

Procrastination

We will explore procrastination and how it can hinder our effectiveness. Procrastination is when you carry out less important tasks in preference to the ones you should be working on, or doing jobs that you find more enjoyable in place of the ones you dislike. This often results in putting off tasks and jobs to a later time, and doing them at the last minute.

Why Do We Resist Change?

Procrastination often occurs when we are required to change. Rearranging the office, starting a diet, giving up smoking, all become tomorrow's activities. If you are surrounded by incomplete projects, you may also feel a lack of accomplishment. This may result in losing opportunities, and you experiencing the emotional consequences, or the feeling of being irresponsible. So why don't you just act effectively and rid yourself of these problems?

We are complex and inventive creatures who do not always act for our own self-interest or in a rational manner. We can, and do, distract ourselves from our problems and reconstruct them so that they are temporarily more digestible. There are various forms of procrastination diversions and if you can identify which are your most common patterns, you can then correct them and change your behaviour.

Action Diversions

Action diversions involve substituting a lower priority activity for legitimate maintenance or development work.

Emotional Diversions

Waiting for the moment of inspiration to strike, or waiting until they 'feel right'. You do not have to feel inspired to get things done! Feeling inspired is not necessary to scrub a dirty floor or face up to a difficult confrontation!

Mental Diversions

This is sometimes known as the "*manana* ploy", putting off what you could do today until tomorrow. The contingency *manana* ploy is even more sophisticated; you make one action dependent upon the other, so you put off the preliminary action.

The Catch-22 ploy is even more pernicious. Here you quit before you begin, essentially because you have created an impossible situation for yourself.

How to Stop Procrastination

Action Change Steps

Start with clear, measurable, achievable goals – it is better to say you are going to work on your income tax return for a few hours each Saturday morning in March, than to say you are going to stop paying your taxes!

Take a 'bits and pieces' approach – even the most complex of tasks have simple beginnings. Break the activity down so that you can tackle each phase with a reasonable expectation of success.

Use the five-minute method – begin by committing five minutes concentrated effort to get started and then do it. Carry on committing an ever-growing small proportion of time, until you reach the end.

Emotional Change Steps

By setting perfectionist level standards, you can depress yourself by being unable to achieve them. Set realistic and pragmatic standards.

Mental Change Steps

Listen to what you say, in particular where you start to procrastinate. Challenge these thoughts by pushing yourself into problem solving actions and self-visualisation – visualise yourself managing the task in hand.

Conclusions

Procrastination is not always a simple act of putting something off. It is often a symptom of self-doubt, discomfort-dodging and perhaps irrational guilt. It can be a defence against the fear of failure and a well-practised problem habit! Take a broader view and always consider why you are procrastinating and look to overcome it.

Techniques to Manage Procrastination

- Accept procrastination as a normal human behaviour
- Be realistic – only prioritise a couple of tasks or goals each day
- Create a schedule that allows for unanticipated events – such as computer crashes, mistakes, distractions
- Forgive yourself if you don't complete all the tasks on your to-do list

- Choose a level that is 'good-enough' for each task
- Give yourself a break and schedule time to socialise (network!)
- Set priorities and focus on one project at a time.
- Break tasks into separate small steps
- Reward yourself when you accomplish a goal
- Use a time management system, diary, notebook, etc.
- Optimise your chances of success
- Get organised
- Do it now (Only handle it once)
- Just get started!

If you use these techniques and understand your personal procrastination actions, it will ensure that you increase your personal effectiveness

