

# The #1 Way to Overcome Procrastination

By Mary Anne Hahn

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"Never handle the same piece of paper twice."

This oft-heard bit of advice kept swimming through my thoughts as I stared at the piece of paper in front of me, wondering what on earth to do with it. Not that this was the first time I'd touched this particular piece of paper. Not the second, nor the third. In fact, I'd tossed this sucker back into my in-bin several times during the last two months.

The time had come to do something with it.

But what? I'd already asked my boss for clarification on the assignment--twice. And who knew how many minutes I'd spent, on and off, studying it, mulling over it, and feeling guilty about not doing anything with it. It had become my nemesis, this piece of paper. How could I make it disappear, once and for all? Why did I keep procrastinating on this one task?

That's when it hit me. Maybe I had at last asked myself the right question. Instead of "what do I do with this?", perhaps the real question was "why am I \*not\* doing this?"

Intrigued by this new insight, I looked at the piece of paper again. Within seconds, the answer came to me. I kept putting this task off because I simply didn't have enough information to complete it. And asking my boss for assistance hadn't helped because she wasn't a subject matter expert on this topic, either. But I did know someone who was, and I knew that person would be more than happy to help me.

I was finally on my way to making that piece of paper go away. Moreover, I'd learned a very important lesson on how to deal with procrastination in the process.

During my research on this topic, I discovered an article by Dr. Kent T. Yamauchi at Virginia Tech, in which he listed three main causes for procrastination: inadequacy, discomfort and perfectionism. On top of this, the tendency to procrastinate something often increases exponentially with our desire to complete it; therefore, the more important the goal is to our feeling of success and well-being, the

more reasons we find to put off doing it.

So here we are, many of us, putting off returning to school, or writing that book, or starting our business, or whatever it is that we resolve year after year to do--but don't.

So how do you overcome this powerful procrastination tendency?

By asking yourself \*why\* you keep doing it. Is it because you feel inadequate to complete the task? Or does thinking about doing it make you uncomfortable? Or do you feel that if you can't do something perfectly, you don't want to do it at all? Once you understand the "why" behind procrastinating, you've taken a major first step towards dealing with it.

In my situation with that miserable piece of paper, I'd felt inadequate to perform the task correctly. I needed more information. Once I realized that, I was able to take steps to get the information I needed, and the urge to put the task off disappeared.

What if I had realized instead that I was uncomfortable performing the task? Let's say the assignment was something that struck me as unethical, or that I perceived would cause me harm or embarrassment. Again, had I come to these realizations, I would better know what steps to take to address them. Maybe I would have expressed these concerns to my boss, instead of simply asking her for clarification, or perhaps I would have suggested that it be reassigned to someone more capable of performing it safely.

As for perfectionism...this is perhaps the most potent cause for procrastination. While striving to do one's very best in each endeavor is admirable, settling for nothing less than perfect stops us from even trying. At the 1976 Olympics Nadia Comaneci made history, becoming the first gymnast to ever score a perfect 10. Could she have achieved such an accomplishment without a great deal of efforts, or thousands of hours of practice? Of course not.

So, if you're putting off something that means a great deal to you, ask yourself: Is it because you feel inadequate to perform it? Then turn to those who can help you sharpen your skills. Does the task cause you discomfort? Perhaps you need to break it down into smaller tasks, until you can build up a comfort level that allows you to try something greater. Are you a perfectionist? Recognize the truth in "practice makes perfect," and practice, practice, practice.

And one more thing--try not to ever handle the same piece of paper twice.

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Mary Anne Hahn is a freelance writer who wants to encourage others to follow their dreams. If you're looking to start an online business on a shoestring budget, she invites you to join her at <http://goalsetter.buildreferrals.com> , or email her for more information, mailto: [goalsetter@buildreferrals.net](mailto:goalsetter@buildreferrals.net) .

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