

SPECIAL REPORT:

The Fine Art of Procrastination:

How to overcome the disease of putting things off

By Gerry Robert

The Procrastinator's Creed:

- 1. I believe that if anything is worth doing, it would have been done already.**
- 2. I shall never move quickly, except to avoid more work or find excuses.**
- 3. I will never rush into a job without a lifetime of consideration.**
- 4. I shall meet all of my deadlines directly in proportion to the amount of bodily injury I could expect to receive from missing them.**
- 5. I firmly believe that tomorrow holds the possibility for new technologies, astounding discoveries, and a reprieve from my obligations.**
- 6. I truly believe that all deadlines are unreasonable regardless of the amount of time given.**
- 7. I shall never forget that the probability of a miracle, though infinitesimally small, is not exactly zero.**
- 8. If at first I don't succeed, there is always next year.**
- 9. I shall always decide not to decide, unless of course I decide to change my mind.**
- 10. I shall always begin, start, initiate, take the first step, and/or write the first word, when I get around to it.**
- 11. I obey the law of inverse excuses which demands that the greater the task to be done, the more insignificant the work that must be done prior to beginning the greater task.**
- 12. I know that the work cycle is not plan/start/finish, but is wait/plan/plan.**
- 13. I will never put off until tomorrow, what I can forget about forever.**

Procrastinate on Procrastination

Procrastination

\Pro*cras`ti*na"tion\, n. The act or habit of putting off doing something, especially out of habitual carelessness or laziness.

Research conclusively shows that people must learn to handle procrastination better.

Our own research and that of leading universities from America indicates that management correctly assesses a major reason for poor productivity to the lack of time management skills within their organizations. In particular, procrastination and interruption top the list of personal productivity killers.

Here are some methods being used by major corporations to curb the time problems.

A doctor turned to his patient and said, "Bill, I have some bad news and some worse news." "Hold on now doctor", said the concerned patient, "I can handle bad news and good news but bad news and worse news?" The doctor asked which one he should share first. Bill wanted the bad news first. "Well", the doctor said sadly, "the results of all the tests are in and you only have 24 hours to live." "What? That's the bad news what could possibly be worse than that?" The doctor replied apologetically, "We

found out yesterday and forgot to tell you."

It is relatively easy to come up with many excuses for putting things off. We don't have the time right now. I will get around to it later. Let me sleep on it first. There is lots of time to do that this weekend. Why do we procrastinate?

The reason is quite simple! It is easy to put off the unpleasant, difficult and time-consuming tasks. In essence, procrastination is nothing more than a time waster. It causes many more headaches than it cures. Think right now of all the small tedious things you have procrastinated about in the past week, month, year, decade. They are all cramping your brain.

So we only do those tasks that scream the most, as it were. We rush to finish them. The minute we lick the envelope we notice we forgot to insert the letter. We start cooking hamburgers only to remember the B.B.Q. gas tank is empty. There is a cure for procrastination! Look in a mirror and you will see the cure. The only person who will manage you is You!

Procrastination test

For each question, circle T or F as it applies to your behavior right now. If you have trouble choosing true or false, pick the one that best fits your most recent experience.

- T F 1. I often find myself performing tasks that I intended to do days before.
- T F 2. I often miss concerts, sporting events, or the like because I don't get around to buying the tickets on time.
- T F 3. When planning a party, I make the necessary arrangements well in advance.
- T F 4. When it is time to get up in the morning, I most often get right out of bed
- T F 5. A letter may sit for days after I write it before I mail it.
- T F 6. I generally return phone calls promptly.
- T F 7. Even with jobs that require little else except sitting down and doing them, I find they often don't get done for days.
- T F 8. I usually make decisions as soon as possible.
- T F 9. I generally delay before starting on work I have to do.
- T F 10. When traveling, I usually have to rush in preparing to arrive at the airport or station at the appropriate time.
- T F 11. When preparing to go out, I am seldom caught having to do something at the last minute.
- T F 12. In preparing for some deadline, I often waste time by doing other things.
- T F 13. If a bill for a small amount comes, I pay it right away.
- T F 14. I usually return an RSVP request very shortly after receiving the invitation.
- T F 15. I often have a task finished sooner than necessary.
- T F 16. I always seem to end up shopping for birthday or Christmas gifts at the last minute.

- T F 17. I usually buy even an essential item at the last minute.
- T F 18. I usually accomplish all the things I plan to do in a day.
- T F 19. I am continually saying "I'll do it tomorrow."
- T F 20. I usually take care of all the tasks I have to do before I settle down and relax for the evening.

Scoring:

Give yourself one point for questions 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17 and 19 that you answered true. Give yourself one point each for questions 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, and 20 that you answered false. Add up the points. If your total score is 9 or more, you are above average in your tendency to procrastinate. If your score is 13 or above, you are having extreme difficulty with procrastination.

Procrastination is a strange phenomenon.

It often seems to be a good solution for making life more enjoyable (by delaying unpleasant responsibilities). But procrastination almost invariably works to make things ultimately more difficult and stressful. And it is a rare individual that escapes the dark hand of procrastination. Many people struggle for years to free themselves from its chains in order to forge ahead towards academic success, fulfilling relationships, a clean house, or a muscular body.

Most people understand that they will feel better once their duties are done, but the human brain is infinitely complex and procrastination is not an easy monster to beat. It is not necessarily the result of laziness or lack of self-discipline, but can be rooted in a multiplicity of causes. And determining why you procrastinate is the best way to eradicate it from your list of habits. Once you've learned why you put things off, you can deal with the real issues at hand and finally learn to face work and school, to deal with relationships, to tackle household chores, and to face personal issues head on. With a good attitude, faith, and perseverance, this is a battle that can be won!

*"In a moment of decision,
the best thing you can do is the right thing to do.
The worst thing you can do is nothing."*

Theodore Roosevelt

Strategies for Success

Procrastination Strategy 1: START THE TASK

Get going, even if you have failed at it in the past. If you want to win, you must begin. This seems obvious but if you have been procrastinating at something just make a start at it and you will have begun the process of success.

Procrastination Strategy 2: BLOCK OFF TIME.

Chances are very remote that you will ever get done without it getting scheduled into your calendar. We procrastinate for ever because we don't block off the necessary time to finish the job.

Procrastination Strategy 3: SEE THE JOB IN BITE SIZED PIECES.

You will never start losing weight if you see the whole project in one lump sum. An alcoholic would have difficulty picturing himself not drinking for the rest of his/her life. They can handle not drinking for this 24 hour period. "One day at a time" is a popular slogan among self-help groups.

Procrastination Strategy 4: ADOPT A "DO IT NOW" MENTALITY.

People who conquer procrastination problems learn to become "Do It Now'ers". They never wait until tomorrow to do what they know should be done today. They put things back after each use. They refuse to delay.

Procrastination Strategy 5: SET UP OBJECTIVES

We already discussed the need for objectives in life but it bears repeating here as it affects the procrastination dilemma. Set a goal to accomplish something you have procrastinated doing.

Simplify your life. You do not need all the clutter you are holding on to. Get rid of it now because it is stealing your energy. The clutter in your life takes energy to maintain. Start with the smallest things. Clear away a little and you'll be amazed at the vast amounts of energy it releases inside of you.

- John Roger

Procrastination Strategy 6: REVIEW ACCOMPLISHMENTS.

Winners in life dwell on their successes. Losers constantly focus in on their failures. It is of value to remind yourself of areas you have succeeded in winning the procrastination game.

Procrastination Strategy 7: REWARD OR PUNISH YOURSELF.

Now I am not espousing deviant behavior by suggesting you conquer procrastination problems by punishing yourself. What I am suggesting is that you find some way of punishing negative behaviors like not doing things you said you would do.

One manager I know buys all his staff lunch, out of his own pocket, if he does not have his reports in on time. If he promises to deliver something and

procrastinates, he has to fork out cash and for him this is negative reinforcement for negative behavior.

Similarly if you have succeeded in doing a task you have long procrastinated in

doing, reward yourself. We tend to repeat those behaviors with positive reinforcements and shun the negatives reinforcers.

ELEVEN TIPS TO CONQUER PAPER CLUTTER

- Feed your wastebasket
- Get rid of what you don't need
- Skim material as soon as it arrives
- Don't even skim junk mail; just toss it
- Pass on to the appropriate person any papers someone else can handle
- Find a place for everything worth keeping and put the papers where they belong
- Realize the world won't end if you get rid of it
- Recycle it
- Ask yourself: Do you really want to be caretaker of this paper?
- Do you really want to devote precious space to this?
- Handle each piece of paper only once
- Get rid of it

60 PRACTICAL TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

1. When cleaning out closets, storerooms etc, label three cartons "scrap", "give away", and "keep".
2. If you haven't used something for over a year, don't let it take up prime space.
3. Schedule a "quiet hour" each day and consider it non-negotiable.
4. Don't let others infringe on your valuable "prime-time".
5. Each evening get out everything you will need in the morning.
6. Use your planning calendar to schedule your "to do" lists.
7. Schedule "appointments" with yourself.
8. Have an office in your home for writing and filing.
9. Take advantage of self-inking stamps to save time.

10. Delegate whenever possible.
11. Get things done during commuting time.
12. Make up casseroles in double quantity and freeze them.
13. Throw out as much correspondence and other paperwork as possible.
14. Store jewelry in egg cartons inside a drawer.
15. Maintain a stock of frequently used items such as paper goods, light-bulbs, garbage bags, paper clips, post it's.
16. Make minor decisions quickly.
17. Don't waste time agonizing after decisions.
18. Store items close to where they will be used. Duplicate where necessary.
19. Clean the bathtub during a shower. It is easier working from the inside.
20. Keep desk supplies in your briefcase or car for those unpredictable delays and waiting periods.
21. Say "no" more often. Stop volunteering for everything.
22. Don't keep shuffling paper. Handle each one as it appears.
23. Start earlier in the morning.
24. Don't read passively. Search for ideas. Use highlighters. Make marginal notes.
25. Don't store magazines. Tear out or photocopy relevant articles.
26. Set a deadline on all tasks and stick to it.
27. Always carry a small scratch pad with you for note taking.
28. Plan in advance your TV viewing time. It can be a real time robber.
29. Use colored labels to flag important dates in your planning calendar to highlight urgent requests that come up.
30. Carry a supply of "post-its" notes in your planning calendar.

31. Review "junk mail" during low energy times (i.e. the last 15 minutes of the day).
32. Take only carry on bags while traveling in airports. Delays occur when waiting for checked bags.
33. Use only transparent containers for leftovers so you can see what you have in the refrigerator.
34. When leaving a message to call you back, indicate the best time to call you back.
35. If the person you call is not there, try to get the information you need from someone else rather than leave a message to call back.
36. Keep paper and pen handy in every room.
37. Carry a portable "Trident" 3-hole punch (1 1/2" wide x 10 1/4" long x 3/8" thick) in your briefcase or meeting binder.
38. Record the time you must leave the house in your planning calendar when you must attend meetings some distance away.
39. Have more keys made than you think you'll need.
40. Don't be a slave to your telephone. Take messages during the dinner hour -- or ignore it completely.
41. Make doctor and dentist appointments first thing in the morning so you're ahead of the crowd.
42. Keep a supply of greeting cards and stamps on hand. Also gifts.
43. Put away materials immediately after use. Clean up the mess as it is generated.
44. Use a highlighter when reading letters, reports, etc., so you can mark those parts requiring action.
45. Always confirm appointments; don't assume the other person will remember.
46. Use stacking trays to sort mail as to bills, correspondence, junk mail.
47. Place color dots on all your credit cards for easy identification.
48. Photocopy sides of your credit cards (about nine per page) and leave a copy at your home and office as well as carry one with you.
49. Use driving time to listen to cassette tapes.

50. Record ideas from cassette tapes by dictating into a pocket recorder.
51. Keep a pocket recorder in your car for recording ideas, information, things to do, etc., as they occur to you.
52. Subscribe to newsletters related to your profession to cut down on reading time.
53. Color code your various keys with small plastic rings available in many stores to avoid fumbling for the right key.
54. Photocopy birth certificates, marriage certificates, etc., and keep them in your files.
55. Form the habit of taking your planning calendar with you wherever you go -- even on vacation. You can record those ports of call, favorite restaurants, hotels, people you meet, etc.
56. Store empty clothes' hangers to one side of the closet and use as required. Don't let them mix with used ones.
57. Keep a personal effect tote bag equipped with all personal items from toothbrush to travel hair dryer and use it only for traveling.
58. Find ways to delegate more.
59. Shorten telephone calls.
60. Phone instead of writing.

Procrastination Quotations

Abraham Lincoln:

The leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for to-morrow which can be done to-day.

Anne Frank:

How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.

John Andrew Holmes:

Speech is conveniently located midway between thought and action, where it often substitutes for both.

Mary Todd Lincoln:

My evil genius Procrastination has whispered me to tarry 'til a more convenient season.

Pearl S. Buck:

I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to work.

Procrastination: A hardening of the oughteries."

Anonymous

"I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."

Douglas Adams

"Anyone can do any amount of work providing it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at that moment."

Robert Benchley

"Nothing separates the generations more than music. By the time a child is eight or nine, he has developed a passion for his own music that is even stronger than his passions for procrastination and weird clothes."

Bill Cosby (1986, Fatherhood)

"Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday and avoiding today."

Wayne Dyer

"Work is the greatest thing in the world, so we should always save some of it for tomorrow."

Don Herold

"I like work: it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. ."

Jerome K. Jerome (Three Men in a Boat, 1889)

"Procrastination gives you something to look forward to."

Joan Konner

"I'm going to stop putting things off, starting tomorrow!"

Sam Levenson

"Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday."

Don Marquis (1927, Certain Maxims of Archy)

"Live, drink be, merry, love the reeling midnight through,

For tomorrow ye may die, but alas we never do."

Dorothy Parker

"Procrastination is my sin.
It brings me naught but sorrow.
I know that I should stop it.
In fact, I will - tomorrow!

Gloria Pitzer

"Procrastination and worry are the twin
thieves that will try to rob you of your
brilliance-but even the smallest action
will drive them from your camp."

Gil Atkinson

"If once a man indulges himself in
murder, very soon he comes to think
little of robbing; and from robbing he
next comes to drinking and Sabbath-
breaking, and from that to incivility and
procrastination."

Thomas Quincey

"We shall never have more time. We
have, and have always had, all the time
there is. No object is served in waiting
until next week or even until tomorrow.
Keep going day in and day out.
Concentrate on something useful.
Having decided to achieve a task,
achieve it at all costs."

Arnold Bennett

"Do nothing by halves which can be
done by quarters."

F. R. Scott (From his poem,
W.L.M.K.)

"This is as true in everyday life as it is in
battle: we are given one life and the
decision is ours whether to wait for
circumstances to make up our mind, or
whether to act, and in acting, to live."

General Omar Bradley

"Never put off till tomorrow, what you
can do the day after tomorrow."

Mark Twain

"Procrastination is the grave in which
opportunity is buried."

Anonymous

"Procrastination has robbed us of too
many opportunities"

Sarah Ban Breathnach

"When there is a hill to climb, don't
think that waiting will make it smaller."

Anonymous

"I don't wait for moods. You accomplish
nothing if you do that. Your mind must
know it has got to get down to work."

Pearl S. Buck

"Postpone not a good action."

Irish Proverb

"Know the true value of time; snatch,
seize, and enjoy every moment of it. No
idleness; no laziness; no procrastination;
never put off till tomorrow what you can
do today."

Lord Chesterfield

"Anger is the only thing to put off till
tomorrow."

Slovakian proverb

"Much of the stress that people feel
doesn't come from having too much to
do. It comes from not finishing what
they started."

David Allen

"Procrastination is one of the most
common and deadliest of diseases and its
toll on success and happiness is heavy."

Wayne Dyer (1997, The Ultimate
Success Quotations Library)

"Procrastination is a sin of lawyers, trial judges, reporters, appellate judges, in brief, everyone connected with the machinery of criminal law."

Macklin Fleming

"Even if you're on the right track - you'll get run over if you just sit there."

Arthur Godfrey

"Do you know what happens when you give a procrastinator a good idea? Nothing!"

Donald Gardner

"Don't wait. The time will never be just right."

Napoleon Hill

"When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that in itself is a choice."

William James

"Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today."

Thomas Jefferson

"Procrastination is opportunity's natural assassin.

Victor Kiam (1992, Quotable Business)

"The leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for to-morrow which can be done to-day..."

Abraham Lincoln

"My evil genius Procrastination has whispered me to tarry 'til a more convenient season."

Mary Todd Lincoln (June 1841, Her Life and Letters - 1972)

"Putting off an easy thing makes it hard, and putting off a hard one makes it impossible."

George H. Lorimer

"...who waits until circumstances completely favor his undertaking, will never accomplish anything."

Martin Luther

"Slaying the dragon of delay is no sport for the short-winded."

Sandra Day O'Connor

"Procrastination is like a credit card: it's a lot of fun until you get the bill."

Christopher Parker

"Until you value yourself, you will not value your time.

Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it."

M. Scott Peck

"Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live.

M. Scott Peck

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."

Will Rogers

"In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do. The worst thing you can do is nothing."

Theodore Roosevelt

"Nothing is as exhausting as indecision and nothing so futile"

Bertrand Russell

"In delay there lies no plenty."
William Shakespeare

"The greatest amount of wasted time is
the time not getting started."
Dawson Trotman

"The secret of getting ahead is getting
started. The secret of getting started is
breaking your complex overwhelming
tasks into small manageable tasks, and
then starting on the first one."
Mark Twain

"He who hesitates is last."
Mae West

"Do or do not do. There is no try."
Master Yoda

"He who puts off nothing till tomorrow
has done a great deal."
Baltasar Graci ? 1601-56)

"Nothing so perilous as procrastination"
John Lyly (1579, Eupheus)

"In the conduct of almost every affair
slowness and procrastination are hateful"
Mark Anthony (Philippics, 6.7)

"Do not put your work off till to-morrow
and the day after; for a sluggish worker
does not fill his barn, nor one who puts
off his work: industry makes work go
well, but a man who puts off work is
always at hand-grips with ruin."
Hesiod (Works and Days, l. 413)

"It is not because things are difficult that
we do not dare, it is because we do not
dare that they are difficult."
Seneca

"He who begun has half done. Dare to be
wise; begin."
Horace

"He who postpones the hour of living is
like the rustic who waits for the river to
run out before he crosses."
Horace

"Deliberando saepe perit occasio [The
opportunity often slips away while we
deliberate on it]."
Syrus

Gerry Robert is the best-selling author of *The Millionaire Mindset* and motivational speaker. Over 1 Million people have attended his live seminars.

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