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25 YEARS OF PROVIDING SERVICE



## PROCRASTINATION

### WHY DO PEOPLE PROCRASTINATE?

For most people procrastination is NOT about being lazy. In fact, when we procrastinate, we often work quite intensely for periods of time just before our deadlines. Working long and hard is quite the opposite of being lazy?

Some individuals claim they "do better" when they procrastinate because they do their "best work" under pressure. If you always procrastinate, and never really approach your tasks systematically, then you cannot accurately say that you know you "do better" under pressure. Perhaps your performance would improve even more without the stress? Other people say they like the "rush" of leaving things to the very end prior to a deadline. But they tend to say this when they are NOT currently working under any deadline. We say this works when we have already forgotten the negative consequences of procrastinating such as anxiety/stress, fatigue & disappointment. Not to mention, leaving things to the end increases chances something will go wrong - like getting sick or technical issues. So, procrastination can be even harder on both our mind and bodies and increase our chances of failing, then why on earth do we do it?

The answer is that procrastination is not simply a matter of having poor time management skills but rather it can be traced to underlying and more complex psychological reasons. For the most part, our reasons for delaying and avoiding are rooted in our deeper fear and anxiety-about doing poorly, looking stupid, or having one's sense of self challenged. We avoid doing work to avoid our being judged. And, if we happened to succeed, we feel that much "smarter."

### WHAT CAN WE DO TO AVOID PROCRASTINATION?

**Awareness is an Important First Step** - To overcome procrastination you need to understand the function procrastination serves in your life. You can't come up with effective solutions if you don't understand the root of the problem. As with most problems, awareness and self-knowledge are key to figuring out how to stop procrastinating. For some simply acquiring this insight and knowledge actually protects them from feeling like they are not enough, or that they are a failure. Psychologists, Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen, who have helped many overcome procrastinating, report in "Mind Games Procrastinators Play" (*Psychology Today*, January, 1982), that for many "understanding the hidden roots of procrastination often seems to weaken them". Basically, just knowing our reasons for procrastinating can make it easier to stop.

**Proper Time Management Techniques is Key** - Time management techniques and tools are indispensable, but they are not enough by themselves. There are some time management techniques that are well suited to overcoming procrastination and others that can make it worse. Those that reduce anxiety and fear while emphasizing the satisfaction and rewards of completing tasks tend to work best. Those that are inflexible, rigid, and focus on the magnitude of tasks will increase anxiety and can sabotage your efforts making it counterproductive. For example, making a massive list of "things to do" or scheduling every minute of your day can INCREASE your stress and lead you to the one thing you were avoiding... procrastination. Instead, set reasonable goals such as a manageable list of things to do, break larger tasks down, and give yourself flexibility and enjoy something fun as a reward for work completed.



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## TIPS FOR OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

**Awareness** – Reflect on the reasons you procrastinate, your habits & thoughts that lead to your delaying your work.

**Assess** – What emotions lead to procrastinating & how does it make you feel? Are these positive, productive feelings?

**Outlook** – Change your perspective by looking at a big task in terms of smaller pieces making it less intimidating.

**Commit** – If you feel stuck, start by committing to complete a small task and write it down. Write down on a list only what you can truly commit to following through with no matter what. By doing this you rebuild faith & trust in yourself, which many procrastinators have lost. Once finished go ahead and reward yourself for your success no matter how small it seems.

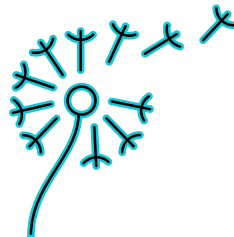
**Surroundings** – Choose wisely where and who may be nearby when you are trying to work. Repeatedly placing yourself in situations where you don't get much done because of distractions (e.g., at a cafe or when kids are playing loudly nearby) can actually be a method of avoiding work.

**Goals** – Focus on what you want to do, not what you might be avoiding. Think about the productive reasons for doing a task by setting positive, concrete, achievable goals for yourself.

**Be Realistic** – Achieving goals & changing habits takes time and effort; don't sabotage yourself by having unrealistic expectations that are impossible to meet.

**Self-talk** – Notice how you are thinking & talking to yourself. Speak to yourself in positive ways that remind you of your strengths & capabilities that will help you in reaching goals and avoid focusing on past “failures” or what you consider weaknesses.

**Swiss Cheese Method** - Start with a brief period (10-15 minutes) to work on a large task. Complete as much as you can -in that time- with little expectations about how much you will complete. After doing this several times on the same task, you will have made progress & have momentum ...and you will have less work to do to complete the task. The task won't seem so overwhelming because you've punched holes in it (like Swiss cheese!). Remember to take your break between work periods.



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## **TIME MANAGEMENT & PROCRASTINATION**

**1. Have an Effective Schedule** – Most have a schedule that they tend to follow and have a rough idea of their responsibilities they need to accomplish in their heads while others prefer it written down. If you want to improve your time management & stop procrastinating, you need to start making effective and realistic to-do lists and use a system that is successful for you.

**2. Take Enough Breaks** - Not allowing yourself a break to save time is actually a big waste of your time. Working non-stop is a big trigger for procrastination. Give yourself something to look forward to and allow your mind a sense of relief that a break is in your near future. If you don't have short breaks scheduled, your brain will think it must work continuously. Also, if you don't schedule a break you will be more tempted to squeeze a bit of free time more often instead of working on your task....procrastination! Allow yourself a 5-minutes break after every 25-minutes of work, you will feel more motivated to work hard for those 25-minutes knowing you can enjoy a break after. It keeps you from procrastinating & boosts your motivation.

**3. Prioritize** – You may already be aware of a time of day you are most motivated & likely to get the most work completed. If not, start paying attention to your mood & energy throughout the day. Schedule your most important work at the time when you know you're most likely to be productive. Prioritization may not solve procrastination, but it can help manage your time better by selecting tasks need to be done sooner than others.

**4. Monitor Your Behavior** - The best way to stop yourself from procrastinating is to keep yourself accountable. Try tracking your actions for a few days & write down where you're spending your time. How much of it was spent on work, and how much time did you spend distracted? There are time management apps you can use which makes tracking easy. Next work on eradicating causes of procrastination and minimize distractions. For example, turn off your phone so you don't waste time scrolling on social media. For physical distractions you can easily remove the distraction however, for mental distractions, you may need more practice. Try adding a 10-minute meditation session before starting the day. It can help you practice mindfulness throughout the day.

**5. Make Realistic Goals** - Setting impractical goals can overwhelm and may even send you down in a spiral of feeling unmotivated & overwhelmed. Your objectives, therefore, must be achievable and stimulating. A long list of to-dos can be overwhelming, it can cause a sensory overload and we end up ignoring all items on the list altogether. Break down your daily, weekly, monthly goals into achievable tasks so that you can accomplish them one step at a time. Mix up the type of tasks you do (boring versus interesting) to make sure you don't get bored.



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## TIME MANAGEMENT & PROCRASTINATION (Continued)



**6. Start with the Easiest Task** - After breaking down a large project, start with the easiest item.

Think of the effortless action such as naming your documents or creating an outline. When you start working on these simple tasks, it will be easier for you to accomplish more every day & stay motivated.

**7. Avoid Clutter and Distractions** - One of the biggest hurdles to motivation is the environment you are in. This means that your surroundings must be free of diversions, noise, and clutter. Personalize your space and make it warm & inviting but avoid items that may cause any distractions.



**8. Use Positive Self-Talk** - Negative self-talk is one of the things that derail people from getting things done. Telling yourself that you are lazy, incapable, dumb or unqualified are examples of negative self-talk. Instead of talking to yourself negatively, why not practice positive self-talk? Remind yourself of your strengths and what you have accomplished in your life.

**9. Know Your Strengths** - Do you know your strengths? If the answer is no, take a couple of minutes to think of your strengths when preparing to work on a task or goal. Apply them to your task to get things done quickly. Research studies have shown that focusing on your strengths boosts productivity, cultivates positive feelings, and increases engagement in the workplace.

**10. Take a Nap** - A study conducted by the National Sleep Foundation found that a ten to thirty-minute nap can boost your productivity and motivation. If you are struggling to sleep better at night, you should limit your nap time during the day and avoid screen time before bed. Always aim to 7-9 hours of sleep nightly to feel refreshed and ready to work on the tasks ahead.

**11. Get a Busy Workspace** - If you work remotely, you should occasionally consider moving your workspace to a busier environment. Find people who are highly focused on their work and work close to them or go to a library where others are hard at work. When you do this, your motivation and productivity will organically increase. The same applies if you work in the office. Get inspired by a colleague you respect and look up to.

**12. Take a Cold Shower** - In most cases, tiredness & lethargy go together. In short, if you are feeling tired, the chances of getting up and working on your most important tasks are low. You can banish any tiredness instantly by taking a cold shower. A cold shower offers instant benefits unlike coffee or other stimulants.

**13. Dress-up** - How you dress affects your mood. If you are working from home in your pajamas, you're likely to want to go back to sleep or spend most of your time watching TV. On the other hand, if you shower when you wake up and dress up as if you are going to the office, you are more likely to stay focused on your work & boost productivity.

**14. Don't Focus on Perfectionism** - The fear of failure holds most people back. You should keep in mind that everyone who goes after what, often taking risks, are bound to fail from time to time. This is part of life. You need to change your mindset and start seeing setbacks as learning experiences and to be kinder to yourself, think constructively & learn from missteps. When you stumble, ask "What can I learn from this situation?"



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## SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Procrastination Cure: 21 Proven Tactics for Conquering Your Inner Procrastinator, Mastering your Inner Procrastinator, Mastering Your Time, and Boosting Your Productivity by Damon Zahariades

The Perfectionism Workbook: Proven Strategic to End Procrastination, Accept Yourself, and Achieve Your Goals by Taylor Newendorp MA, LCPC

Procrastination Workbook: CBT Series by Antonio Matteo Bruscella

Get Out of Your Own Way: Practical Lessons for Conquering Procrastination, Fear, Envy, Neediness, Guilt and More by Mark Goulston, MD and Philip Goldberg

*Remind yourself.... You Got This!*

You can accomplish whatever you set your mind to do. You don't have to live out the self-defeating narrative you have created over time. You don't have to believe that inner critic who represents all those who may have said "you can't" or "you will never succeed". Remind yourself how strong you are & what you have achieved already, both the larger & smaller achievements.

Take a deep breath, get yourself organized and put one foot in front of the other.

*You can do it!*



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