

OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

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Is procrastination a habit? Is it causing problems in your work, school or personal life? Would you like to do something about it, but keep putting it off because you don't know where to start?

First thing to do: stop beating yourself up. There may be valid reasons why you procrastinate, and until you know what they are, you may not be able to stop. Even if you know why you do it, berating yourself for being a loser or lazy or lacking willpower doesn't help, does it?

Here are a few of the reasons why people procrastinate, and some possible solutions:

- 1) **Lack of motivation.** Are you waiting until you're 'in the mood'? Don't! "Just do it", as the commercial says. The law of inertia says that when you're not moving, the hardest part is getting started, but once you've started the ball rolling, it will be much easier to keep going.
- 2) **Lack of reward.** Have you noticed that you're less likely to procrastinate on doing your taxes when you're expecting a big refund? Rewards are motivating! So think about how you can reward yourself for cleaning out the garage or writing that report.
- 3) **Unpleasant or difficult tasks.** Most people put these off, for obvious reasons. But putting it off won't make it any easier or more fun; it will just ruin the rest of your day (or week) thinking about it, so by the time you get to it you're REALLY crabby! Try to accept that a chore is just a chore, or focus on how much better you'll feel once it's done, and dive in.
- 4) **Not enough time in the day.** The busiest people I know seem to be better at getting things done. Their secret: break down big projects into little tasks that can be done in 15-minute increments. This works well for unpleasant tasks and difficult assignments, too.
- 5) **Fear of failure or making mistakes.** Being afraid to fail, or to not do something perfectly, can lead to paralysis. It may seem easier to do nothing than risk failure, but the truth is you risk failure anyway if your procrastination results in losing out on an opportunity or missing an important deadline. Rather than perfection, aim for progress, and be OK with "good enough."
- 6) **Lack of desire.** The most common reason for procrastination: you don't want to do the task, period. So ask yourself, "what will happen if I don't do it?" If you can live with the answer ("not much", "feel slightly guilty") then you could decide not to do it. If, however, the consequence would be undesirable (bad grade or performance review), then try one of the above strategies to get the task done. *Don't forget that letting yourself down is a negative consequence.*

Sometimes there's a good reason for procrastinating: maybe you're just not ready, and need more time – to prepare, to research, to gather needed materials, or just to mull it over. Maybe it's something you never should have agreed to do in the first place – in which case your problem is not procrastination, but learning how to say "no".

If you'd like to learn more about overcoming procrastination, an excellent book is "*The NOW Habit*" by Neil Fiore; or check out the article by Ramona Creel at www.OnlineOrganizing.com, or contact me to find out how working with a therapist or coach can help.