

What does procrastination cost you?

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It's Monday night. My column's not due until Thursday. What could possibly have possessed me to start now? The ideas will flow better Wednesday. It can wait – I know I am busy Wednesday all day, but I still have the evening. And really, I can write it Thursday. It's OK as long as it's there Friday morning.... Shoot, now my partner's threatening to write the damn thing if I don't get started. I was just looking at a few websites on the internet!

Sound familiar? How many stories do you make up to put off doing necessary work? We all seem to procrastinate at some level. In extreme cases our procrastination can be debilitating. Most of us lose some freedom and choice.

So why don't we create the sense of peace that comes from doing things in a timely fashion more frequently? Much has been written about why we procrastinate. Which of the reasons below resonate for you?

- perfectionism: waiting until you can get it just right
- poor time management: feeling overwhelmed and worrying about getting the task done rather than actually doing it
- self-sabotage: when you don't feel comfortable with success you can take steps to sabotage yourself in order to become less successful and less visible
- fear and anxiety: someone may find out you don't really know what you're doing
- finding the task boring: just not wanting to do something you don't like much
- working better under pressure: when you get positive feedback about your work, the habit of doing things last minute is reinforced, along with your high level of anxiety
- manipulating others: gaining a sense of power and control in knowing that no one else can move forward while they wait on you completing a task

Whatever your reasons, practicing procrastination can lead you to feel weak, useless, or helpless. Like any habit, the more you do it the easier it gets, creating a downward spiral of negative feelings.

So, how to beat the procrastination bug? Behaviour modification! You don't procrastinate about everything right? You make sure to get to your weekly soccer game on time. You check your email daily. You brush your teeth before bed. These are behaviours you have developed based on your values.

Here are some tricks for beating procrastination:

- *Look at how you procrastinate:* What stories are you making up? What reasons do you give yourself for not doing something today? Now make up the counter argument. What are some good reasons for doing it now? You be the judge – which argument do you prefer?
- *Get started:* Take 5 minutes and start the miserable task you're avoiding. I always chuckle when the whole task actually only takes these 5 minutes to complete. How many minutes or hours did I worry before doing something? Often once you're engaged you will be able to continue to work and get the task finished.
- *Do a small part of the task:* Maybe this really *is* going to take a few hours. Break the task down. Do some today. Reward yourself and continue the work tomorrow.
- *Set priorities in accordance with your values:* What is important to you about getting your work done in a timely fashion?
- *Tell on yourself:* Let some colleagues know the shameful way you have ignored a file and let peer pressure work on you.
- *Set a meeting:* Nothing like promising the senior partner or a client that you'll have a task done for discussion at an upcoming meeting. A good way to train yourself out of procrastination is to always schedule the next meeting or phone call before the current one ends. Try some "false" deadlines to get things moving.
- *Create a buddy system:* Work with a friend to power through some overdue work. Call each other every hour to share your progress and take a rewarding break.
- *Expect some back sliding:* Remember, you're trying to break a habit. Don't beat yourself up if the change doesn't happen overnight.

Imagine the possibilities of feeling in control and on top of things more. Heh, it's still Monday night – and I am done. Now I can play on Wednesday evening!