

Now? No, wait - procrastinate!

The art of putting things off

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Let's face it, we are all guilty of procrastination. How many times do you tell yourself that you will get something done only to keep putting it off? Maybe its something around the house like cleaning the garage, paying bills, or filing your taxes. Perhaps its a doctor or dentist appointment you promise yourself to schedule. Whatever the task, there may be several reasons why people master the art of putting things off. Let's examine some of these factors.

Magnification and Minimization

Procrastinators typically overestimate or magnify the time and difficulty of the tasks that they put off. As a result, their to-do list feels more difficult, tedious and unpleasant than it may actually end up being. Others may minimize time estimates by saying, "It won't take that long", which leaves them scrambling at the last minute.

Can't Find the Time

"I will do it when I can find the time". Does this sound familiar? Sometimes we hope or convince ourselves that time will magically appear, thus allowing us to finally get down to business.

Perfectionism

Perfectionists sometimes often adopt the mindset, "If you can't do it right, then don't do it at all". This all-or-nothing approach can create a perception of needing more time than might actually be required. It also presumes that there is a "right" way to do things, which can be a counterproductive.

Emotions and Stress

Emotions often get in the way of being efficient and productive. If you are feeling overwhelmed, stressed, tired, or pulled in too many directions you may not know where to begin. If you are anxious or depressed, then getting through the day can be enough of a challenge. Sometimes the task itself can cause anxiety or stress because its something you don't want to do, but rather you have to or should. Addressing your emotional needs by reducing external stressors, where possible, can give you renewed energy to tackle the things that you never seem to get to. Professional help may be needed if your emotions are having a significant impact on your day to day functioning, or if your relationships are suffering.

Getting Down to Business

Now that we have examined some of the factors that contribute to procrastination, you may be wondering what you can do about it. Here are some suggestions:

- **Improve your predictive ability.** Whether you magnify or minimize, it would be beneficial to more accurately assess the tasks at hand.
 - **Try this:** Before you start a task rate it on a scale of 1-10 in terms of difficulty. Also, estimate how much time it will take to complete it. Note these predictions and compare the actual time and difficulty you experience. Doing this will help you improve the accuracy of your predictions.
- **Unwind from stress.** Find some healthy outlets to unburden yourself from the stresses of life.
- **Break down tasks in to smaller, manageable steps.** Use dates and reminders to keep you on track.
- **Get help** for more serious emotional difficulties like depression or anxiety disorders
- **Don't try to find time, make time.** Use a calendar, computer, day planner or smart phone app to help you manage and better plan you time. Visualizing your to do list will help you plan accordingly. (Check out Astrid and GQueues for task management apps)
- **Prioritize.** Write down all of your to do's and put them in order based on priority. Consider using three categories: "Must Do", "Would Like To" and "Later". Make sure to use all three categories! Set a time frame for each and start with the "Must Do's".
- **Make a public commitment.** Telling someone that you will do something increases the likelihood that you actually will. You can tell a friend, your spouse or update your status on Facebook. Positive feedback, accountability and encouragement from others can be highly motivating.
- **Free yourself of perfectionistic expectations.** Practice being okay with things being "good enough".
- **Use the 15 minute rule:** Make it a goal to work on the task for 15 minutes. At the end of 15 minutes feel free to stop, but try to go for another 15 minutes if you can. Slow and steady progress is much better than none at all.
- **Start with the easiest task first.** This can help build momentum by building on your successes while shortening your to-do list.
- **The two minute rule:** Adopt the mindset "If it takes less than two minutes, do it now".

Now that you have some ideas on how to be more productive, try to tackle something today. What are you waiting for?