

Putting Off Procrastination??

"Procrastinators are people with a wait problem—they're always putting off until tomorrow what they could/should be doing today." I'm sure that you don't procrastinate, do you? Someone once referred to procrastination as "the nature of the animal," as if it were a genetic trait in all of us. I'm not so sure. . . I've found it has more to do with upbringing, emotions and enthusiasm than our genes. Many people approach procrastination like a cold, looking for the Vicks 44 or Contact as a quick fix. The most important question about procrastination is not how to fix it, but instead why do we do it? All of the fix it answers provide, at best, temporary solutions to the immediate symptoms. Seldom do they cure the cause so it isn't a recurring disease.

Procrastination is a "disease" in our lives in that it creates upset, frustration and anger. In some cases, it slowly eats away at self-respect and confidence. In other cases, it is like a common cold, a mild discomfort and irritation that is accepted as a part of life. Fortunately, the causes of procrastination are not as evasive as the cause of the cold. First, let's separate the reasons from the causes. The reasons we procrastinate are abundant—

- the task is unpleasant or over whelming.
- we really want someone else to do it (and if we wait long enough they will).
- to gain sympathy for our position of overworked and underpaid (the more we don't do, the more we have to do, the more we have to complain about).
- we're over-committed and can't do one more thing.
- we operate better under pressure, so last minute deadlines get us moving
- no one said when it had to be done, so whenever. . .
- "I got so many phone calls, I just didn't have time."

and on, and on, and on . .

Under all of these reasons are just two causes for the behavior of "putting off." The first is fear > Fear of what will happen after we complete the task, such as . . .

- they'll find out I'm not good enough for this job because my work isn't up to standards.
- if I do it once, I just might be expected to repeat the results and I don't know if I can.
- .I'll be responsible for. . . following through, success, failure, etc. . . . and I'm not sure I want the responsibility.

To find out if fear is the cause, simply ask yourself the question, "What will happen if I finish or accomplish this task?" Listen and be honest with yourself about the answer. Then talk with someone about your concerns and get support and encouragement for handling the situation.

The second cause is anger. It is usually old anger at controlling parents or other authority figures who told us what to do, when to do it and how to do it when we were small or too intimidated to talk back. It felt like being out of control of our lives and resulted in anger, resentment and a determination not to let anyone ever control us once we grew up.

The question to ask here is "Who am I angry at?" Myself, for over committing? (That one can also be closely connected to a fear of saying no and getting disapproval.) Am I angry at my boss or spouse—who seems to always be telling me what to do, when to do it and how to do it?

Once again, an important part of the solution is to talk to someone about the feelings. Often, you'll realize that they have nothing to do with present time and the immediate task and your perception of the situation will change. Then your attitude toward the task will be one of enthusiasm or at least a willingness to get it done.

Many books have been written on this subject containing hundreds of fix it solutions. However, I believe that the key is uncovering the cause and communicating the feelings. Then, you can create your own fix it solution tailored to the situation. My experience has been that being aware of the cause allows me to catch the "cold" before it starts--and ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—by noticing the feeling I have when I take on a project or agree to an action. That's the time to tell the truth about what I feel and what I really want. Now that's a whole other article, "How to Tell the

Boss NO!" P.S. If you are already in the throes of the procrastination "cold" and are looking for the "Contact" quick fix, here's a few suggestions: Take action—do something, anything to get you started, even if it is on something that seems unimportant. Get a sense of completion and accomplishment on something and let that gradually build up your enthusiasm or determination to tackle the biggie.

Eat the elephant one bite at a time—analyze the project and break it into small tasks which you can do, one at a time. This again builds a feeling of completion and success which builds determination and enthusiasm. Reward yourself for accomplishments--create a list of rewards, from free to expensive, all the things that you want to do for yourself. Give yourself one on the completion of a task you've been putting off.

Finally, stand in the middle of your office (warn those around you first) and yell NO, NO, NO, NO until you are exhausted. The sit down at your desk and do something you really want to do, i.e., take a five minute nap, read the paper, make a non-business call, stare out the window. Then organize your tasks and projects to see what do to next. Remember, you can only do one thing at a time. So do that one and enjoy it!

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