



Relief for the procrastination Blues

Contrary to popular opinion, procrastination may not be a trait you are particularly proud of, but it isn't always the villain it's cracked up to be. Sure, along with procrastination often comes a hefty dose of guilt and a case of the "shoulds," but if you take a look at what's behind procrastination, you're likely to gain a deeper understanding of what is really important to you, and why.

The result of procrastination is virtually the same for everyone: increased anxiety, wasted time, poor performance, missed opportunities, guilt, excusing ourselves and avoiding people who depend on us. And therein lies the problem. Each of those negative emotions dominates our thoughts, crowding out the opportunity to examine and create a compelling meaning that inspires us to take action now, not later.

Getting Bugged Down in Trivia

Who hasn't found themselves spending time on tasks which are easy to do, just to say they're so busy they couldn't get to the major project? Most people tell themselves, "I had to do these things first before tackling that project," and then found there was no time left. Sure, you might gain a small measure of satisfaction by busying yourself with distraction tasks such as answering phone calls, writing a letter, surfing the Internet, answering emails, or having lunch, but the respite from guilt is brief at best.

It isn't procrastination that robs us of our time and energy, it's the guilt and the nagging feeling that haunts us. Let's take a look at how you can ease the grip of procrastination, let go of the guilt, and create a sense of teamwork with yourself.

What's On Your Plate?

Procrastination is often a signal that there are too many other things occupying your mind. It isn't that you don't want to get a particular task accomplished, it's that there simply isn't enough time. If this is true for you, then the solution is clear. Take it off your immediate to-do list, ask someone else to do it, or schedule it for a time that is reasonable and realistic. The relief you'll feel will be immediate.

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"Training and Coaching Since 1985"

MARK W. ZALKIN, M.Ed., MSW, has been coaching and training professionals, executives, entrepreneurs, small business owners, government officials and non-profit staff members since 1985. He has been described as optimistic, conscientious, enthusiastic, insightful, honest, humorous, caring, and supportive.

When he is not coaching, Mark teaches a wide range of workshops and facilitates team building throughout the USA and in Asia. He has been an Adjunct Professor at the University of Denver where he taught a graduate course on team building.

He received his bachelors' degree (BME) and masters' degree (M.Ed.) in education from Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. His second masters' degree is an MSW from Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work, New York, NY.

Before the establishment of Zalkin Training and Development, Mark spent over 13 years as a supervisor and executive with organizations in Los Angeles, Omaha, and Denver.

A more detailed listing of Mark's background and programs can be found at zalkin-training.com.

The "If-Then" Tango

It's easy to blame others for something not being accomplished. "If only I had gotten that promotion, then I would be more involved in my job." "If only my husband would take out the garbage, I would have time to do the things I need to do." "If I had a faster computer I would find more enjoyment in sitting down to write the report." When someone selectively focuses on one reason, they're making an attempt to shift the responsibility for their life to someone, or something, else. In the long run, owning that we are the architects of our life is both empowering and motivating. If you find yourself doing the "If-then" tango, use it as a hint to put control back into your hands. Ask yourself, "What action can I take to move towards what I want?"

What If You're Just Not In The Mood?

At times we're all faced with tasks that are just plain unpleasant. It may be having an uncomfortable conversation, facing a difficult decision, or taking care of a task we don't feel competent in doing. It's easy to put off what we know isn't going to be a picnic. Unfortunately, the reason for the task rarely disappears. It continues to lurk at the back of our mind. Before we know it, the task seems to follow us like a ten-ton elephant on our heels.

So what do you do? It's simple really: First turn your attention away from how unpleasant you think the situation is going to be, and the negative mind-chatter that has kept you immobilized. Now start asking yourself questions that will support you in seeing the value of taking action. Good questions to use are:

"What is true for me in this situation?"
"By taking action, what will I gain?"
"How will I feel once I've taken action?"

Finally, ask yourself, "I'm willing to take action by _____" Write this sentence down, filling in the date. You'll be surprised at how the previous discomfort melts away and is replaced with confidence and motivation.

Why Wait To Celebrate?

Reward and celebration are powerful, compelling motivators. The problem is, we don't get enough of them. Don't wait to celebrate. Pat yourself on the back, take a break, even say "Good job!" out loud at each step you complete. Here's a novel and energizing concept: Reward yourself for the effort, not the result.

So what are you waiting for? Isn't there something that has been waiting for your attention? Take action now, reward yourself for the effort, and enjoy the surge of energy you feel!

At A Glance...

Procrastination isn't a demon, just a signal that a task doesn't fit with our sense of priorities, control, skills, or comfort level. Here are 4 ways to get unstuck and start moving!

1. Break the task down into smaller pieces.

2. Take a stand. Tell a friend or your coach that you plan to finish a job by a certain date. Make your project a public endeavor rather than keeping it to yourself. It helps to gain the support of others when you feel stymied.

3. Just get started. You don't have to wait until you feel inspired to write that speech. Just write whatever comes to mind, and you can revise it later. A journey begins with one small step.

4. Look at all you have accomplished. Rather than punishing yourself for not having done enough, take the more positive approach of examining all that you have done. Don't let the fact that your "to-do" list may be longer than your "I did it" list stop you from celebrating what you've accomplished so far.