

## Kicking Procrastination

If you find yourself postponing important tasks again and again, you are not the only one who is troubled by this habit. You procrastinate when you put off things that you should be focusing on right now, usually in favour of doing something that is more enjoyable or that you're more comfortable doing. Many people, or rather most people procrastinate to some degree, but not all of them are procrastinators. Both chronic procrastinators and those who procrastinate once in a while want to overcome it. Most of us think that postponing things is

just about "not working hard enough", but there is more to procrastination than simply postponing your actions. Here we look at the factors which help us become procrastinators and maintain it.

*Check yourself for signs of procrastination:*

- *Are you filling your day with low-priority tasks*
- *Reading emails/ assignments/course-work several times in a day without starting work on them*
- *Waiting for the "perfect time/right mood or right mindset" to start work*
- *Saying "yes" to unimportant tasks more often and putting off important tasks for some other time*
- *More than two tasks have been on your "to-do" list for many days now*
- *You are waiting for the "deadline" to arrive so that you can start work*

Some of us justify delaying tasks by saying that we work better under pressure, some of us just blame our laziness. Going deep we might realize that either explanation may not be entirely correct. Working under pressure might cause you to finish off your work within a short span of time; however it may also result in a number of errors; which might lead to further issues to deal with. Secondly, blaming laziness may not be fair; as once we procrastinate, we often end up working hard for long stretches of time as the deadline approaches. Working hard and laziness do not seem to go together. So we need to look into alternative explanations for procrastination rather than just finding superficial reasons for the same.

### The WHYS of procrastination

Understanding the underlying causes of this destructive habit can easily lead you to the solutions for dealing with it. Procrastination depends both on factors within you and the task at hand. Both of these features might come into play at a given point of time, or one of them might be the actual cause. It varies from one situation to the other. A very common

tendency is to avoid unpleasant jobs. Most tasks or jobs have an unpleasant aspect to them, and some academic or career – related aspects cannot be avoided even if they are grossly unpleasant. Among the factors within self, being disorganized is a good strategy to maintain procrastination. Not having a to-do list, losing it frequently, revising it too often, or jumbling it up every now and then are indicators of this tendency. Deficit in decision – making ability is another common cause. If you cannot decide what is to be done, you are likely to delay your actions just out of the fear of doing the “wrong thing”. Surprisingly, another common cause however for procrastination is perfectionism. The tendency to “do it right” or “perfectly” is a very prominent factor here. Many of us wait for the right moment, the right mood, the right mindset, or the right skills to start the work. And thus, the work might never get started. This is truer in case of starting a new habit, exercise regime or any self-help endeavours. Another pertinent factor which makes us delay our actions is the unconscious thought process. This pattern is more relevant in case of school and college students where performance matters a lot. Here procrastination is used as a self-protection approach. If someone is delaying things, he has always the excuse of not having “enough time” in case of failure. By doing this one is actually safeguarding his abilities. All of us are worried about our performance, not doing well in exams, being criticised by significant others for lack of ability is something that threatens us the most. So, in this scenario, avoiding work to avoid our abilities being judged is actually a safer option.

### Dealing with procrastination

Don't expect procrastination to evaporate out of your system overnight. It is a deeply ingrained pattern of behaviour and you have acquired and nurtured it over the years. Kicking it is also probably going to take few months or years. So be persistent, be realistic in your approach and expectations from yourself.

**Force Vs Choice:** Please remind yourself that what you are doing currently is a choice rather than something that has been forced upon you. If you keep on saying to yourself that “I have to study for a good job”, you are bound to feel helpless and disempowered. “Have to” makes your life sound like as if it is being controlled by external factors and not internal choices. Replace “have to” with “I will”. Remind yourself that everything in your life is a choice. Yes! Even studying and working are choices that we make in order to achieve financial success and knowledge. You could have always chosen the other way, provided you were willing to pay the price. Since you have chosen this way; you must pay the price for this one too. Use a language that expresses choice and makes you feel powerful.

**Start:** Rather than focusing on the finish line, pay attention to the start line. Starting the task may be enough to keep the momentum. Take a small step, leave it and come back to it again, but anyhow start it. Sometimes over-planning may also delay this step. So plan a little and give it a shot. After a few attempts you will get better and faster.

**Time Management:** Managing time is important to manage procrastination. Making “to-do” lists too often; reviewing them again and again would lead only to more anxiety and increase your stress. They might end up helping you delaying the tasks further. Setting reasonable goals, breaking them down in concrete, achievable parts, calculating time that you need to complete each part or the whole task are strategies that help. Allowing yourself to enjoy your hobbies, and rewards for the work done would keep you motivated and ensure the right pace. When rewards are small, frequent and well-deserved, they work wonders. Commit to a routine of making way for relaxation and leisure time. This reverse strategy would keep you in a more productive and enjoyable mindset.

**The 100%:** You cannot always give your hundred percent. Accept it. Trying to achieve the best may be maladaptive and self-defeating at times. We are often told that good is the enemy of best. The reverse is equally true. At times best is the enemy of good. In our quest for the best, we are not even able to achieve the “good”, or are able to achieve the best performance only in a very limited area as opposed to finding reasonable success in most areas. The perfectionist attitude is the root cause of much suffering and failures in life. Not doing it just because it’s not perfect would only make you feel more miserable.

*Just as the reasons for procrastination for each one of us are different, the answers are also different. Try to see what your reasons for delaying things are and then approach the solution; taking the general route is unlikely to be of much help. Awareness is undoubtedly the first step for any kind of change in our lives. Procrastination is a self-destructive habit which makes us underachieve our true potential and live in guilt. Kicking it does not mean that you would become the most successful person in the world, but it would definitely mean that you would be able to live up to your full potential.*

For Further information on this and other psychological concerns please contact the Student Counselor; South Asian University

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