

Time Management

Postponing tasks we do not like is normal and most often harmless. Some of us successfully fool ourselves by setting clocks ahead or concluding that we work best under such pressure. Problems arise when we let the tasks become so overwhelming that we do nothing at all. These tips are to help prevent you from getting to that point.

1. Pinpoint the fear. What is preventing you from action? Is it fear of rejection, failure, embarrassment, or disapproval? Sometimes even the fear of discovery, as in realizing success in an area or on a test, can prevent us from proceeding.
2. List the pros and cons of procrastinating. Make note of the positive results completion will bring and of the negative aspects that will stop once the task is done.
3. Stop trying to be perfect. Doing something is better than doing nothing at all. If you're a perfectionist, you just add more stress to your stressful situation. None of us are perfect.
4. Chunk it! It doesn't all have to be done at once. Start with a piece of the task so simple that you can't possibly justify not doing it; then move on to another piece. Build your confidence one step at a time.
5. Set a time frame for your project and stick to it. Designate 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday for studying and don't let anything intervene. If something comes up, explain regretfully, but firmly, that you have a previous engagement.
6. Do the worst tasks first. You'll be over the hump, and the rest of the job will look like a cinch by comparison.
7. Seven/eleven it! This is another method of overcoming inertia. Tell yourself you'll just spend seven minutes on your project, and no more. Set a timer. You may become so inspired that you decide to continue eleven minutes more. Presto, you're nearly 20 minutes underway!
8. Make "To Do" lists. Make lists of things to be done, and check the tasks off as you complete each one. Being able to cross something off the list often inspires us to do another.
9. Use odd times as an ally. Ten minutes while waiting for a friend or for a ride can be used to jot notes about a paper or study vocabulary for an exam. Don't expect to get it all done in one sitting. Remember, reviewing over time lets the brain absorb more.
10. Try a buddy system. Arrange with a classmate to check each other's plans and progress. Having a support network helps you keep on track.
11. Make a commitment to someone. Promise your classmate, your spouse, your friend, yourself that you'll have the task finished by its deadline, and that you'll do it - or look incompetent.
12. Avoid distractions. They'll only give you excuses to delay further.
13. Modify your environment. Buy a new set of pens, clear a space on your desk or the kitchen table, turn on some classical or slow music, make a pot of coffee; then get started!

14. Quit threatening yourself. It only makes your situation worse when you talk to yourself negatively. Remember: Positive self-talk works!

15. Reward your non-procrastinating behavior. Make your reward tangible so that you'll learn to appreciate good feelings when you don't procrastinate. Make your reward personal so that it has significance for you alone and won't complicate things if someone else can't be a part of it. Make your reward appropriate so that you receive more than a jelly bean for finishing a term paper, but not a trip to Florida because you made it to class.

16. Deny urges to delay. Force yourself to sit for 15 minutes and do nothing but think of what could be done. Both the relaxation and the denial of activity are sometimes helpful in spurring us into action.

17. Think progressively. By the time procrastinating has gotten us into trouble, the tasks probably seem insurmountable. Beating procrastination is a gradual process.

18. Don't expect miracles. Procrastination, like any other habit formed over time, is tough to break.

Adapted from California State University, Chico
www.csuchico.edu/sac/leaders/mantime.html

