you want to be rich as a *means to the end* of doing what you really love—it's a much better idea just to go ahead and do it. Once you're in action, you'll have so much energy and imagination that you'll turn up one hundred ways to get rich by doing what you love—if you still care. (You may not, once you've found out that you don't need lots of money to live your good life.) But if you decide you've got to get rich first, it's a good bet you won't get rich—and you won't get what you want, either.

Obviously, a million dollars can be made. Plenty of "ordinary geniuses" like you and me have done it, and you can use brainstorming to figure out a way. But nontouchstone dreams, "means-to-an-end" dreams, have a funny way of never coming true. That's because they don't tap into the one real power source you've got: your heart's desire. People who really want to make money *make* it, because making money turns them on. The rest of us just let it turn us off to what we do care about.* But we don't have to. Human ingenuity invented money in the first place. Human ingenuity can find a way around it.

So let's assume in our hypothetical example that your touchstone is either "owning your own yacht" or "sailing around the world in style." We'll start with Question No. 1, and see how you could get that goal for very much less than a million dollars.

* Very often, we also let it shelter us when we're scared. Being poor is one of the best excuses not to go for your dreams. It gets you much more sympathy than being fat. Nobody knows how to argue with poverty. We're all much too bamboozled by money in this society.

STAGE 1: WOOLGATHERING

The different brainstorming techniques differ only at this stage in how you get your ideas, not in what you do with them once you've got them. There are three different ways to do "Woolgathering."

Brainstorming alone

Sit down with pencil and paper in a quiet place, where you can daydream undistracted. Across the top of the first sheet of paper, write the problem—for example, "How to get a yacht/sail around the world in style without \$1,000,000?"

Now start writing down every idea that pops into your head, and I mean *every* idea. Don't rule out anything, no matter how far-fetched or frivolous it seems. If you wanted a yacht, "Go down to the boat basin at night and steal one" would be just fine. At this stage, don't edit or judge your ideas. It could inhibit your imagination, and you might miss a good one. Take as long as you like; keep going till you run dry.

If you have trouble shaking off the habitual limitations on your thoughts, first check and see whether a little Hard Times is called for. Discouragement or apprehension may be weighing you down. If not—and you just seem to need a spur to fresh thinking—there's a second technique for brainstorming alone that can really turn your mind loose.

Role-play brainstorming

In the "Seeing Yourself as Others See You" exercise in Chapter 4, you discovered that playing the part of another person can open up unsuspected stores of knowledge in your own brain. Besides being great fun, this is one of the best ways in the world to get fresh ideas.

Your everyday identity is itself a role you've been cast in by time and place and culture. It doesn't express your total human potential. You were born with the same basic equipment in your head as a Stone Age hunter, an eighteenth-century duchess, a Mississippi riverboat gambler, or a Japanese

monk. You have the capacity to assume any of those points of view in imagination—and it's like looking at the world with new eyes.

You can use your imaginary “ideal family” as a cast of characters for role-play brainstorming, or you can try playing the roles of some diverse and far-out characters, like these:

1. an old mule driver
2. the queen of a foreign country
3. a mad genius
4. a Martian
5. a fool
6. the president of a giant corporation
7. a Samoan fisherman (Eskimo hunter, Watusi warrior, etc.)
8. an engineer who builds bridges in the Andes
9. a Texas oilman
10. a 5-year-old girl

To get into any role, just close your eyes and spend few moments imagining yourself into the life and mind and environment of that character. Then look at your problem from his or her point of view and write down whatever solutions come to mind.

For example:

Albert Einstein: “Intelligent conversation is a very rare commodity. Perhaps there is someone who owns a yacht who would simply like to have you on board for stimulating company. Or perhaps there is something you can teach—about the stars, or the Greek Islands, or the Galapagos. What about a floating university or seminar? Surely someone would provide the boat and the funds for that.”

Bette Davis: “Hell, I’d stow away and then charm them into letting me stay on board.”

Samoan fisherman: “Whenever we need something, we make it ourselves. Of course, a dugout canoe is easier to build than one of your strange and foolish boats. I know, because they get wrecked on our coral reef from time to time. You could have one of those if you want. They’re no use to us. You’d have to do some patching up, though.”

You get the idea.

Role-play brainstorming will come to your rescue when you get stuck for ideas alone. But if you can get a bunch of *real* people to toss ideas around with you, all the better! Brainstorming is always done in groups in business, industry, and creativity workshops, and for a good reason: each mind brings a different angle of vision to bear on the same problem. You've probably had the experience of effortlessly solving a dilemma for a friend who was totally blocked on it—or having a friend to do that for you. That effect will be multiplied if you can get four or five people to pitch in. Group brainstorming has the added advantage of being a natural takeoff point for a barn-raising, as you'll see a little later on.

Brainstorming with a group

The people you call in to brainstorm don't need to know the first thing about the area you've got the problem in. In fact, the less they know the better! On a brainstorming team, you want inexperienced people, because the experts in any field only know what *can't* be done. Naive people come up with the best ideas in the world. That means children, too. Kids above the age of four are astonishingly creative, because they have no restrictions on their thinking at all. When 6-year-olds were asked to design a vehicle that could drive over rough terrain with big ditches in it, they reinvented the tank.

Older people are terrific too. They've known a world without television or jet planes or superplastics, and their minds are often slower, deeper, more resourceful. But anyone can play: your husband, your wife, your mother, your friends, the TV repairman. And they'll love it. Playing with ideas is the world's best party game. You can invite people over, serve wine and cheese and make an evening of it.

The one rule you must be sure to establish is that at this stage of the game there are no rules. No holds barred—the weirdest idea is a welcome guest. Once you've put the problem on the table, your job is to sit there with your pencil and write every idea down. Don't let one of them escape. It might be the one you are looking for.

After a good brainstorming session of any of these three kinds, your list of ideas might look something like this:

OWN YACHT

1. steal a yacht
2. marry somebody who has a yacht
3. win a yacht in a contest
4. win a yacht in a poker game
5. buy shares in a yacht with a group of people
6. get an old hulk and fix it up

SAIL AROUND THE WORLD

7. stow away
8. make friends with somebody who has a yacht and get invited aboard as a guest
9. rent a yacht
10. trade the use of a yacht for something I have (living loft, country cabin, etc.)
11. get hired on a yacht as a:
 - captain
 - engineer
 - crew member
 - waiter/waitress
 - bartender
 - gourmet cook
 - masseur/masseuse
 - companion to elderly or handicapped person
 - tutor to young children
 - lifeguard/swimming teacher
 - entertainer—musician, magician, singer, comedian, court jester, etc., depending on your talents and on what you're willing to do (Everyone—but everyone—has something to offer: a sense of humor, a great recipe for chocolate cake. . . .)
12. design a private educational tour for rich people
13. design a promotional voyage for a boat company
14. design an around-the-world goodwill mission for ecology or peace or an end to hunger
15. design a scientific expedition or “floating seminar”: for instance, retrace the voyage of Darwin's *Beagle* for a travel agency or group

If it really was your heart's desire to sail around the world on a yacht, somewhere on this list you would find an idea that appealed to you—and one you could do without becoming a millionaire first. Of course, at this point you'd still have no idea how you were going to “get an old hulk and fix it up,” or “retrace the voyage of Darwin's *Beagle*.” Those ideas look almost as far-fetched as the original million dollars! But it's going to be the whole

purpose of Stage 2 brainstorming to provide answers to the question: “How?” So don’t worry if the most intriguing ideas on your Stage 1 list still look pretty far out. Just take it from me: if you really want it, it can be done. For instance, before you dismiss my yacht example as fairy-tale stuff, take a look at this:

“*Sofia*, an 89-foot, three-masted schooner and floating cooperative, is looking for crew members. Since being restored from very battered condition in 1969 . . . Sofia has hauled cargo in the Caribbean, fished in New Zealand, sunk in the Galapagos, and in nine years, sailed around the world. She's had 50 or 60 crew members, about ten at a time . . . Past members have usually put \$1,500-\$3,500 into the boat and become part owners.”

CoEvolution Quarterly, Spring 1978

I found that clipping *after* I’d made up the example . . . and at about the same time, there was a news story on TV about a mysterious series of yacht hijackings! While I don’t recommend piracy on the high seas, it does go to show that no idea is impossible.

The sample list of ideas above also shows you some of the general types of strategies you can devise for getting around the money obstacle—or drastically reducing its size:

1. There are plenty of ways to get things, even big things, without buying them:

- a. beg
- b. borrow
- c. steal
- d. trade
- e. win
- f. rent
- g. make

2. Sell yourself. Swap something you can do—gardening, magic, talking with old people or kids, telling jokes—for free admission to a world you want into. Two friends of mine longed to live in the country, but could see no way they’d ever have enough money to buy or rent the kind of place they dreamed of. So they advertised their services as caretakers—and are now living year round on a famous rock singer’s farm!

3. Even if money is required for your project, it doesn't have to be your money. Be the idea man or woman. Design a package and sell it to somebody who is a millionaire.

4. Share the cost of your dream with people you'd like to share your dream with. Basia, a textile designer in her 30s, confessed that she harbored a hopeless million-dollar fantasy of her own: to start an artists' community in her own villa in the south of France. Once I got her to drop her assumption that it was impossible, brainstorming quickly produced a solution: get together with several like-minded friends and share the rental of a villa. (Cost to each: about \$2,000.)

See? Being poor is no excuse not to go for your dreams, no matter how big they are.

TRANSITION: EDITING YOUR LIST

OK. You've got a list of ideas for "How to get my goal without X " (or "How to get X "). You wrote down every idea that came along, so some of them are strictly whimsical. Some of them are workable ways of getting to your goal, but not things you think you'd particularly like to do. Then there will be a few ideas that look promising. I don't mean the most "possible" ones, I mean the ones that make your heart beat faster. They may still look pretty pie-in-the-sky. Your next job is to pick the one or two best ideas and then start bringing them down to earth.

Let's take a look at how a real-life person did it.

Mary, 27, the divorced mother of a 2-year-old daughter, had decided her first target was to go to medical school. Mary had been a premed major in college and had gotten good grades, but then she had fallen in love with a cellist who spent a good part of the year traveling with a professional string quartet. Since music was Mary's other great love, she had made the difficult decision to marry her musician and travel with him instead of going on in medicine. When the marriage didn't work (her husband fell in love with the new second violinist), she moved back home to her upstate New York town, where her married sister could take care of her daughter while she worked for an electronics company.

Mary felt that she'd chosen the wrong fork in the road and that, with no money and a small child to support, it was too late to go back. But she obviously still wanted very much to be a doctor! I urged her to make entering medical school her first target, and to put all the reasons for discouragement on a PROBLEMS list. They were formidable:

1. no money
2. my college science is very rusty
3. older women and mothers have trouble getting into med school
4. child care (if I have to leave this area)

I told Mary to take those problems through brainstorming one at a time. She picked “money” to work on first, because she was going to need money for everything: premed refresher courses, tuition, food, rent, child care. She did her brainstorming with her sister and a friend while their kids played under the dining room table. Her first list of ideas looked like this:

Problem: How to get through medical school without a dime of my own

1. get a scholarship
2. get a loan
3. win the New York State lottery
4. marry a rich man who will send me through school
5. join the Armed Forces and let them send me through school
6. get my story in the local papers and attract a wealthy patron
7. stand on the streets of New York City with a sign saying, SEND THIS MOTHER TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

That's how brainstorming often works. You think of all the staid, sensible, obvious ideas first, like scholarships and loans. Then come the “rescue fantasies”: someone is going to come riding along in a white Cadillac and carry you away, or appear mysteriously on your doorstep with a check for a million dollars. Being free to give those fantasies a legitimate place on your list brings liberating laughter—and only then do the really audacious, original ideas begin to flow.

In fact, they'll look *too* original. When Mary first glanced over her list, she said, “Maybe I can get a loan, but I'm afraid it won't cover living expenses. Ideas No. 3 and No. 4 are just silly. As for No. 5—*me*, join the Army? No way. I'd go nuts in a week. I kind of like No. 6, but frankly it doesn't seem to

have much chance of working, and besides, I've got too little nerve and too much pride to go begging. That really rules out No. 7."

Stop right there! When you reach this point with your list, *don't cross anything off*. Like Mary, you probably think you could throw out about nine-tenths of your ideas without further ado, but there are two very good reasons why you shouldn't do that yet. One is that even the craziest idea has something to give you before you abandon it. The other is that *pessimism about an idea's workability can masquerade as lack of interest in it*. And until you've probed a little deeper into each idea with the magic question "How?", you won't really know what the word "possible" means.

The first rule of transition brainstorming, either alone or in a group is: *Never throw out any idea* until you have asked three questions about it:

1. What is the useful element (or elements) in this idea? (You must find something of value in each one.)
2. How can I (we) get around the impractical elements of this idea? (In other words, instead of being reasons to junk the idea, any snags would become a miniproblems list calling for a new round of Stage 1 "Woolgathering.")
3. What further ideas does this idea suggest?

Let's see how Mary did it—and what surprises she turned up.

IDEA NO. 1: GET A SCHOLARSHIP

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Useful elements:</i> | No debts |
| 2. <i>Problems:</i> | a. must have super-good grades and test scores
b. I'm not sure there are scholarships to med school |
| <i>How to solve:</i> | a. go to night school and study like mad |

b. do some research on financial aid to med students

3. *Further ideas:*

Create a scholarship! Write to large corporations offering to let them do good for society and the cause of women and get great publicity by sending me through medical school!

Now that's an exciting idea, one that really set off fireworks in Mary's brain—and if she had just thrown out “Get a scholarship,” she would never have thought of it! Mary didn't know whether anything like it had ever been done before, and she had no idea how corporations would respond to her approach. But the very fact that you're bold enough to try something brand new can impress the right people. And the time certainly looked ripe to offer big companies favorable publicity for their enlightened attitude toward women. So Mary set this idea aside as a promising one and continued with her original list.

IDEA NO. 2: GET A LOAN

1. *Useful elements:*

standard procedure, channels exist

2. *Problems:*

a. good grades, as above
b. might not cover living expenses
c. years of debt

How to solve:

a. & b. same as above
c. unavoidable

3. *Further ideas:*

get a private loan, rather than an outright gift, from a wealthy individual (as in Idea No. 6 on list)

Ideas No. 3 and No. 4—winning the lottery and marrying a rich man—Mary recognized as outright “rescue fantasies,” which had done their job of uncorking her imagination, and which she wouldn’t really want if they *did* happen. She didn’t want luck *or* love to solve her problem—she wanted it to come from her own ability and deserving.

IDEA NO. 5: JOIN THE ARMED FORCES

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Useful elements:</i> | training free
living expenses provided |
| 2. <i>Problems:</i> | I'd hate it! |
| <i>How to solve:</i> | no way |
| 3. <i>Further Ideas:</i> | Is there some other organization that would train me in exchange for service? Peace Corps? Government? Foreign government? Australia? Investigate. |

IDEA NO. 6: FIND WEALTHY PERSON VIA LOCAL PAPERS

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Useful elements:</i> | appeals to local pride |
| 2. <i>Problems:</i> | a. unlikely to find a taker
b. feels like asking for charity |
| <i>How to solve:</i> | a. try and see
b. swallow pride—or decide I'm worth it |
| 3. <i>Further ideas:</i> | Do “create a scholarship” idea and get a newspaper article written about that—send clippings to corporations—& even to national magazines! |

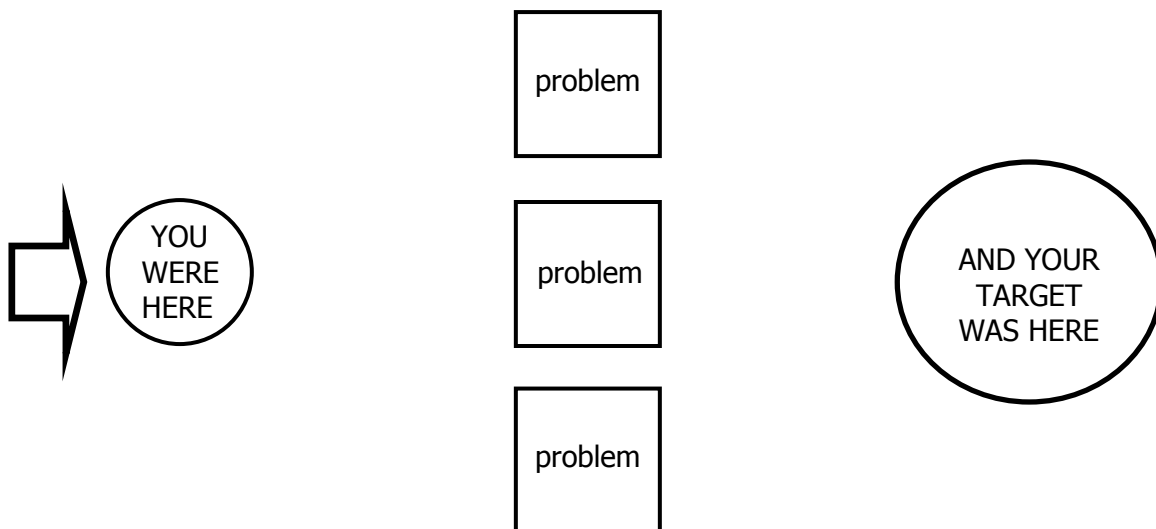
IDEA NO. 7: STAND ON STREET WITH SIGN . . .

This idea may sound outlandish, but Mary's sister, who gave her the idea, told her the true story of a young man who staked out a corner of Fifth Avenue in a sandwich board that said, “Send This Nice Jewish Boy to College.” He got enough money to go! (Of course, he had nerve—and an angle.) Mary had to admit it was enterprising and would have the advantage of not indebting her to one person, but it just wasn't her style. The further idea she got from it was, “Put an ad in Ms. and other magazines asking for \$1 contributions.”

When you reach this point, you're ready to go into Stage 2 brainstorming with the idea or ideas you like best. Mary chose the “Create a scholarship” idea. (She decided that she'd also investigate the more conventional sources of financial aid.)

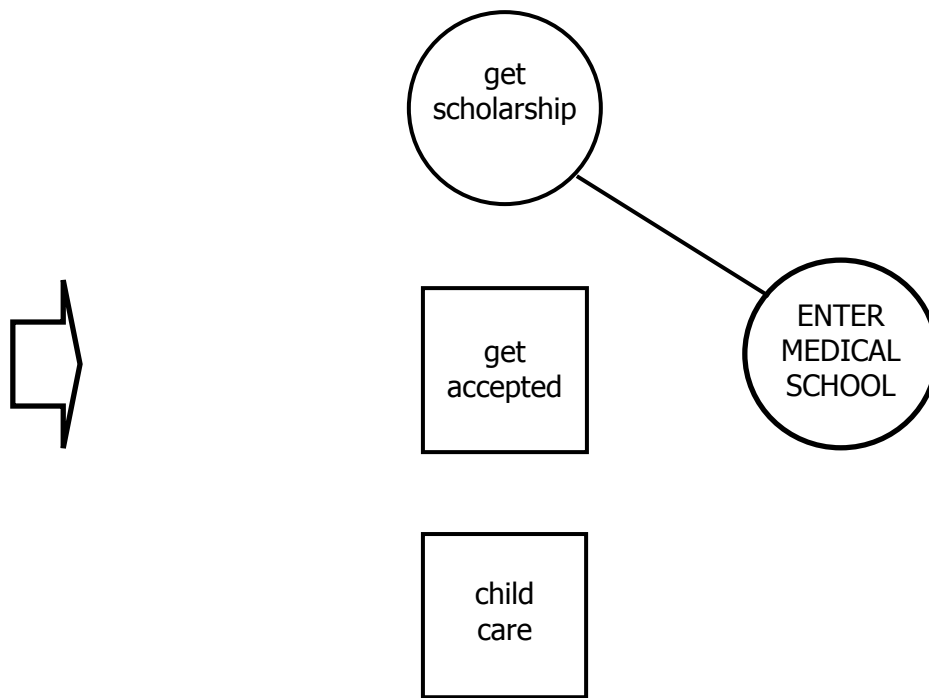
STAGE 2: BRIDGE BUILDING

Before you did any brainstorming at all, your situation looked like this:



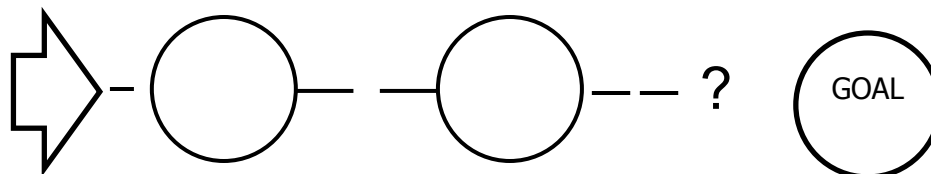
In Stage 1 brainstorming you transformed one of the problems into a *subgoal*: a specific way of getting one of the things you'll need for your

goal. In Mary’s example (her other problems, getting admitted to medical school and finding child care, can wait for now):



A subgoal is a first break in the wall of problems and the first link in your plan. *But it’s almost as far away as your goal itself.* Mary wanted to win a kind of scholarship that didn’t even exist yet except in her own imagination. You may have decided to get financial backing for your small business from an investor or “angel” you don’t know how to find . . . or to sell a screenplay you haven’t written yet . . . or to take an advanced painting class when you haven’t made so much as a sketch in twenty years. There’s still a big gap to get across before you reach that subgoal. What we’ve got to do now is build a solid bridge of actions over that gap, from the subgoal right to your door-step. You’ll be able to take your first step on that bridge *tomorrow*, confident that it will lead you step by step all the way to your goal.

There’s only one way to build that kind of bridge, and that’s the way you’re going to do it in Stage 2 brainstorming: *by planning backwards* from your goal. If you’ve ever tried for your dreams before and been frustrated, the chances are good that you started out like this:



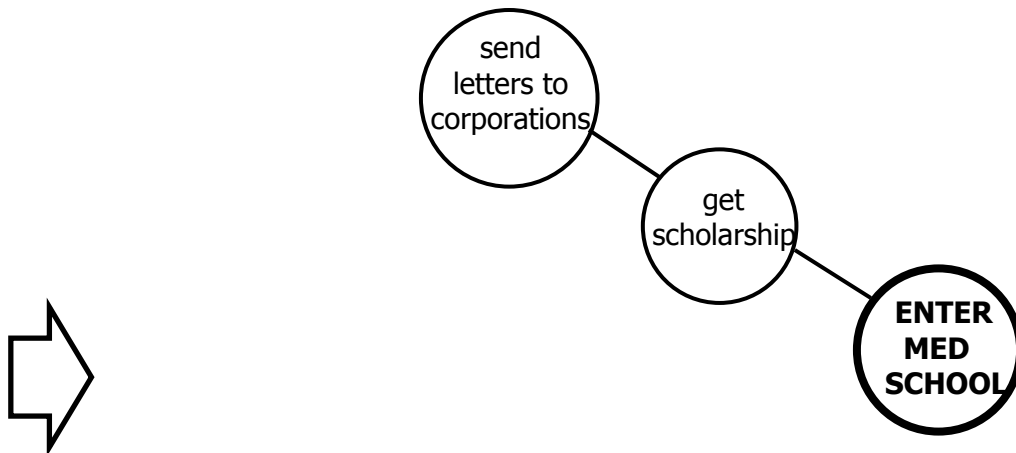
and then wondered why your best efforts petered out somewhere in the middle. You had energy and guts to spare, and even some excellent ideas. What went wrong?

There are three possibilities:

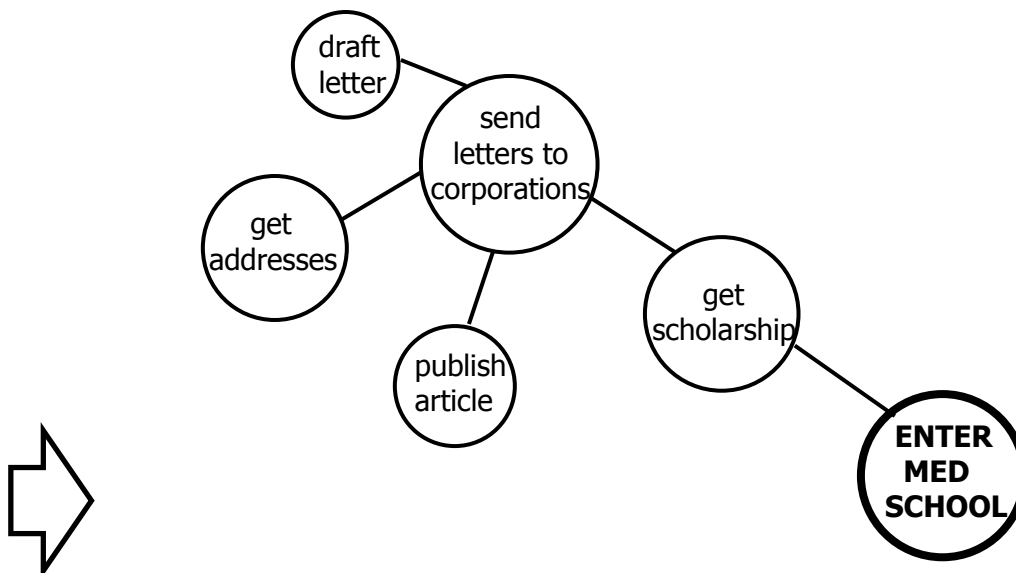
1. The steps you took were a waste of time because they were the wrong steps. They scattered your energy in fifteen directions instead of focusing it toward your goal.
2. Some of your steps may have been the right steps, but they seemed so small and insignificant compared to the size and distance of your goal that you couldn't see how they'd ever get you anywhere. So you gave up.
3. Your steps didn't come together right. You did the right things, but in the wrong order or at the wrong times. For instance, suppose you wanted to open a small bookstore. You went looking for a location, and found a perfect storefront at a reasonable rent. But you didn't have any money in the bank—and by the time you got the money together, the store had been rented. Or: you rented the store—and then it stood empty for two months, with money going down the drain, while you tried frantically to learn all you needed to know about the retail book business.

If that has happened to you, your basic mistake was thinking that just because *action* goes forward, from the present to the future, *planning* has to go forward too. It can't. Planning has got to go backwards from the distant future to tomorrow . . . from the intimidatingly huge to the reassuringly small . . . from the whole vision of your goal to its component parts, little things you can do one by one. "In reality, great deeds are made up of small, steady actions"—remember? But before you can put great deeds together in reality, you have to take them apart on paper to discover *what* small, steady actions, *in what order*, will really get you there. Here's how you do it.

Two questions are your tools for breaking down subgoals into the smaller and smaller steps that lead up to them. The first is, "Can I do this tomorrow?" If the answer is "No," the next question is, "OK, what would I have to get done first?" For instance, Mary's subgoal is to get a scholarship from a large corporation. Could she have that money in her hands tomorrow? Of course not. Well, what would she have to do first? She'd have to send letters to a whole bunch of corporations:



Can she mail those letters tomorrow? No. What would she have to do first? Draft a letter, and compile a list of promising corporations and their addresses. If she wants to use another idea she got out of her Stage 1 list—to have an article about the plan appear in the local paper and enclose clippings with her letter—she'll also have to arrange to get such an article published:



YOUR FLOW CHART

I'd like to stop for a moment and explain that this kind of visual framework for brainstorming—where you write the steps down in funny little circles, working from right to left—is called a *flow chart*. The one you will draw as

you do your Stage 2 brainstorming is probably the single most important item in your Portable Success Support System, because it will not only help you think—it's also going to help you *act*. When it's finished, it will be a detailed map of the path to your goal, showing you exactly what you have to get done at each stage of the game before you go on and do the next thing, and how the various “branches” of action have to come together.

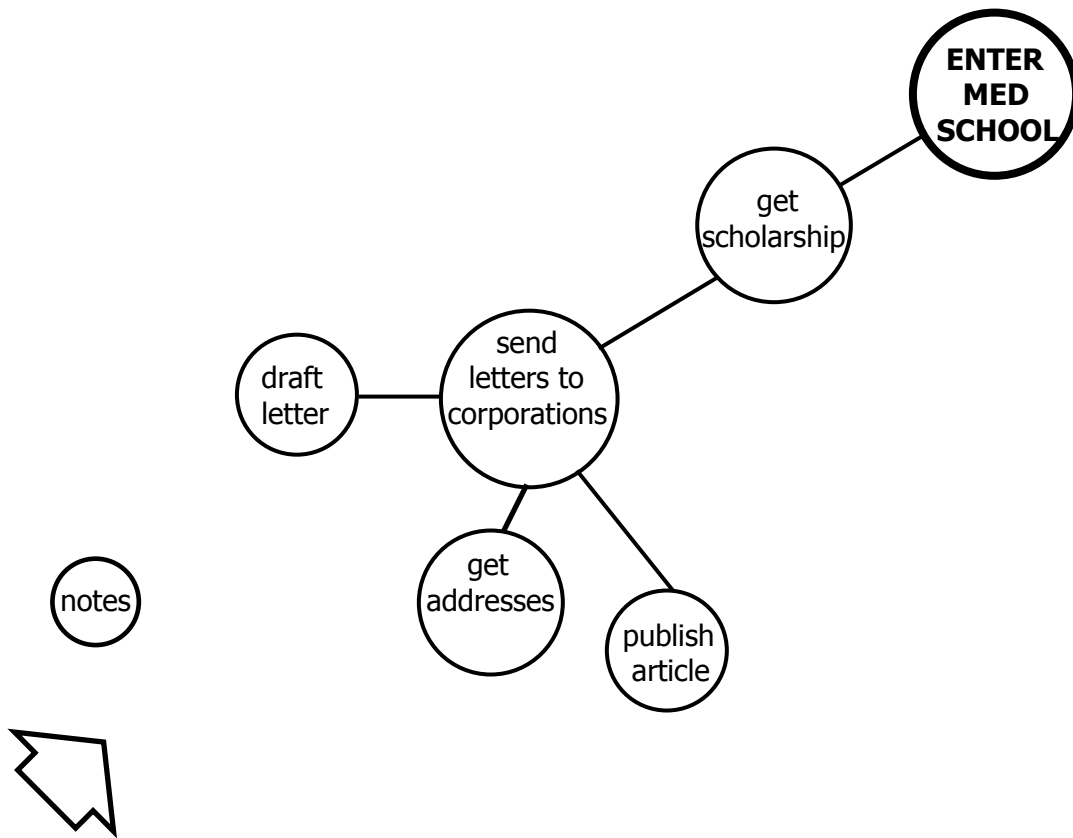
I borrowed flow charts from business and industry, where they are used in coordinating the complex processes of manufacturing and marketing. In the Ford factory in Detroit, for example, body, engine, and transmission must each be assembled separately from subassemblies, which in turn are put together out of thousands of smaller parts; still other parts and finishings have to be imported from abroad. Flow charts are drawn up to insure that everything comes together properly, so that on the target date for the new season, a finished Ford rolls sparkling off the assembly line.

I've been using flow charts for my own personal “business” for several years, and I've found them every bit as indispensable to my success and my sanity as they are to Ford's profits. Once you know how to use them, I promise you you'll work one out for every project you ever have in mind, right down to planning a dinner party! You won't know how you ever got along without them. Of course, the flow chart you draw of the path to your goal will be much more flexible than its cousins in big business: a highly individual design, subject to revision and change. It will look and behave more like a living organism than an assembly line. But it will serve exactly the same purpose as Ford's: to guide you in getting your goal together.

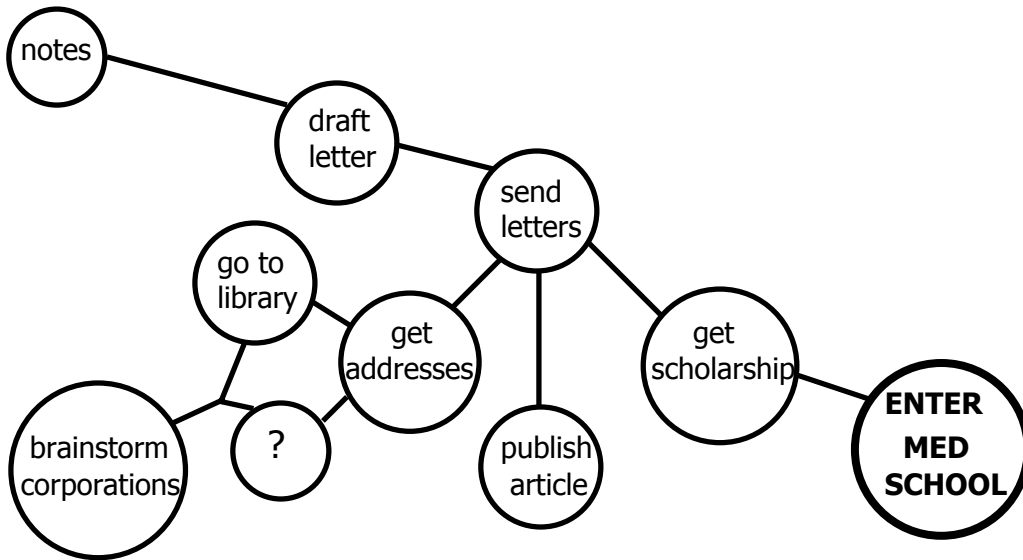
A flow chart isn't finished and ready to roll until it completely bridges the gap between the present moment and your goal. That means that each of its main branches has to be worked down to *first steps: things so small and manageable you could do them tomorrow*. So let's go back and see how Mary completed her flow chart, following her through the process step by step.

Mary has three steps to ask questions about now. One: Could she draft a letter to corporations tomorrow? Theoretically, yes, she could. But in reality, she'll want to be further along in the process of brushing up her knowledge and applying to medical schools first, And that's another major branch of her flow chart, one she hasn't even started working on yet. What she can do

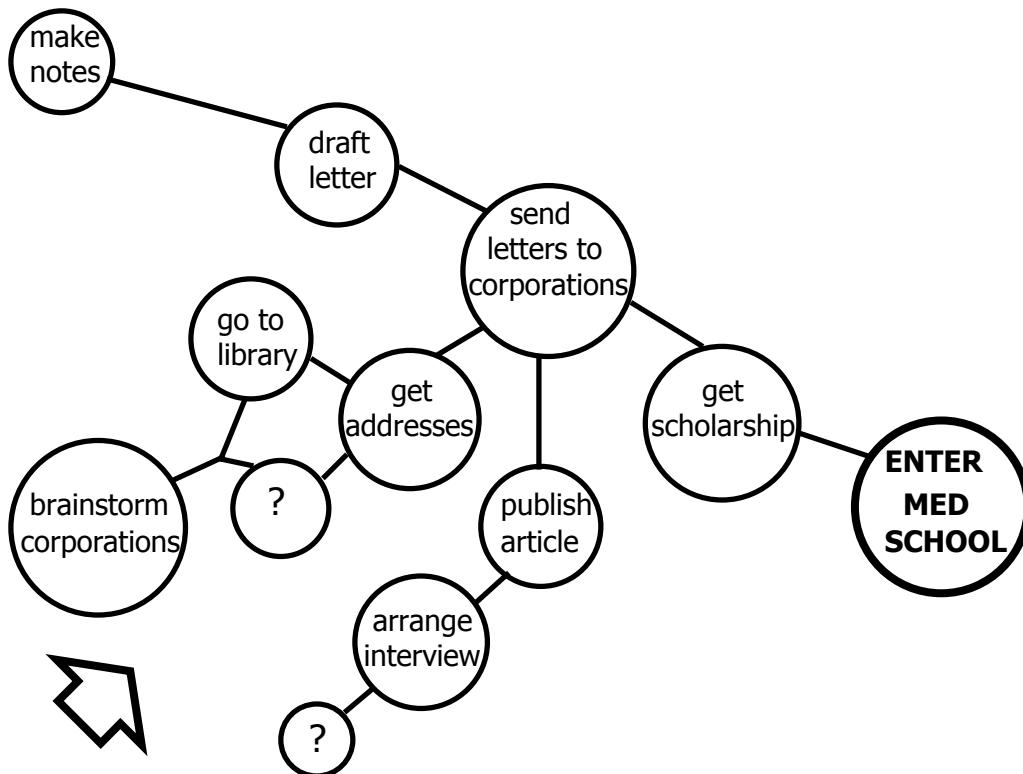
tomorrow, though, is make preliminary notes for that letter, as a way of getting her thinking started and making the idea real to her.



Two: Can she have a list of corporations' names and addresses tomorrow? No, she'll have to do some research first to figure out which corporations might be receptive and who would be the best person to contact in each one. Some of that research she can do in libraries, but some of it she'll have to do in another way, one we'll be talking about at length in the next chapter. (For now, I'll designate it in her flow chart by a question mark.) What Mary could do tomorrow is brainstorm on what kinds of corporations to approach: drug companies? Vitamin companies? Oil companies eager for a humanitarian image? (She felt there were ethical as well as practical questions to consider.)



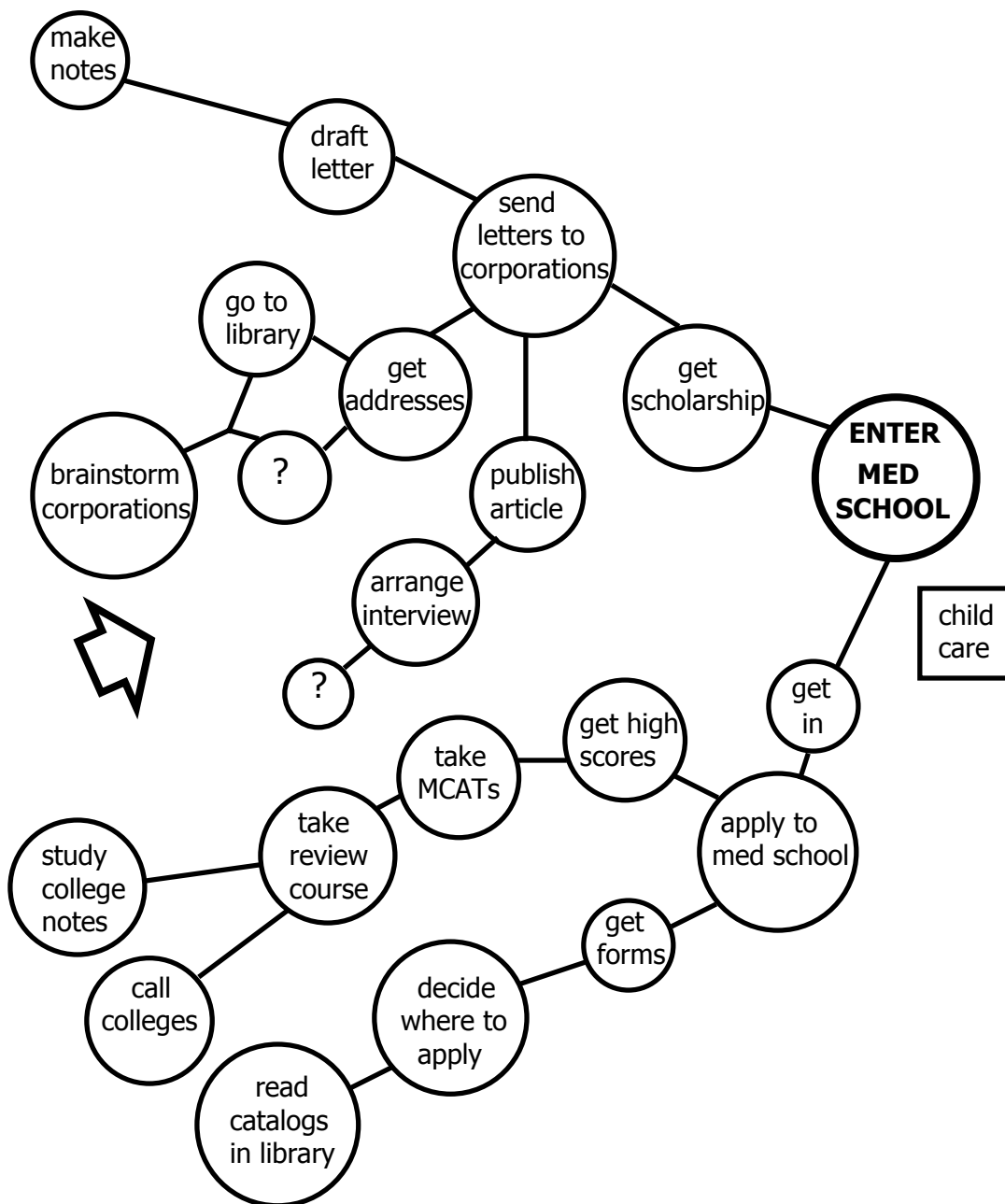
Three: Could Mary get an article about her plan into the local newspaper tomorrow? No, first she'd have to have a reporter come and interview her—and how on earth is she going to do that? Just calling up the paper and telling them about herself doesn't sound like such a hot idea. This is the place for another one of those question marks:



At this point, Mary has taken the “Money” branch of her flow chart as far as she can by herself. The next important branch for her to work on is “Get admitted to medical school”—and it has to be roughly coordinated with the “Money” branch so that the two come together in time. How Mary solves the child-care problem will depend on what medical school she goes to—if she stays in her own area her sister can help her out—so she can leave that problem for later.

I’m going to run quickly through the series of questions Mary asked herself, and show you how she incorporated the results into her flow chart—adding one more circle on the left for each answer she gave herself.

1. “Getting into medical school is a subgoal in its own right. Now, can I do it tomorrow?
“Hardly.
“What would I have to do first?
“Well, I’d have to apply to medical schools.”
2. “Can I apply tomorrow?
“No. There are two things I’d have to do first: get high scores on the MCATs (a general competence test for medical school admissions, like the college SAT’s), and send for application forms.”
- 3a. “Can I get high test scores tomorrow?
Obviously not. First I have to take the tests.”
- 3b. “Can I send for applications tomorrow?
Not until I’ve decided which schools to apply to.”
- 4a. “Can I take the MCATs tomorrow?
If I did, I’d flunk them! First I’d better take some kind of premed review course.”
- b. “Can I decide which schools to apply to tomorrow?
No, first I’ll have to go to the library and read catalogs. (I can find out about regular loans and scholarships at the same time.) And that I can start doing tomorrow.”
5. “Can I take a review course tomorrow?
No—first I’ve got to find out where there is one. I can do that tomorrow, by making phone calls to all the, local universities, college and medical schools. Another thing I can do is dig up my old college class notes and start reviewing them on my own.”



And that is an almost complete flow chart. It gave Mary five things she could start doing right away: make notes for a persuasive letter to corporations; brainstorm on what kinds of corporations to approach; make calls to ask about premed review courses; start reviewing her college science notes; and go to the library to check out med school catalogs. While she wasn't literally going to run out and do all those things the next day, they did give her plenty to do in the immediate future—small, manageable actions she

could see were directly connected to her goal. If she ever had any doubts on that score, all she had to do was look at her flow chart!

Stage 2 brainstorming brings even the most unreachable goal within reach by breaking big achievements down into human-sized tasks. There is *no* goal—I don't care if it's becoming President of the United States in twenty years—that doesn't break down to something as simple as going to the library or the newsstand or picking up the phone. Almost all goals begin with information-gathering, an act which requires no preparation and very little courage, yet sweeps you right up in the excitement and reality of your goal. Creative goals, like writing a novel or learning to paint, begin with a very modest qualitative and quantitative demand: “Write one *bad* page” or “Make 5 silly drawings of the cat.” (More on this in Chapter 9, “First Aid for Fear.”) Just because these first steps are so tiny, *you'll do them*. They'll get you up off your chair and out on your path where the prospect of a huge goal or subgoal would leave you sitting paralyzed.

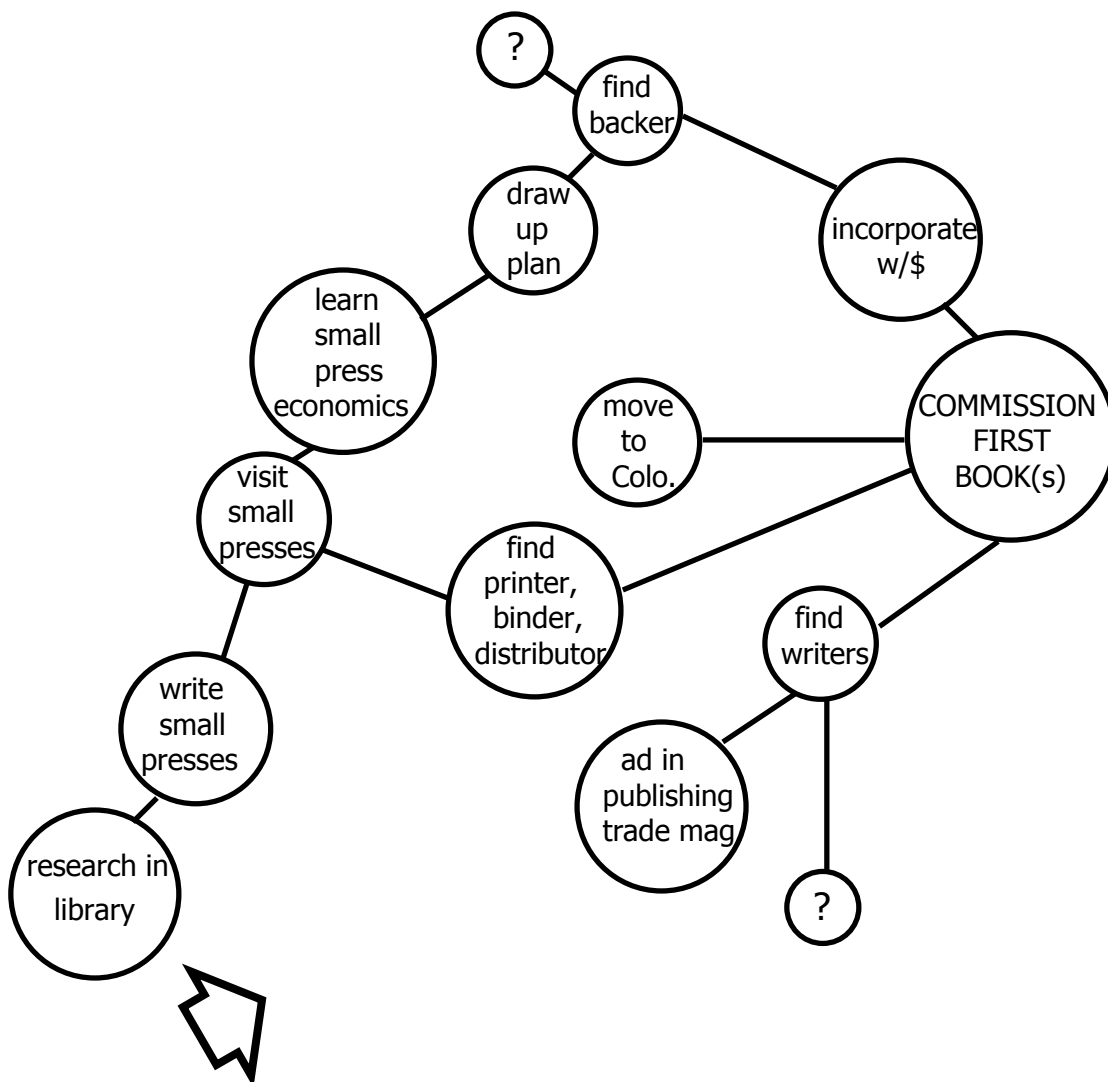
But your flow chart isn't finished, as I said before, until all its major branches are broken down to first steps. Like Mary's chart, yours is bound to have a few holes in it—places where you get stuck short of first steps and have to write in a question mark. You may run into that kind of dead end in a much more drastic way than Mary did.

For example, Jeannette was a \$150-a-week typist whose real passion was photography. Her dream was to travel through Appalachia taking pictures and to publish a book of those pictures. She knew that as an unknown photographer she didn't have a chance of getting a book advance, and that she'd have very little chance of selling a finished book even if she did find some way to finance her trip. So she went into brainstorming with a group of friends, and together they came up with a beautifully ingenious plan.

Suppose she got an old panel truck and turned it into a rolling darkroom? Jeannette could drive through Appalachia with Brownie cameras, teaching children to take pictures and develop them. As they explored and recorded their own world, she could photograph that luminous process of discovery—and put her pictures together with theirs. That would be a book with a fresh angle—and a good chance of finding a publisher. It was also the kind of project that was tailor-made to attract foundation funding.

However, this still left Jeannette stuck with a sizable money problem. Trucks, darkroom equipment, cameras, photographic paper, and just plain traveling all cost money—and getting foundation support takes time. It could be more than a year before Jeannette got her grant—or found out that she didn't get one. And she just didn't want to wait that long. She has a flow chart that isn't flowing. What can Jeannette do to break that bottleneck?

Then there's Alan, the Chicago educational-books editor whose goal was to open a small publishing house in Colorado, specializing in outdoors hand-books and literature. Alan had no capital of his own to invest in his business, and he decided to solve that problem by finding one or more investors or moneyed partners. After a great deal of thought, Alan's flow chart looked like this:



Alan was smart enough to realize that the best way to learn small-press economics was directly from the publishers who practiced them (that is, by apprenticeship), and he knew how to contact those publishers through directories that can be found in any library. But when it came to finding a backer, Alan was stumped. He didn't know anybody with that kind of money. When he brainstormed the problem, he got the wild and wonderful idea of getting an environmentally-aware celebrity like John Denver or Robert Redford to put his money and his clout behind Mountainbooks (as Alan was calling it). But that left him just as stuck as he was before, because he didn't know John Denver or Robert Redford, either, and he had no chance of meeting them.

When you come to this kind of impasse in your planning, you may get very discouraged. You may also feel embarrassed that you don't know how to pull the whole miracle off all by yourself. But I've got news for you. *You're not supposed to.*

Look at Christopher Columbus. A moment's thought will make it obvious that he did not discover America "on his own," and that there was no way he could have. There's no question that his vision, his drive, his desire was the galvanizing force of the expedition. But he was "dependent," first of all, on the brainstorming of Copernicus, who had, come up with the ridiculous idea that the world was round. He was "dependent" on Ferdinand and Isabella for faith and financing, on shipbuilders for the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*, on his crew, and on the inventors and makers of navigational instruments, the sextant and the astrolabe. If that's "dependency," then dependency is the foundation of human civilization. If you really think you should be an exception, good luck. You'll be the first.

What you have to do in this world you cannot do alone. Every successful human enterprise is a collaboration—a drawing-together of diverse resources and energies to achieve a single end. And you can and should do just that for your goal.

So when you've gone as far as you can on your own, it's time for a barn-raising.