Procrastination

10 Surefire Ways to Conquer Procrastination

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"Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." That may be practical advice, but for many of us, it goes in one ear and out the other. Unfortunately, it's more practical in theory than in practice. The name for this practice (and it plagues many of us) is procrastination—and there are ways to conquer it. Primary is self-discipline. Following are "10 Sure-Fire Ways to Conquer Procrastination."

1. **KNOW WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR PERSONAL BEST**

   Some of us are morning people—we're most productive in the wee hours of the day when others are still in bed. But, when the evening hours are upon us, our energy is at a low ebb. That's when the biological clocks of the "night owls" kick in. These are the people who are most productive later in the day.

   When are you at your personal best? If you can't say, spend some time monitoring your periods of productivity. Are you able to get things done most effectively early in the morning? During the lunch hour? In the afternoon? After 5:00 p.m.? Once you've determined when you're more effective, schedule your most challenging projects and tasks for those times.

2. **PRIORITIZE**

   Each of us has a number of activities that we must accomplish in any given time period. Some of those activities, however, are more critical than others.

   Without prioritizing, it's virtually impossible to accomplish all of the tasks that must be accomplished.

   Prioritizing means ranking the tasks that must be done in order of their importance. How is importance determined? It can be based on deadlines established by supervisors. It can be based on your own personal goals. It can be based on the resources you have available to you.

   Priorities make it clear what needs to be done and when. By setting priorities you'll be less likely to forget the critical tasks that must be done—more likely to meet your deadlines.

   Remember, though—even the lowest priorities must get done. You can't continually push aside those small things because they're at the bottom of your list.

3. MAKE LISTS

Most people who are effective at getting things done make lists. Whether those lists are kept in a Filofax or other piece of scrap paper, the key is to keep your list of duties in front of you at all times.

Lists are the first step in prioritizing the things you must do. Many people use a simple alpha-numeric system to prioritize. They set up A, B and C categories, with A being used for the most critical tasks. A1 would be done first, A2 second, etc. A D category can also be used to indicate those tasks which can be delegated to somebody else.

Once you've established a list and prioritized it, make sure you stick with your priorities. Don't go to the C items because they'll be "easy" to do. If you've established something as an A1 priority, do it first.

4. USE THOSE "EXTRA GIVE MINUTE" BLOCKS OF TIME

We often find ourselves with small blocks of time. It might be while waiting for a lunch date, while waiting in a doctor's office, while commuting to work or at the end of a workday. Many of us waste those small blocks of time because we feel that "I can't get anything done in five minutes." We're wrong.

Here are some ways that effective managers use those small blocks of time:

- Make or revise your list of tasks for the next day.
- Always keep a folder of reading material handy. Bring it with you when you feel you'll be likely to have idle time.
- Tackle one aspect of a larger job.
- Open and sort mail.
- File
- Return phone calls.

Even five minutes can prove to be plenty of time to tackle some small tasks that might otherwise go undone. Use those small blocks of time effectively.

5. SET REALISTIC DEADLINES

Too often we place undue burden on ourselves by establishing or agreeing to deadlines that are unrealistic. Before setting a deadline, consider what will be involved in completing the task:

- Break the task down into its components.

- Examine those components—what resources or information will you need to complete each step?

- Who else will you need to rely on to complete the project? What will their time requirements be?

- What other projects are you currently responsible for and how much time will you need to devote to those?

By carefully considering the assignment before you establish a deadline, you'll be in a better position to accurately predict when you can complete the project. And, if the person who is counting on you to get the job done doesn't like the date you've chosen, you'll be able to objectively document why you need the amount of time you do.

6. BEAT PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism is often the prime reason that procrastinators never seem to get the job done. They don't feel they've got it right. While quality is important, and you want to do a good job, it's equally important to know when enough is enough.

Anything we do can always be done better. The key is to determine, for this particular task, what is required? Then, meet those requirements or, if time permits, exceed them. But don't miss deadlines or put projects off because you labor over them too long wanting them to be "perfect." It won't happen.

7. DELEGATE

When we talked about making lists, we talked about establishing a D category for those things that can be delegated to other people. Many tasks on your "to do" list can easily be done by somebody else, thus freeing up your time to attend to more critical activities—those A items on your list.

You'll be surprised at how many of the items on your list can be delegated or done by somebody else. It won't be easy at first. Many people hesitate because they're afraid the job won't be done as well as they would do it or as quickly as they could do it. It probably won't—at least initially.

But, once you begin to delegate activities, you'll find they get done just as well (perhaps better) and you'll have time to do other things.

8. "SCHEDULE" INTERRUPTIONS

We're all frustrated by things that interrupt our schedule. The key to controlling interruptions is anticipating them and then "scheduling" them into our day. How? By setting aside time periods when you will allow interruptions and refusing to acknowledge them at other times.

For instance, suppose the phone is one of your most heinous interrupters. You could determine that from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. you will take no calls. Simply turn your phone off, send calls to a receptionist or turn on your answering machine and then attend to other activities.

The problem with interruptions is that they instantly become A priorities, even though they might only warrant a C9 spot on your list. Don't let this happen to you. Accept interruptions only when it's convenient for you to do so. You'll soon find that there are really very few "emergencies." It's the rare interruption that can't wait an hour or two until you have the time—and the inclination—to attend to it.

9. REWARD YOURSELF

When you've completed a major project or met a tight deadline what do you do? Do you start instantly on the next task or do you take a "breather" and reward yourself for a job well done.

We need to practice positive reinforcement with ourselves just as we do with our employees or our children. When you complete a project, reward yourself. The reward can depend on your own personal preferences.

The point is that by associating the successful completion of a task with a reward you'll make it much more likely that the next task will be completed on time.

10. LEARN TO SAY "NO"

Most people hate to say no. Consequently, they take on more than they can possibly handle and wind up feeling frustrated, resentful and stressed out.

Before you take on an additional assignment, consider how it will affect the rest of your responsibilities. Maybe you simply won't be able to do it. Or, maybe in order to add this item to your list, you'll have to give up another item.

It's important to realize that you'll be more respected when you say "no" up front, than you will if you take on assignments that you can't possibly finish.