



The Art of Procrastination

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Raymond, habitually put off returning important business calls and addressing key staffing decisions which had been on the table for some time, behavior that seriously threatened his business.

Mary knew she had to complete that report for her manager, yet overriding tasks just kept getting in the way. She knew it was important to her manager but had not quite found the moment to focus on getting it started let alone completed. Her performance review was around the corner and likely to be on the agenda

Simon had been in business for some two years now. He needed to make a decision to bring on staff if he was to continue to grow. Something was holding him back from action. It was easier to focus on the mounting list of tasks at hand. Simon was now working seven a days a week. Each day brought something more compelling to do and finding time for what he knew was an important decision didn't seem to be in sight.

Jan knew that the behavior of one of her staff needed to be addressed. She pretended it would get better but knew it wasn't. If anything it had gotten worse with an impact on staff morale. Jan kept telling herself each weekend that she would address it come Monday but weeks passed and still not action had resulted.

Can you relate to any one of these scenarios? They all relate to an act we well know as Procrastination.

Procrastination simply means to put something off, to delay or defer an action to a later time. We are always making choice about the things we do and not do. We are always doing some prioritisation and choice making in our head.

Procrastination occurs for a number of reasons. The task may be tedious, challenging or boring, difficult, or even uncomfortable. There may be fear of the unknown, fear of a negative outcome, perfectionism, and even rebellion. There is a conflict between the intention to do something and some other belief, intention or desire – resulting in no action.

If we are to move past the act of procrastination - understanding this conflict becomes important.

Procrastination can also occur if it's the wrong goal, the wrong time or you do not have all the information you need and hence you procrastinate. In those cases – it may be a good idea or neutral that you are procrastinating.

Most people procrastinate because it offers them comfort and relief from having to undergo an unpleasant task. Everybody encounters unpleasant tasks in their lives and everybody procrastinates from time to time.

Procrastination is destructive when it costs you something that you already have that you are not willing to lose. For example, you have been given a warm lead for a new job provided by a trusted network partner. There is a very good chance of securing work as a result of this connection. You delay the follow-up which in turn costs you incoming work or an opportunity.

If you procrastinate, start to ask yourself what is it costing you – these are just some of the costs associated with procrastination:

- Poor Quality Work – Procrastinating on important tasks means that you have less time in which to complete them, which invariably leads to rushed poor quality work.
- Time Pressure – Leaving things until the last minute results in anxiety and time pressure as you go all out to complete tasks before the deadline.
- Failure to Achieve Important Goals – This can be one of the most depressing and frustrating aspects of procrastination. The problem is that while you procrastinate, your goals and aspirations are not attended to or realized.
- Missed Opportunities - Procrastination causes you to miss opportunities that you never even consider



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or explore. This can lead to guilt and regret as you realise what you are missing.

- **Waste of the Present** – Wasting the present is probably the biggest cost of procrastination. Consistent procrastination leads to an unfulfilled life lacking in accomplishments and enjoyment.

It is important to understand that procrastination is not the result of lacking time management skills. If that were the case then procrastinators could easily overcome their problems by getting a daily planner. But even with proper planning and a well thought out To Do list, procrastination would almost certainly persist. Secondly, and contrary to many popular definitions of the word, procrastination is not laziness. Many of the world's procrastinators are not lazy people, quite the opposite; many are highly successful people with busy lives.

So what to do

Here are seven tips to help you overcome procrastination:

1. Stop Procrastination Condemnation - Lose the Labels! This skill is really easy. Notice your inner critic. All those things you call yourself, such as lazy, scattered, disorganized, not good enough, incompetent, or stupid, for example, aren't helping you get things done, are they? You've learned to believe them, and you think they've become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. If you look around yourself, though, you'll see evidence that you can accomplish quite a number of things without delay. Instead ask yourself – what can I put on my calendar not my to do list – commit it to action

2. End Procrastination Exaggeration - This new skill muscle involves telling the truth about your habits. Are you really procrastinating, or are you simply focusing on other priorities? It's possible that those things you're not doing shouldn't get done until sometimes later, perhaps not at all. Focus on only the most significant areas first, and the rest will come.

Before you include anything on your to-do list, it needs a brief examination. Could it be you're just telling yourself you'll do something without real intent and strategy to follow through? Don't bother. You know what happens: You say you'll do it, and then you ignore it, deny it, say you'll do it just after you finish reading the paper, your e-mail, or the television show is over. You believe you have good intentions. And for the most part, you do, especially when you create the intention! But are your intentions serious and realistic?

Stop just intending. Intention without action is like a car without wheels; you may have a vehicle, but it's really hard to get anywhere.

Have you evaluated this new activity or obligation in light of all the other things on your plate? Where does it fit? Is it more or less important than other things? Is there anything you can remove, stop, delegate, or simplify to make room for this new intention? If not, and if you already have too many plates spinning, so to speak, stop yourself before saying yes. For now, just say "maybe" (perhaps even "no!") before you make a challenging situation more so.

3. This is a task that I CHOOSE to do, not a task I HAVE to do

Shift your thinking away from a "have to" mentality into a "want to" mentality. Make a conscious choice and commitment to either do the task now, or do what is necessary to get out of it. Don't let it linger around in the back of your mind.

4. I don't have to FINISH this task now, I just have to BEGIN the task now

Don't get overwhelmed by the idea of having to complete the task. Instead, focus your thoughts and energy on getting it started and let your momentum carry you through.

5. I don't have to be PERFECT, I'll do the best I can

Don't let perfectionism ruin your productivity. Accept that you are human and that there is no such thing as PERFECT. Focus your efforts on tasks where excellence will make a difference. All the other tasks just need



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to get done.

6. I don't have to do this task all at once, I can break it up into smaller steps

Break large complex projects into smaller steps and focus on taking each individual step. Treat each step as a mini-goal. Don't worry about taking future steps, just focus on getting started on the current task and take time to celebrate after completing it.

7. I don't have to work all day on this task, I can set time limits and take breaks when I need to

Scheduling breaks and other recreational activities in your schedule will help you see that your life is not all work. If you want, you can set time limits to help you get started on a particular task.

Commit to work for 30 minutes on the task and then give yourself permission to take a break. If you feel inspired to continue with the task, go for it and allow your momentum to carry you through. Otherwise, just take a guilt-free break. You deserve it for getting started.

Want to Know More...

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Acknowledged Sources: Kerul Kassel: Stop Procrastination Now; www.timethoughts.com

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