

# Sweating Right Up to the Last Minute: Battling Procrastination

By Peggy Duncan

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If you're waiting until the last minute to complete an assignment because you like that rush you get from being under pressure, and you think that's when you do your best work, think again.

While it may be true that you'll finish the work quicker because the pressure makes you move faster, is it that you're finishing the work because you've done your best, or are you ending the work because you've run out of time? Did you have time to put the finishing touches on it, or did you raise the bar, taking your work to a new level? Probably not.

Instead, you threw something together, was satisfied with mediocre, took chances that nothing would go wrong, created a lot of unnecessary stress for yourself, and then plopped down to start procrastinating all over again.

## Breaking the Habit

Procrastination is a habit that can be broken. You just have to get out of the habit of procrastinating, and get into the habit of doing the work. Instead of agonizing over the thought of doing the work, and concocting every conceivable reason not to start, there are some things you can do right now to help you end this madness.

How organized are you? Getting organized will help any situation. You might be jotting down ideas on sticky notes, various note pads, dinner napkins, and everything else that was nearby when you'd had a thought. If only you could find them now. You've perhaps spent time pulling together articles and reference material for a special report, but have no idea where they are. You walk into your office only to be greeted by mountains of incomplete work. Before you can even get started, you're already overwhelmed. You'll look for any excuse not to do the work.

Get organized so you can find everything when you need it and have a clear mind to get it done.

Do you have the skills to do the work? Often, you're given an assignment that you might lack the skills to do. If you have to write a report but you're not very confident about your writing abilities, the thought of creating it will make you miserable.

Not having the proper skills for a task makes you less self-confident, and that will make you procrastinate. Try delegating or outsourcing this project to someone better suited to it. Then, enroll in a business writing class to improve your skills.

Separate the excitement of the rush from procrastination and replace it with something else.

Procrastination is not something that should give you pleasure. Replace the feeling of excitement from the rush that procrastination gives you with the excitement of learning something new. Or replace it with the excitement of having time to do something you really want to do because you've planned everything so well, and have all under control.

Procrastination causes unnecessary stress and makes you vulnerable if the slightest thing goes wrong. It is not your friend.

Look at the task differently. Instead of looking at the project as one huge job, and being overwhelmed by it, break it up into smaller projects, and set deadlines for each phase. You should also schedule time on your calendar for a project just as you would a meeting.

Setting deadlines, even when you're working on a project alone, gives you a goal to work toward. You could even tell a co-worker that you'd like to discuss each phase of the project with him or her, and give specific dates you'd like to meet. Your co-worker might not know anything about what you're doing (or care), but your putting deadlines in place will help you get started and will keep you motivated.

Could technology make the job easier? Computer software has been written to perform absolute magic. If you know how to use it the right way, you'll be able to complete the work much faster and can easily turn a full-day project into something finished in minutes.

You might not like that type of work. When it's something you don't like to do but have to do, don't spend your valuable time agonizing over it. Schedule time on your calendar to do it so you can get it over with and off your mind.

To break the procrastination habit, get as creative in coming up with ideas of how to get the work done as you are in thinking of reasons not to do it. Planning ahead and getting everything you need to complete the job, including acquiring the right skills, will help you reduce the stress caused by it.

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Peggy Duncan conducts lively productivity workshops on organization, time management, and technology. She's the author of Put Time Management to Work and Just Show Me Which Button to Click! (PSC Press). Visit her online for more tips, and subscribe to her free Webzine at <http://www.peggyduncan.com> .

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