

Procrastination

Before he died, Michael Landon reminded us, "Whatever you want to do, do it now – there are only so many tomorrows."

What it is

Along with fear, procrastination is the most common downfall to any goal. It also kills motivation: the energy behind your ideas and goals dissipates the more you procrastinate. All of the talent, great ideas and goal setting in the world cannot compete with procrastination.

"Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work."

— Stephen King

Everyone experiences procrastination to one degree or another. For some, it's a minor problem – something that causes us inconvenience at times. For others, it's a constant problem that causes lots of stress and anxiety, and prevents us from making a decision or moving forward with our goals and dreams.

Why you do it

Procrastination, when it comes to going after your goals, is usually borne out of fear. However, we like to tell ourselves that we are in control, and that we are *choosing* to put off the project, or that we're just too busy to get around to it. We can start any time, and things will be fine. Here are some all-star great excuses that you've probably heard – or even used – to explain why you haven't started working toward your goals:

- I'm just too busy
- I need a little bit more information
- I don't have the money to do it
- I need to read one more book
- I need to take a few more classes
- I don't have the experience
- I'm just not positive that that's what I want to do
- I can't decide which project to start on
- I don't know which project is the right one for me

But the fact is that we often have negative feelings about the task that we don't readily want to see or admit to. If you have negative feelings, you will always tend to put off or delay.

Here are some common reasons for procrastination and negative feelings:

1. The project seems too big. When things are too big, we don't know where to start – so we don't! We also feel overwhelmed because the project requires large blocks of time, which aren't always available.

The truth is that large blocks of time are hardly ever available. It's better to start small than not to start at all. If you're feeling unsure about where to start, try mind mapping or creating an outline. This is often just enough to get you over that "too big" feeling.

2. Fear of Failure. Ding ding! This is the most common reason for procrastination. After all, the safest way not to fail is not to try. Nobody wants to make mistakes, so we often feel afraid to start toward our goals for fear of being wrong or failing.

Reassure yourself that you can figure it out – that you can handle it! Try listing the reasons you think your goal might not work – usually this highlights the silliness of any further delay. If you have a real concern, ask for help!

Remember – the best way to learn something new is by doing it.

3. Perfectionism. When you put undue pressures on yourself to be perfect, it can make a new task overwhelming.

Often, just getting a start alleviates these tendencies. No one expects you to be perfect, and neither should you! What's most important is that you make a start toward your goals.

4. Difficult or unpleasant tasks
When part of achieving your goal is difficult or you don't like the task, you will always tend to put it off.

Tell yourself it won't be that bad, and remind yourself of your goal, and what you'll get for finishing the donkey work or stuff you don't like so much.

5. Simple habit. Sometimes procrastination is just a behavioral habit you are in. This happens when you respond to what is urgent, or to what seems easiest, instead of what is really important.

Paying the price

What you rob yourself of when you procrastinate is your enthusiasm and passion for your goal. As you wait, it's natural to start to doubt yourself. You spend your time thinking of reasons why your goal might not work, especially if it's a big one.

Other costs of procrastination are stress, anxiety, feeling helpless and feeling useless or undeserving.

Changing the Procrastination habit

"The most important key to achieving great success is to decide upon your goal, and launch, get started, take action, move." —Brian Tracey

Step 1: ACTION!

"Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy." —Dale Carnegie

All of the great ideas in the world can't beat an *average* idea that is acted upon. When you're having trouble getting started on a goal, start moving. Find a way to do something...*anything* toward your goal. Action kills procrastination.

Make a plan

This is often all it takes when something seems too big, too difficult, or when you're feeling paralyzed by perfection. A plan doesn't need to be complex - it can be a simple mind map, or a quick list of steps. This is effective because it requires you to take action. Making a plan gets you going, and gives you direction.

The Ten-Minute Rule

When you are having difficulty getting started on something, just commit to working only ten minutes. Usually, this is enough to get interested and get going on the project.

Decide to change

When faced with a time challenge, it's helpful to stop and ask yourself, "What would my normal behavior be?" Then, consciously decide to choose a better option.