

LEADERSHIP

How to Stop Procrastinating--Now

5 strategies to help you beat one of the most common time killers

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Putting things off for another day is one of the things millions of us know how to do well, but it creates anxiety, low-quality work and missed deadlines.

Researchers and psychologists have come up with many reasons we procrastinate. Instead of fixating on why (years of therapy could give you an answer), its best to find ways to manage it.

Here are some common and not-so-common tips to beat procrastination:

1. **Sometimes it's good to wait.** Yes, it's counterintuitive, but some people do their very best work at the last minute. The danger is that some think they do well in the eleventh hour and they really don't. In the real world, you don't get to decide whether or not your work is excellent--others do.

Strategy: Listen for clues about the quality of your rushed work to find out how good it really is. If you have the appropriate relationship, ask clients and colleagues about the quality of your work (they don't need to know it's last minute, so that they won't place a value judgment on it). Listen to them. If they indicate that your work is sub-par, procrastination is a career limiter for you. If they like it and you can put up with the anxiety of rushing around as the deadline looms, procrastinate to your heart's

content.

- 2. It becomes an addiction.** Don't confuse the massive relief of finally getting something done with the high you get from doing a good job. One is the release of adrenalin along with the negative stressor hormone cortisol (relief), and the other is fueled by the pleasure hormone dopamine (job well done). Over time, you can become addicted to building anxiety so you can relieve it because it mimics pleasure, but it's not the same. Cortisol created from anxiety will eat you alive, and ultimately, it's a bad long-term strategy.

Strategy: Set your clock 15 minutes ahead. Set your due date a week ahead on the calendar. Trick yourself into believing that those new deadlines are real. Over time, you will adapt to the earlier schedule and act as if the deadlines are real. If you're a serial procrastinator and you take this tact, you'll actually give yourself some leeway to re-do bad work.

- 3. Incubation.** One of the most fundamental elements of creating insight and innovative thinking is a process called incubation. It's when you begin a project and then put it away for a period of time. Give yourself time to do this and you'll beat your competition with your thorough thinking and whizz-bang proposals.

Strategy: Put the project aside for a few hours or even a week. Think about it, but don't actively get back into the project. When you come back to it, your brain will usually have made connections it didn't formulate before. This makes your work more profound, robust and better overall. You can't do this if you wait until the last minute.

- 4. Someone to watch over you.** We are less likely to procrastinate if we know there's accountability.

Strategy: I have my office manager send me a weekly update of all the things I owe her or that I said I would get done. She holds me to them and has permission to nag me about them. She puts things on the list beginning about one month from their due date. She lists them in order of priority. It works like a charm. Sometimes we need someone else to help us stay on track.

5. **Get Started.** Action precedes motivation. That means you have to start something before you can really get motivated to get into it. You've experienced this. You start to clean out a drawer because you couldn't find something. Before you know it, every drawer around is tidy.

Strategy: I'm not sure what you put off to read this article. But we're done here. So get to it.