

LATER NEVER COMES

Strategies To Combat Procrastination

Procrastination is one of the main causes of poor time management. The definition of procrastination is, “to postpone or delay action needlessly.” Notice that the definition doesn’t say “to postpone or delay for a valid or logical reason”. The defining word is **needlessly**. Sometimes there is good reason to delay an action or a decision, such as if you don’t have enough information, or if something else has to happen first in the logical order of things.

For example, if you were redecorating your home, you would put off laying new carpet until after you’ve painted, to avoid getting paint on the new carpet. Putting off laying the carpet isn’t procrastinating, it’s sequencing a series of actions in the most logical order. Call it deliberate procrastination, if you will. It’s putting off a task until a more logical time.

True procrastination plays a huge part in the poor use of time and in disorganization. What you put off for “later” ultimately becomes a less important priority as time goes on, but in reality may become even more urgent. When you’re in the habit of procrastinating (and it is a bad habit just like any other), you start and continually add to a “mental pile” of items to do later. They often end up languishing there and they eventually become buried in more and more things that you’ve put off until later.

Most people procrastinate to some degree now and again. However, if you are procrastinating to the point that it is negatively affecting your work, your relationships, or your peace of mind, consider that it may be time to address the problem. Here are five ways to combat the procrastination monster.

Visualize Success

Vividly imagine yourself doing the thing you don’t want to do. Imagine the steps you’ll be taking to complete the task. See yourself getting it done easily and quickly, step by step, without any glitches or snags. Positive imagery will help you to create a picture of ease and success in your mind instead of the negative images you’ve unconsciously been carrying around about the task. Imagine the positive feeling of accomplishment you’ll have when the task is complete.

Vocalize And Change Your Self-Talk

Speak to yourself in the third person and confront yourself as you would another person. Say such things as, “You know you’re just putting this off. Take the time right now and get it done. You’ll feel better and you won’t have to deal with it later.” Hearing your own voice telling you to do something helps confirm that you are indeed procrastinating and you’re not fooling anyone, as well as helps to clarify the reasons why it’s important to get the task done now. Vocalizing can help you break the procrastination habit.

The tape that plays in your head all day every day is your self-talk. It has been created from your experiences and interactions over many years and whether you realize it or believe it, it controls your attitude, your beliefs and ultimately your actions.

The first step to being able to change a problem is to become aware of the problem. In order to change your self-talk, you must become aware that it exists and what it is saying to you. It speaks in a very quiet but powerful voice, so you'll have to listen closely to it and really tune into your gut to know what it's saying to you. Here's a hint: Your self-talk, left to its own devices, is almost never a positive voice which builds your confidence.

Self-talk is usually self-defeating, negative, and it holds you back from doing the things you could do and being the kind of person you could be. It quietly and consistently tells you things such as, "you can't do that", "you're not smart enough for that job", "you don't know how to meet people", "you can't write a book" and so on.

The reason negative self-talk is so successful at keeping you from achieving or changing your habits is because it's sneaky. You probably don't even hear it talking to you, and that's why it works. The bad news about self-talk is that it's an insidious, evil little voice that wants you to fail. The good news is that once you tune into it and can really identify how it stymies you, you can opt to reprogram that little voice to help you!

Tuning into the voice requires some heightened awareness on your part. Every time you have an opportunity to procrastinate, your self-talk kicks into high gear because it has always been successful at talking you into putting things off for later. It must be, otherwise, you wouldn't be a procrastinator, would you?

When you are about to put something off, I want you to get tuned in to what your head is saying to you. Try to get to the underlying meaning of the feelings you feel and the words that are flying around in your brain. Examine your feelings and make a note whether you feel fear, despair, annoyance, overwhelm, sadness, or intimidation. Try to key into that feeling and recognize it for the unreality that it is.

Once you recognize it, you then have the power to change it. If your self-talk is saying, "that's too hard for me to do", be aware of it and then rephrase that thought. You could say "I'm smart and it's not too hard for me." If you hear your self-talk saying "I'm too tired right now" you could counter with, "If I do this now I'll have the enjoyment of resting later!" If you hear your self-talk saying, "let's not start that, we won't finish it anyway", you could say, "the quicker I start, the quicker I am done!"

When you begin to rephrase your self-talk, be sure you choose positive statements rather than negative ones. If you hear your self-talk saying, "you're shy", say to yourself, "I am outgoing and can meet people easily" rather than "I'm not shy." Avoid the words NO, NOT, DON'T, WON'T, and other negatives. The subconscious acts most powerfully on words which have a positive nature.

Once you get accustomed to listening to your self-talk, you'll be amazed at how great it feels to counter it by using positive rephrasing. Once you've begun the positive rephrasing, then it will become a habit for you just like the procrastination had become a habit. So if you can change your thinking, you can change your actions, which means you change your results.

Get Into Action

When you find yourself procrastinating, get your body into action, even if your mind hasn't caught up with you yet. Inertia is the law of physics which says "a body in motion tends to stay in motion". If you can just force yourself to take the first step and begin the physical ACTIONS that it takes to do the task, inertia will often take over and you'll finish the task before you realize it. Don't worry if your brain is screaming at you to sit down and watch television or go check email, just use the power of your mind to force your body to begin going through the motions of doing a task, and your mind will eventually follow. Once you create a habit of getting into action regardless of what the procrastinating voices in your mind are telling you, you can beat procrastination.

Make A Deal

Give yourself permission to receive a reward when you do a task without putting it off, but not until then. For example, "After I clean out the refrigerator, I can have lunch" or "After I've finished painting those chairs, I can take a nap and get an ice cream." Set up an incentive for yourself that will motivate you to get the task done quickly so you can receive your reward.

S.O.S.

Enlist some help from a friend with the things you just can't bear to do alone. This concept of buddying up to complete undesirable tasks is why my business of professional organizing thrives. People respond to encouragement and accountability to someone else, and just like exercising with a buddy is usually more successful than exercising alone, so is doing any other thing you don't want to do. If you can get some help, the task will go quicker and be more fun.

When you recognize that you're in the procrastination habit, being aware of it is the first step to conquering it. By using the strategies outlined above, you will be well on your way to making powerful and positive changes in your life and being more effective.

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