

Overcome Procrastination!
National Procrastination Week ~~ First full week in March

Mark Twain had grown skeptical of would-be inventors after he lost a considerable fortune by investing in glittering, sure thing schemes. One afternoon, Twain spotted a tall, thin man with kindly blue eyes and an eager face, coming up the path with a strange contraption under his arm. It was an invention, the man explained. Twain listened, but shook his head, saying he had been burned too often and the invention just didn't make sense to him. So the tall man turned and walked back up the pathway. "What did you say your name is?" Twain called. "Bell," the inventor said sadly, "Alexander Graham Bell."

Opportunities come knocking at your door in a multitude of ways – some as gentle as a wave upon the sand and others as turbulent as a tidal wave. These moments hit you when you least expect or want them. Learn to accept them. If you turn your back you just might be missing a wonderful opportunity. Quite often you discover wonderful lessons in the messiest of challenges.

Procrastinate is defined as a means to defer or delay action until an opportunity is lost. The tendency to procrastinate devours time—time bandit. If you could change only one habit, eliminating procrastination would be the one that will put you on the roadway to success. Someone once commented, "*Procrastination is the only thing I have time for!*" Is this true for you, too? Do you find excuses to put something off? Or, do you promise yourself that you will start first thing in the morning?

Here are a few reasons people use to justify procrastination and how you might get around them.

- **The task is so overwhelming.** If you believe you do not have enough time to complete a project and think you will find the needed time at a later date, you are only deceiving yourself. Eventually you realize that the time never comes. Yes, you are procrastinating.

Do you fill your days with busyness and miss the opportunities? To avoid procrastination, start somewhere. Divide the task into manageable components and schedule blocks of time in your daily planner. Even 15 minutes a day will move the project forward. Just the act of scheduling an appointment with yourself to accomplish a particular task increases the probability that you will do it.

Any large task or activity can be broken down into smaller increments. Alan Lakein, author of *How To Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* describes the "Swiss Cheese" technique: work on a small portion of the task for five minutes each day, making small holes in the overwhelming project until it looks like Swiss cheese and finally disappears altogether. Approaching large tasks this way eliminates the feeling of being overwhelmed.

- **The job is just a little one.** Unpleasant little tasks tend to be pushed to the background for more important items. These are the little things that *have* to be done, but you do not *like* to do them. The tendency to procrastinate on a small job eventually increases the stress involved when you come to the realization that it must get done.

Whenever possible, delegate! Let someone else do it. If it simply cannot be given away, then create a positive reinforcement as an enticement to completion. A specific reward may be enough to inspire action. Once started it usually is not quite as bad as you anticipated.

It is hoped that if you procrastinate long enough the task will disappear or that something in the future will eliminate the necessity of doing it. At some point you feel under pressure, or it must be done at an inconvenient time, or now the price is higher than if you had done it before.

The longer you put off the small tasks, the more you must worry about finding the time to do them. As long you procrastinate you increase anxiety and stress. You may even become ineffective and inefficient. The longer you wait, the worse it gets. As Harold Taylor put it in his book, *Personal Organization*, “Whenever you put off today’s tasks you add to tomorrow’s burdens.”

You know you will have to do it eventually, so why drag out the inevitable? Take action and do not delay. There is a great relief when the job is complete. The oppressive weight has been lifted from your shoulders. Get into the **Just Do It Now** habit. Dig right in and revel in the accomplishment.

- **I don’t have time to do it perfectly.** Perfect tendencies — over-planning, over-organization, over-cleanliness, and over-conscientiousness — are significant factors in procrastination. The need for perfect labels on the file folders, pens and pencils in proper containers, supply closets that are the model of perfection and boxes of paper separated and lined up evenly support procrastination tendencies. It is exhausting to contemplate a project when there is a need to complete it perfectly.

This is not what organizing is about. You are sabotaging a project when you impose standards that have more to do with an ideal of perfection than with functional efficiency. Having all the *ducks in a perfect row* is fine as long as the thought of accomplishing it is not paralyzing.

The goal is effectiveness and efficiency, not perfection. Life is not perfect and there are no guarantees. So start, now! A pleasant surprise is in store. Momentum is built upon small successes, not the perfection of life.

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