

After Much Delay, Some Thoughts on Procrastination!

I've been meaning to write an article on procrastination for a while, but ... OK, you probably know where this is going without me saying!!

We've all procrastinated at one point or another. "I'll put off that exercise routine until tomorrow; I'll delay finishing that project till another time; I'll wait until next week to make that phone call." The watchword of the procrastinator is "Another time".

Dictionary.com defines 'procrastination' as: "To put off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness." The thesaurus suggests the words "put off, delay, postpone, dally, drag your feet, and dawdle," which gives us a good range of understanding of the concept.

In fairness, it is little wonder procrastination is such a common activity in our lives. **It's the simplest and most convenient solution to essentially every problem.** It is the ultimate avoidance behaviour. People procrastinate for numerous reasons, from fear of failure, fear of success, perfectionism, habit, poor time management, negative beliefs about themselves or their abilities, to an inability to concentrate.

Putting off the things we don't really want to do is the easiest way to escape them. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that those who learn how to avoid procrastination get a lot further in life.

How does procrastination manifest itself in our personal and professional lives?

1. Chronic tardiness

"Never put off until tomorrow that which you can put off until the day after tomorrow" is the procrastinator's adage. But this "Better late than never" philosophy really doesn't hold water. We always have time for the things we REALLY want or need to do.

A minister friend of mine said, "If I didn't have to stand up in front of my congregation every Sunday morning at 11.00am, I would NEVER have time to write a sermon every single week." Motivation checkmates procrastination.

“I didn’t have the time” is a poor excuse for not doing something. Having time is making time. We all have the same amount of time: 24 hours, 1440 minutes, 86,400 seconds in every single day. Not having time says that the thing was not important enough for me to invest some of my time on it. So try to understand WHY you have you been putting off that objective, and what you DO about it will fall into place

2. **Cyber-slacking**

I had a friend who used to say he went into the office on Saturday mornings “just to shuffle papers”. Nowadays, that has been replaced by “cyber-slacking”. The “harmless” 15 minutes you spend here and there surfing the Web and e-mailing friends adds up over the course of a full workday.

Although taking the occasional mental break to look up something online is part of modern-day work life, save the majority of your in-depth news and blog reading for home. You’ll stay focused and get more quality work accomplished.

3. **Distraction attraction**

When you’re easily sidetracked by chatty co-workers, latte runs or excessive snack breaks, you’re more likely to miss deadlines and scramble to finish projects.

While it’s beneficial to your career and overall well-being to have good relationships with your co-workers, job duties should never take a backseat to socializing. We live in a generation of instant gratification, where we “want what we want when we want it.” But there is merit in the adage of doing what needs to be done first and rewarding yourself later.

4. **Errand-running**

Nothing kills productivity more than using our work hours to run private errands. Allowing personal obligations and tasks to consistently interfere with your job is a surefire way to damage your productivity. The solution is obvious: focus on work when you’re at work, and save the shopping, pharmacy trips and dry-cleaning runs for your off-hours. Whenever possible, plan routine dental or medical appointments before or after work, or schedule an hour in the day to do these things and then also schedule a specific time to get back to the task at hand.

Remember in all these things, I am talking about **motivation to achieve**, not some “nose to the grindstone” attitude, which probably promotes procrastination more than discouraging it.

So how does one overcome the habit of procrastination?

a. **Do It Now**

Putting things off until the last minute is a bad habit and like all habits, it is ingrained into our subconscious mind and hard to break. To complete a task immediately may feel strange or like a forced action. But it gets more natural with time.

The minister’s sermon has a deadline. My articles, your tasks and responsibilities are the same. Understand **WHY** you usually leave things to the last minute, only to be left with a less than perfect result. When you have a responsibility or someone requests your expertise, **do it right away**. On top of looking well organized to others, the feeling that the job is done in no time will be one of relief and gratitude.

And this immediacy doesn't need to stop when you leave the office. By incorporating it into your personal life, you will be creating a personality trait - a habit. Are there things that you have left to ‘someday’. Wisdom comes when “one of these days” becomes “here and now”.

b. **Take Baby Steps**

Sometimes we procrastinate because the task may be intimidating to us. Perhaps we have no possible inkling where to start. In these cases, it is quite fine to take it one step at a time. You simply need to break down the project into smaller pieces and tackle each bit separately. Make each task an individual project and after completion of each one, celebrate and acknowledge your achievement.

When I decided to write my latest book, I really didn’t think I had the time. But I wrote it 2 hours at a time. Every morning, I got up, showered and dressed and was at my computer 7.00am – 9.00am Monday to Friday, for 4 months. My book was written one page at a time, in 2 hour segments, over 4 months. Easy!!

Soon you’ll be finished and have no idea why you were putting it off in the first place. Large tasks are conquered in small baby steps.

c. **Forget it**

But let's face facts. Sometimes procrastination is for a reason. If you've been dragging your feet on something for a very long time, there may be a good reason. A part of your mind may be trying to tell you something. Why force the issue? It may all be for the best.

Think about something that you have been putting off again and again and again. What are the reasons that you took this task in the first place? Was it someone else's agenda rather than yours? What are your reasons for this lengthy delay? We need to try to understand the WHY of procrastination before leaping into action.

d. **Just do it**

Procrastination is a habit that you can do without. It slows you down, it holds you back, and it gets in your way. So review these steps and ask yourself the right questions. Get rid of those procrastinating tendencies and watch your productivity soar.

My final word: If at first you don't succeed, there is always next year.