

Four Reasons Why We Procrastinate

By Carol Halsey

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Have you ever spent time thinking about a task you need to tackle but keep putting off, then spend time telling yourself you just must get started and wondering when you will start it, and then feeling guilty because you are working on other tasks instead. Yet this one keeps hanging over your head. If this sounds familiar, you may be one of the many people who procrastinate, and procrastination is probably the biggest time waster.

Putting off the inevitable, sometimes until a deadline is staring you in the face, causes the highest stress level, and results in managing time by crises. There are many reasons why people procrastinate. For some it happens occasionally under specific circumstances, and for others, it is a way of life. Here we will explore a few of the reasons behind why people procrastinate.

1. Poor work habits. These people procrastinate on everything. They are so far behind that they are constantly trying to keep up with yesterday. Boy, talk about high stress!! Their response is usually, "I work best under pressure." If the truth be known, they are poor organizers and have trouble prioritizing tasks and scheduling their time. It is easier to wait until the last minute to start a task because in their mind it is now important.
2. Feeling overwhelmed. When we don't know how to do something, it is easier not to do anything at all. Or maybe we feel it would be too time consuming to learn what is needed to accomplish a particular task. It seems like it would take forever to complete. This is the time to break the task down into manageable parts. Decide a starting point and work for short periods of time, say 10 to 20 minutes. Then check off each part as completed. This imparts the feeling of accomplishment as work is being completed.
3. Trying to be perfect. What may be the goal of the perfectionist may well be looked on by others as nitpicking. Perfectionists usually see their responsibilities as burdens, making it more difficult for them to accomplish tasks in a timely manner. They start tasks but put off completion until it meets their standards for perfection. However, these standards are most likely not recognized or appreciated by others, and thereby the perfectionist has wasted a lot of time to accomplish the unnecessary.

The perfectionist could strive for excellence rather than perfection. Excellence is defined as "very good of its kind" or "high-quality performance." Perfection is defined as "the condition of being flawless" which is not impossible, but most unlikely to achieve. Focus on what is realistic rather than what is ideal. Do the best you can in the time allowed. The time investment should be appropriate to the magnitude of the task or project.

4. Rather do something else. Unfortunately, we all dislike certain tasks that we have to do anyway. It could be filing, expense reports, or writing a report. So we keep putting it off, wishing it would go away. Think what would happen by delaying all unpleasant duties. After a while, their numbers build up to where that's all there is to do. Then everything is unpleasant. Consider the consequences of not doing the unpleasant task. Recognize that it will not go away, but just delaying the inevitable.

Identify why you procrastinate on a particular task or project - do you hate it, are you feeling overwhelmed by a pending deadline, have a fear of failure, or are you just waiting for the 'right time' to start. Try setting aside a half hour a day to get started on whatever you are putting off. By working a half hour at a time, you will overcome the overwhelmed feeling and increase the momentum to work faster.

Consider the risks of waiting for that last minute 'high.' What if you got sick, priorities changed, or an unexpected crises or event developed. Recall the nightmare experienced the last time you procrastinated until the last minute.

When we procrastinate, we get behind before we even start, and create a major time problem.

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