

'Do it tomorrow' and other
strategies for managing
procrastination

What is it?

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXziurFkQxM>

Why do we do it?

- Procrastination is a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision

Neil Fiore, *The Now Habit*

Who are procrastinators?

- Typically, procrastinators are people who struggle with a strong fear of criticism as well as a fear of failure, which leads them to develop perfectionist tendencies
- Perfectionism and procrastination are closely linked

- They also, often, have a fear of success, because they suppose that if they succeed, the moment when they 'fail' is only coming nearer (the bar gets higher and higher, and they believe that inevitably, one day they will fail to meet their own standards) so they try to put off the moment when they find out what they are capable of.

It is **not** because we're

- Lazy
- Stupid
- Weak
- Lacking in discipline
- (In fact, its because we *believe* these things about ourselves that we procrastinate)

But we need to learn

- to manage our **time differently**
- how to **plan realistically**
- to plan to **take time off** everyday
- how to **talk to ourselves** about our work differently

Time Management

- Procrastinators often have a vague sense of time
- They *overestimate* how much time they have to do a task
- They *underestimate* how long it will take them to complete a task

Action 1: Learn where your time goes

- Keep a log for three to seven days to see what you actually do with your time
- Try not to judge yourself, simply record how long it takes you to do things
- Include everything you do

Time tracking tools

- There are free online time tracking tools that you might consider using, if that makes it easier for you.
- Some of these include Klok, Manic Time, RescueTime, and Project Hamster.

Question:

- We have 24 hours in a day and during that time, at a minimum, we have to sleep, shower, eat and travel from one place to another: how many hours do you think are actually available for you to work in a day?

Action 2: Learn what your work units are

- The next key to planning your work realistically is to know how long each of your basic tasks takes
- How many pages can you read in 45 minutes?
- How many words can you write in 45 minutes?
- (Is your basic unit of work 30, 45 or 60 minutes?)

Plan your work

- Once you have a better sense of your time, you can plan how to get your work done more realistically
- Knowing how long the tasks take is one part of the planning, breaking down the end goal into its smaller, achievable parts is another part.

Question:

- What are the component tasks of writing an essay?

But, remember, we're

- ***Not*** lazy
- ***Not*** stupid
- ***Not*** weak
- ***Not*** lacking in discipline
- So, in addition to learning about how much time we have and how to plan it we must ...

Plan to take time off

- Procrastinators often believe strongly that they (1) must be working all the time, (2) work in order to 'earn' what they really want (to socialize, enjoy hobbies, exercise), (3) think work *is* deprivation, and (4) feel guilty if they take time off for what they think are non-productive activities.

Action 3: Enjoy your life now!

- Socialize with your friends
- Make time for any hobbies you love to do
- Exercise
- Do whatever you love to do as a part of your regular day, not as a 'reward' for dragging yourself through your work

Talking to Yourself About Your Work

- Procrastinators talk to themselves in terms of being *forced by something outside them*
- *I have to*
- *I should*
- *This is really important*
- *It has to be done right*
- *I don't have time to do anything else*

- Talking to yourself about work in these ways reinforces feelings that you are not in control of your life and you cannot choose what to do.
- When you feel like a victim of your situation, you do what anyone would do and simply refuse to cooperate with the authority (even if that authority is one part of 'you' trying to handle another part of 'you').

- The hardest part of dealing with procrastination is learning to talk to yourself so work becomes something you choose or want to do.
- That might mean some difficult choices – do I really want to do this? Am I doing this because I want it, or I think I *should* want it?
- It might just mean reminding yourself of your own motivations.

Action 4: Notice *how* you think

- For a few days try to be aware of how you talk to yourself about the things you do, are you choosing them, or being 'forced' to do them?

Question:

- Can you reimagine your actions?
- You have an essay due on Friday. You begin by saying to yourself 'I have to hand in an essay' (meaning, left to myself I wouldn't, but the professor is making me). What else can you say to yourself?

Final Thoughts

- You don't have to be deprived, overworked or exhausted to feel you are doing a 'good' job.
- You are not your work. People will criticize (and grade) your work, but its not a judgment of your basic human worth.
- You can enjoy yourself now, and it will only help you to be more effective.

'Please do your best'

- In Japanese martial arts, the sensei will often say before practice or a match begins 'Onegai shimasu' which can be translated as 'Please do your best'
- Why does the sensei encourage us in this way?

Further reading

- Boice, Robert. *Procrastination and Blocking: A Novel, Practical Approach*. Praeger, 1996.
- Carroll, Michael. *Awake at Work*. Shambhala, 2006.
- Fiore, Neil. *The Now Habit*. Penguin, 1989.
- Forster, Mark. *Do It Tomorrow*. Hodder and Stoughton, 2006.
- Tharp, Twyla. *The Creative Habit*. Simon and Schuster, 2003.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar. *The Clockwork Muse*. Harvard University Press, 1999.

Internet resources

- <http://www.structuredprocrastination.com/blog/>
- <http://http-server.carleton.ca/~tpsychyl/>
- <http://zenhabits.net/>