

SORTED! OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is a common human trait. We all do it at some time or other and some of us are very good at it!

Sue Turner explores why we procrastinate and suggests some techniques for combating it.

Notice that you are doing it

One of the keys to overcoming procrastination is to name what you are doing. Once you have labelled your behaviour it is harder to justify what you are doing or to blame other people for the choice you are making.



Common avoidance behaviours and rationalisations for procrastinating:

Contemplating a task without engaging in it -sometimes called planning! For example sitting in an armchair for long periods of time thinking about putting up shelves. Where long periods of time could be 30 minutes once or several hours a night for many weeks!

Finding a reason not to start. "I'll start exercising when I have lost some weight". This is simply putting off dealing with the main problem now.

Finding something else to do. Tidy desk, clean oven, check email etc...

Waiting for inspiration or motivation to arrive. You could be waiting a long time! Getting started will spur you and get you out of the endless procrastination loop.

Leaving tasks until the last minute because "I do my best work under pressure". Find evidence for this claim by comparing the quality of your 'last minute work' and your 'start earlier work'. Is the real problem the tedium of the task in hand?

The best way to get something done is to begin.

It has been my observation that most people get ahead during the time that others waste time.

Henry Ford

Identify why you are putting something off

Does the task belong to you, is it something you want to do or is someone else asking you to do it? Do you own the task?

Is there an underlying fear of failure? Does it push one of your buttons, is a gremlin popping up? Are you delaying to keep anxiety and fear at bay? Examples include “If I don’t start writing the report then I don’t have to deal with it being rejected” or “If I don’t make the call then I can’t be told ‘No’.”



Are you rebelling by delaying the task to get at someone else? This is commonly seen in relationships for example your partner has nagged at you to do a task and you don’t like the nagging. Or are you rebelling because you feel put upon, this could be expressed when you feel you have been asked to do something that ‘is someone else’s job’.

Do you have a Low Frustration Tolerance (LFT)? This is your perceived inability to put up with frustration, boredom, hard work, setbacks and uncomfortable feelings. LFT says “I can’t stand present pain for future gain”, but this is deceptive because tasks mount up and life gets harder not easier. Avoiding unpleasant or mundane tasks in the long term will add stress not remove it.

Strategies for getting on with it

Focus on how you will feel when the task is finished. Most people when asked about how they will feel when a task that they have been putting off is completed answer ‘great’. Why wait to have that ‘great’ feeling? Start now!

Reward yourself for doing something boring. For example an interesting task or plan to do something you really enjoy, even a cup of coffee and a biscuit can work.

Don’t wait until you feel in the mood, you may never start! Break the task down into small chunks and **get started**, the sense of achievement will help to keep you going.

Consider what the payoff is for not starting? Is it one of the reasons listed above, fear of failure, rebellion or do you have a low frustration tolerance? Once you have identified the underlying emotion you can consider how to overcome your resistance to starting.

Plan your day and do your most important tasks first, don’t be tempted to get little more interesting tasks done first. Get stuck in to the task you have been putting off, otherwise you may find that by the end of the day it is still waiting.

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