

***PAIN*T THE BARN**

***MOW* THE HAYFIELD**

***PICK* BLUEBERRIES**

***CUT* FIREWOOD**

***RAKE* LEAVES**

***SHOVEL* SNOW**

***CLEAN* THE BASEMENT**

My strategy for getting myself out of a rut is to sit at my desk reminding myself of what the problem is, reviewing my notes, generally filling my head with the issues and terms, and then I just get up and go do something relatively mindless and repetitive. At our farm in the summer, I paint the barn or mow the hayfield or pick blueberries or cut firewood to length; and at home in Massachusetts in the winter, I rake leaves or shovel snow or clean the basement floor. I don't even try to think about the problem, but more often than not, at some point in the middle of the not very challenging activity, I'll find myself mulling it over and coming up with a new slant, a new way of tackling the issue, maybe just a new term to use. Engaging my brain with something else to control and think about helps melt down the blockades that have been preventing me from making progress, freeing up the circuits for some new paths. My strategy could hardly be cruder, but it works so well so often that I have come to rely on it.

One summer many years ago, my friend Doug Hofstadter was visiting me at my farm, and somebody asked him where I was. He gestured out to the big hayfield behind the house, which I was harrowing for a reseeding. "He's out there on his tractor, doing his tillosophy," Doug said. Ever since then, tillosophy has been my term for this process. Try it; if it doesn't work, at least you'll end up with a painted room, a mowed lawn, a clean basement.