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PROCRASTINATION



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What is Procrastination?

Everyone does it, including me and you. You have things to do, important things or general things, and you postpone doing them until the very last minute. If Procrastination were an Olympic sport you might be in the running for a gold medal, you're *that* good at it. You make jokes about being a world class procrastinator with your friends, telling them that sure, you could finish that project right now if you wanted to but (yawn) you're just going to do it tomorrow or the next day.

Procrastination is putting off taking action until later, either due to carelessness or habitual laziness. It's putting off till tomorrow what you just as easily could have finished up today. A procrastinator postpones or needlessly delays accomplishing something –just because.

Students are notorious for engaging in this behaviour. Papers need to be researched and written, tests must be studied for but none of this is done or even started until the very last minute. Students who procrastinate generally spend a great deal of time pulling all –nighters in order to catch up to where they need to be or to cram for the big test in the morning. I remember doing school projects on a Sunday night that were due in on the Monday, even though I was given ample time to complete them.

A person who is habitually late to everything, from meetings to dates, is someone who procrastinates getting ready to leave. Maybe they don't start getting ready until it's nearly time to leave or they move so slowly that by the time they should leave for the event, they're still way behind schedule.

Why do we let things slide until we're in a time crunch and the deadline is looming and we're not even CLOSE to being finished? Why do we procrastinate?

Why Do You Do It?

The behaviour of procrastination affects almost everyone at one time or another in their life. For some it is a continuous habit, part of who they are, a not-so-endearing character trait; for others it may be a situational thing and doesn't affect too many events in their life. For whatever reason, people put off things they don't want to do – fact.

Because You Are Afraid. No one likes to admit that they fear something, but fear might just be the reason you put off doing what you know you should do. Whether it's fear of failure or fear of success, it's still fear. Fear is a paralyzing emotion. It has the ability to stop us in our tracks-literally. Some writers fear failure so they never write that epic novel they have churning around inside of them; some fear success and the result is the same. If you procrastinate compulsively, and who doesn't enjoy doing that, then you may fear that once you're successful at something you'll suffer the compulsion to continually be successful. This will require you to work and finish what you've started and that will cut into your compulsion to procrastinate. It's a never ending cycle. Fear can cause us to procrastinate.

Many of us are struck by the dreaded four letter word – F E A R, the fear of failure, the fear of rejection, the fear of losing everything, the fear of not being good enough, the fear of being laughed at - you get the picture. The word *fear* and the feelings that go with it have stopped many people achieving their goals or worse still, not even starting to set goals in the first place. Overcome your fear and unlock your potential by reading [The truth about goal-setting](#).

Because You Don't Think it's Important Enough. You don't place a high enough priority on the task at hand, it's not vital and so it's not worthy of you beginning it. You know the task needs to be done and you may already have decided that you're the one who must do it. However, there is always something else more important on your to-do list that keeps bumping that particular job back to the bottom. Let's say you know that some bookkeeping needs to be done. You'll get to it later, after you go grocery

shopping. Grocery shopping is more important because if you don't have food you'll starve to death. Besides, no one knows you have some paperwork to do – except you. After grocery shopping you need to eat, because you're hungry. Besides, you can just do it later in the night after dinner. Doing your paperwork isn't a priority and that's why you procrastinate doing it.

You Don't Know Enough to do the Task. You may procrastinate beginning a project because you simply don't know everything you need to know in order to complete the task. You may not have consciously admitted this to yourself, but deep down you know it and it's coming out as an aversion to starting the project. You need to determine whether or not this is because you haven't collected all the data on what you have to do, or simply because you want to stall for more time. A classic example for me is the internet. I kept procrastinating about creating a [website](#), and [writing articles](#) because everytime I went to start I was just bombarded with so much information about what to do and what not to do that I believed that it was just too hard. But then I realized that if it's going to be, it's up to me!

Because You're Too Busy. Life is busy. We have jobs and commitments and sometimes, just sometimes, we can't get to a particular task because we've run out of time in our busy day to complete one more thing. I say to my wife quite often, 'What on earth did we do with our time before we had kids?' People with children will be nodding their heads right now.

Because It Works. Unfortunately, procrastination can reinforce itself. If we avoid something we don't want to do (like cleaning out the car) by engaging in behaviour that we *want* to engage in (like watching TV) then getting to it later, we can say that putting it off wasn't that bad after all. And besides, we had fun while we procrastinated.

You Haven't Committed To the Job. You may think the job should belong to someone else, it's not really your job to do and the job is a waste of time. If this is how

you're looking at this particular task, then you need to ask yourself what will happen to you if you don't complete the job. We are all responsible for our actions and we must accept the consequences of our actions. Too often people lay the blame on others and don't take responsibility.

You Just Don't Want To Do It. Everyone is faced with jobs in life that they simply don't want to do. They're either disgusting, like having to clean toilets, or they're dangerous, like climbing up on the roof and cleaning the leaves out from the rain gutters. We put off doing the task at hand because we simply do not want to do it. Full Stop. There is no underlying psychological reason for putting it off. It's that disobedient four-year old in us coming out to say "I don't wanna and I'm not gonna". Actually, I heard those exact words from my four year old this evening while we tried to give her a bath.

You Could Just Be Lazy. Yes, that's what I said. I know it's not an easy thing to hear about yourself, but sometimes facing the truth about ourselves can help us overcome bad habits and succeed where we otherwise may have failed. You need to find a way to motivate yourself out of your habit of being lazy in order to stop procrastinating. I'll admit, I tend to become lazy on the weekends only because I work from home and currently look after our two daughters, so when the weekend arrives the girls want to spend all their time with their mother – who could blame them!

How Can You Change Your Behaviour?

Now that you've read a little bit about just why you procrastinate...wait, you DID read that section right? You didn't put it off until later, did you? What do you mean you didn't think it was important? How are you going to stop procrastinating if you don't understand WHY you do it in the first place? Taking a good hard look at why you don't start your bookkeeping until the night before it's due at the Tax Office or why you put off cleaning those rain gutters is the first step in learning how to change that behaviour.

Below are a few strategies to help you stop procrastinating. Not every tip will work for every person, so take what you can from this list and see what works for you.

Take a Conscious Mind Approach. Do you hear a little nagging voice in your head telling you that you need to do something? Can you see a visual in your head about the task you're avoiding and are you feeling the physical and emotional consequences of what will happen if you *don't* complete this task? This is your conscious awareness. Look at the clues that tell you just when and how you're procrastinating and you'll be able to see that you are indeed putting something off. Sometimes it's difficult to tell when you're procrastinating because you're attempting to *avoid* thinking about it but if you piece together the clues you'll be able to pinpoint your behaviour in order to get a handle on it.

Learn How You Procrastinate. Do you think if you ignore the job at hand it will eventually go away and not bother you? I tried that once with an amount of money I owed the tax office and nearly received a hefty fine for my procrastination. My one and only ever financial tip to you is 'Don't procrastinate with the Tax Office.' Trust me when I say that ignoring the problem/job won't cause it to disappear in a puff of smoke – more often it will create a fire!

Do you over-estimate or under-estimate the degree of difficulty in completing the task? Do you scoff at the impact not finishing the task will have on your future? Perhaps you

substitute something important for something REALLY important, like sending some emails off to friends instead of working on that presentation that's due in two hours.

Maybe you take a short break, but let that "short" break turn into an all night event, and therefore put off getting to that task you need to finish.

You might focus on one part of the job to the exclusion of the remaining task and thereby never finish the entire thing. Ask yourself this question, 'How many projects have you started but never finished?' The silence is deafening!!

Once you recognize how you procrastinate, you'll better be able to put a stop to it. Often we don't even realize that we are procrastinating until it's too late and we've missed a deadline. You know what, that is your subconscious mind taking over for you. In overcoming procrastination it's critical that you [understand how your mind works](#) in the process.

Make Yourself a Productive Environment. For example, if you work from home like I do, create a home office where there's no TV to distract you from your work. Sure, that football game is playing but you don't have time to watch it because you have a deadline with a client. If the TV is there, you'll be tempted to turn it on and then full-blown procrastination occurs. If you are addicted to the Internet, but need to use your laptop or computer to do your work, then try to go somewhere where you won't be able to receive a signal and get online. Removing temptation to do something other than what you NEED to do will help you put a stop to procrastination.

Throw Out Those Procrastination Myths. *"I work best under pressure"* That's the myth that nearly kept me from winning a presentation with a large organisation. Once you believe that you can *only* work under pressure, you're giving yourself permission to procrastinate. This can snowball and create serious problems for you if you have several deadlines looming

“I can’t do this unless I have five uninterrupted hours” This is simply another stalling technique that master procrastinators use for telling themselves it’s ok to not start the project because they won’t have time to finish it. Hello? If you don’t start the task you’ll never finish it. It’s ok to start something and then stop so you can finish it later. Sometimes the simple act of beginning a task will break the cycle of procrastination and allow you to finish your job. Spare a thought for author’s who experience writers block. I can imagine how frightening that would be for them as I sometimes stare at a blank screen trying to gather my thoughts while putting together my [articles](#).

I can’t do this unless it’s perfect. The problem that most procrastinators have is that we are too hard on ourselves, demanding perfection where perfection is impossible. If you think you can’t start your project until you have all the information, then you have once again given yourself permission to put it off. The time is never right – but the time is NOW!

Break Down the Job. You have a job to do and it looks enormous. You could never, ever complete a job that big, so why even start? If that’s your mindset, then you probably won’t finish the job. In order to combat this kind of thinking, break the job or task down into small, manageable chunks. Your yard is a disaster, it’s too much for you to handle. Start at one end and work to the other end. Voila! You’ve started. Take baby steps and soon you’ll see that the entire task has been completed.

Far too often I see people giving up on their goals because they started too big for what they could really handle. Start with smaller manageable goals and targets but remember these are within the BIGGER picture of the overall goal.

Change Your Attitude. Often times we don’t begin something we have to do because we tell ourselves how difficult it’s going to be, or how much we’re going to hate doing it. By undertaking negative self-talk we give ourselves permission to avoid beginning the task at hand. When you hear yourself doing this, change your attitude. Be like the Little Engine that ‘Could’ and tell yourself that you CAN do this, it’s not that difficult. If you tell yourself that you don’t know how to do a particular task, change that around to tell

yourself that you can learn as you go. It's all a matter of mind over matter. If you think you can, you can and if you think you can't you can't. You'll be right in both cases.

Ask Someone for Help. It's true that you may not be able to do everything on your own. You're not Superman or Superwoman, though you do think you'd look pretty cool in the outfit. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help when you know that you can't do it on your own. If you don't understand a project at work, rather than putting it on the back burner (procrastinating), ask someone to clarify it for you. Once you understand it better, the fear of tackling it will be gone and you can proceed. You know, most people like to help other people. It gives them a sense of feeling needed.

If you have a big job to do, then ask a friend or a coworker to help you be accountable for working on it. Let them check up on you every so often to see that you're making progress and soon you'll find that the job is completed. The Buddy System isn't just for deep sea divers anymore!

Keep What Needs to be Accomplished in Plain Sight. If you put away the project specs where you can't see them, it's much easier to not think about what needs to be done. Leave your work where you can see it, as a visual reminder of what you have to do. If it's hidden, it's forgotten. What an invention the 3M Postit Notes were! Funny thing is we've been doing it for years with bits of paper and sticky tape.

Learn How to Tell Time. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you already know how to tell time and you can even do it on a clock without a digital readout. But did you know that world class procrastinators have unrealistic views of the time it takes to accomplish something? It's true. You'll tell yourself that a certain task will only take three hours to complete, so you really don't have to start it right this minute. You can wait till later and then you'll finish it up in three hours. What you fail to realize is that other things can happen along the way to distract you and stretch that three hours into six and pretty soon you've missed that deadline. Starting now is a good best option.

Keep Yourself on a Schedule. Take a calendar and write down all the things that you have to do, the blocks of time that are taken up with things already scheduled. The blank spaces in between those times are the times when you can work on your task. Make sure you don't over-schedule your time and under-estimate the time you'll need to finish a project.

Set a Time Limit. Maybe the task at hand is something you really don't want to do. That happens to all of us and there's no shame in admitting that you would simply rather not do it. However, if it's a job that you must do, here's a good tip on how to not procrastinate. Tell yourself that you're going to work on it for one hour. Devote that one hour to the project or task and then stop. Set another time limit the following day, depending upon when the job needs to be accomplished. Knowing that you don't have to do something unpleasant ALL right now will go a long way towards helping you avoid not doing it at all.

Make a List. If your mother is anything like mine, then she has a list for everything. She has a list for the things she is going to accomplish each day, a grocery list for what needs to be purchased and even a list for my father. Making a list can also be a useful tool in helping you avoid procrastinating. I carry a 240 page notebook with me everywhere I go and have done for the past eight years. I have a whole storage box filled with these notebooks. A phone number, a thought, a conversation, a to-do list – all in my notebook. I used to use a diary, however when the year changed I found myself carrying around two diaries for awhile.

Write down a list of what you need to accomplish. Put it in order of importance, highest to lowest. Next, start with number one and work your way down the list, checking off items as you go. Not only will this help you be organized, but putting those little check marks next to items you've finished will give you a mental boost and help you feel successful. And who doesn't like to feel successful?

Want To. I have found over the years that when I have caught myself procrastinating, I turn the situation into a Want to. Why do I want to start the project? Why do I want to clean the back yard? Why do I want to build a website? When I ask myself this question, I quickly discover my motivation and set about starting and not procrastinating.

Conclusion

Basic human nature will always play a role in procrastination. Pleasurable activities are infinitely more enticing than painful or dull ones. We seek out what makes us feel good and attempt to avoid the things that annoy or bother us.

Some people procrastinate more than others, just as some people are more churpy in the morning (that's me) than others. You're either a night person, or a morning person. You're either a procrastinator or you're not.

Consciously determining why you procrastinate will go a long way in helping you change your behaviour. Don't expect to transform your habits over night, but do take small steps in the right direction and you'll eventually get there. If you reward yourself for your little successes in this area, you just might make non-procrastination more pleasurable than full-blown-avoidance-procrastination.

Discover the [One Technique](#) that will keep you motivated and help you to overcome the biggest roadblock to success – procrastination.