

Put Off Procrastination For Good

By Christine W. Zust, M.A.



What does procrastination have to do with positioning yourself? Everything. Every time you push back a due date, or turn in a report late, or submit shoddy work because you waited until the last minute, then you are hurting your professional image. You are positioning yourself as someone who puts things off and never comes through on time. Is that the image that you want to project? Probably not. We all procrastinate on some things we don't like or want to do, but when that occasional behavior turns into a consistently bad habit, then it's time to seek change and get back on track. The only way to fight procrastination is to consciously remind yourself to take action in small steps.

Here's my story. I was scheduled to address a colleague's university class on the topic of goal setting. The first place I went, of course, was to my bookshelf to locate a book which was appropriately titled, Procrastination. It was written in the late 1980s by two California-based psychologists. I had received it through a Business Book of the Month Club back then. It was now 2001. This was the first time I had opened the book. Even I realized it had taken me 14 years to pick up that book. Do you see the irony in this?

We all have procrastination lapses. Here are some quick tips to help you stay focused and keep on track:

Start small. Don't let size overwhelm you. A large project can be daunting, so don't get pulled into feeling overpowered. Any large project can be broken into smaller chunks. Attack smaller pieces of the project one at a time instead of trying to get your arms around the entire thing. You will find that you will be better able to focus on that one task rather than thinking of the larger, broader project all at once.

Seek counsel. If you're working on something that is a little out of your league, go to other professionals for information and advice. You'll be surprised how willing people are to share their expertise with you. Throughout our careers, we come into contact with people who enrich our knowledge base. Take advantage of the knowledge that is around you, and of course, return the favor when they need advice from you.

Ask "Why?" We often procrastinate because we don't like to do specific tasks. Ask yourself the question, "Why do I dislike this task?" Getting to the real reason why you hate doing something helps you identify any obstacles you need to get through so you can move forward.

Chart your progress. Some of us respond better to visual stimulation. Seeing a check mark next to a To Do list item, or a graph showing your progress, or a photo of your child on your desk that reminds you s/he needs to be fed! – can keep you motivated.

Forget about being perfect. You may perceive that putting 40 hours into a written report automatically makes it a better report when, in reality, you could have accomplished more in less time if you had just remained focused and not put so much time into reworking things.

Reward yourself. One of the best ways to motivate yourself to change and adopt a more positive behavior about not procrastinating is to develop some type of reward program. For instance, if you have two weeks to put together a marketing campaign, think of ways to reward yourself for completing small assignments each day that will lead toward the completion of the overall campaign. Those rewards can be anything from buying yourself a new outfit to treating yourself to a hot fudge sundae. Pretty soon your brain gets the hang of it, and you're working for the reward (just like Pavlov's dogs).

Put these procrastination tips to work for you, and position yourself like a professional. If all else fails, then visit your nearest library or bookstore and pick up a copy of Procrastination for Dummies. And P.S., don't put off reading it!

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