



Dealing with Procrastination

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When I ask clients what they want to deal with, I often get the answer, “procrastination”, and sometimes “time management” goes with it. And quite often, just to prove the point, they will add how long they have been thinking about seeking help but not doing anything about it. In this article I want to talk about twelve methods to help you overcome procrastination. When I work with clients one-on-one, I can get very specific in understanding why they procrastinate and how to overcome it. I can’t do that here, but below I am going to give some general suggestions which many people find helpful.

1. We sometimes procrastinate because of fear of failure or overwhelm. The task to complete seems scary, or too hard to do. If that is the case, then break the task into small tasks. Whatever it is that you want to do, you can always subdivide it into smaller tasks. For example, if you want to get fit, then make one task – signing up at the gym – your task. When that is done then focus on the next task. Recognise and reward yourself after completing each small task.
2. The words of those around us can have a bigger impact on our motivation than we realise. Lots of people who procrastinate tell themselves, or have been told by others, they are lazy or lack self-discipline. Do not go there. It has no benefit whatsoever. If you find yourself starting to think like that then just stop. If you want to do something or feel you need to do something, then don’t beat yourself up about it. You will just make it harder to do and even more likely that you won’t do it. Saying things to yourself like, “I know you can do this”, “you have got this”, is going to have a better outcome for you.
3. Put up a picture or some visual of what the finished task will mean to you and how it will impact your life. Then look at the picture when you need to do the task. There are two aspects to this point. A visual that we see often can be a great reminder. Focusing on the benefits can also help you get into action and just do it. Activating the reward centres in the brain usually helps you start doing something.
4. Have an accountability “buddy”. Get people to contact you when you need to start and stop a task. You can do this with reminders (such as on your phone), but having people contact you usually works better. Commit to a report back to people on your daily progress. Having tools - electronic and visual - that track your actions and indicate percentage completion can also help.

5. Tell yourself you will just work for 5 minutes on the task. Then you can stop. This can help you start tasks if you battle to begin something. Very often once you have started something you want to keep on. Quite a few people have used this method to exercise. They loathe the idea of exercising, but after five minutes they have gotten into it and continue.
6. Remove distractions. Lock your phone away if you have to so you cannot scroll through social media or browse the internet. Turn off email notifications.
7. As with point 2 this is about your thinking. Change your thinking and stop telling yourself that you procrastinate or cannot complete tasks. Don't create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Stop telling yourself that this is going to be so hard or that you cannot do it or that you will hate doing it. You will just make it more difficult to do. Rather tell yourself that you can do it. People often do this at work when they have a huge volume of work to get through. Instead of starting on a small portion of the work, they put off starting by telling themselves how hard and how horrible and how impossible it will be to get through this. That is certainly unlikely to make you want to start the task.
8. Make the task harder. Yes, I also did a double take when I first came across this. But many people testify that it can and does work. Sometimes we are more motivated to complete a difficult or challenging task. If this is you, then make the task more challenging. Sometimes we really like getting stuck into a difficult task because the sense of satisfaction in completing it can be great.
9. Create a routine. This means get into a habit of doing certain tasks at certain times in the day. It is recommended a lot by professionals such as occupational therapists, and if you can do it then good. Because a lot of what we do every day is down to habit. The word routine alone seems to put a lot of people off, so it doesn't work for everyone, and I have seen people talk about setting routines for years and still never doing so.
10. Make the task interesting. Make it fun, exciting, or playful. Make it a competition. Change your working environment. Vary the tools you use for the task. I have never been able to study just reading material from the time I started school. I have always created visuals, produced diagrams, drawn pictures, etc, to learn material. When I do have to help people with studies, I suggest many different ways to learn including writing a poem or a song about the material to be learned. Make it different each time, especially if you like variety and get bored easily.
11. This may or may not work for you, but some people say cleaning up their working space does help. Others seem to do quite well with a messy office. Although if you have quite a lot of anxiety a messy office can make things worse.
12. Work with other people. Working on your own can be difficult if you procrastinate. Working with other people also working on tasks, especially if they are similar tasks to what you are doing, can help you start and complete tasks. Create a competition with others. Link a reward to an outcome. Set tough deadlines with others.

We live in a world that rewards action. Thinking is necessary, and so is reflection, if you want appropriate and beneficial action to be taken. However, at the end of the day, if you action nothing, you are not going to go anywhere fast. Actually, you are not going to go anywhere. At the end of the day all progress is ultimately due to action. And because of this, people who procrastinate are usually quite distressed by it. But you can do something about it. Make tasks really rewarding (in other words you experience completing the tasks as especially rewarding), and really fun and exciting. Play games or have competitions. There is no reason why work cannot be play. Get other people involved and have them support you or even do the tasks with you. Just stop procrastinating about dealing with your procrastination because it can hamper your progress in life a lot. And it doesn't have to.