

Ten Strategies to Overcome Procrastination



True confession: I procrastinated on writing this article on procrastination. The irony is funny, right? Actually, it is proof positive that we all procrastinate now and then; some more often than we'd like to admit. As a Productivity Consultant, I love to share my "human" moments with clients and workshop participants to show that I understand what they go through and have learned lessons along the way that I practice and teach to be more organized and productive.

We can define procrastination as the undesirable time gap between intention and action. I intended to write this article weeks ago, but didn't get to it until last week because of competing priorities and, if I'm honest, because of my own perfectionist tendencies.

There are ten primary causes to procrastination:

Self-Control – someone who procrastinates because of self-control issues may be impulsive or be unable to prioritize.

Shiny Objects – email alerts, paper piles, interruptions, or other distractions can serve intentionally or unintentionally as avoidance factors, causing us to procrastinate on what we really ought to be doing.

False Beliefs – erroneously thinking, "I work better under pressure" makes some people put off tasks until the last minute. They may even pull it off and get the task done by the deadline, but it is often not the highest quality of work than if the task had been given more time.

Fear of Failure – If someone does not have the confidence that they can accomplish the task successfully, they may procrastinate, preferring to be seen as lacking in effort than in skills.

Thrill Seeking – some people enjoy the adrenaline rush that accompanies the last minute push to get something done "under the gun."

Task Related Anxieties – avoiding the difficult, boring or undesired task. "I just don't want to do it."



Unclear Expectations – vague priorities or direction might lead to procrastination if you don't know how to start or what steps to take to get the task done.

Depression – for someone who is experiencing clinical depression, it can be hard to get started on something new. It may feel overly difficult or pointless.

Punitive Parenting – an individual who was raised with highly critical parents may have messages running through their mind that they aren't good enough and/or they fear additional criticism. Procrastination can be seen as a form of rebellion for these folks too.

Perfectionism – This is the #1 cause for procrastination. Perfectionism can be paralyzing to productivity. A perfectionist will put off starting something that they worry they can't do perfectly and they will also put off finishing a task because it never seems "good enough."

Employ these ten strategies to address each cause and combat procrastination:

Eliminate Distraction – clear clutter in your workspace, shut down email to get something done and remove shiny objects from your space.

Gain Clarity – ask questions (of yourself or someone assigning you a task or project) to better understand the objective of the task, as well as the recommended steps to get it done.

Eat an Elephant – Q: How do you eat an elephant? A: One bite at a time. If you feel overwhelmed by a project or task, break it down into bite size pieces. The end result may feel daunting, but each piece should feel very manageable by itself. If the bites still feel overwhelming continue to break them down until taking the first step, or the next step, by itself feels doable.

Stop Messing Around – Sometimes we just need some discipline to stop any avoidance strategies and buckle down to work. Know what you use as avoidance tasks (i.e.: Facebook, a trip to the water cooler, checking email again, etc.) and don't let yourself indulge until you accomplish a task or reach a milestone in your work.

Establish Rewards – It can be motivating to have something to look forward to. Consider small ways you can reward yourself for staying on task for a period of time (this could be allowing yourself to participate in something that you previously used as an avoidance task – 15 minutes on Facebook, a call to a good friend, a walk around the block, cup of tea, etc.) and identify a bigger way to reward yourself for accomplishing the end result in a timely manner for larger projects. Consider the Pomodoro technique for working – stick to a task or project for 25 minutes and then take a 5 minute break. Alternately, work for 50 minutes in an hour and do something for yourself for 10 minutes. Rinse and repeat.

Block Time – Mark time on your calendar for priority tasks, and then honor it. Make appointments with yourself to work on something that you might otherwise put off. We are usually good at sticking to our appointments we make with others. We can do the same for important work we want to accomplish. When the appointment shows up on the calendar, no procrastinating; that is what you work on during that time block. Yes, some of this takes discipline, but you can do it.

Minimize Interruptions (or at least know how you'll handle them) – If you have an office with a door, consider closing it when working on a priority task or project. Minimally, post something visible that tells others that you are "heads down" for a period of time. Eliminate the candy dish from your desk if it is the reason others constantly interrupt you to chat. If you are interrupted by a colleague, stand to greet them (so they don't sit and make themselves comfortable for a while), ascertain what they need and then make a decision about whether or not their need is a higher priority than what you were working on. If it is, make a quick note on your work about the step you were about to do next (this reduces the time it takes you to recover from the interruption and reengage in the work) and give them your full attention. If what you are working on is a higher priority than what they need, let them know you are on a deadline and need to finish your work, and ask them to come back or meet up at a later time.

Adopt My Favorite "Recovering Perfectionist" Mantra; Done is Better than Perfect – Get started, even if you don't



think you can do something perfectly. Most of the time, perfect isn't needed. Know when 90-95% is good enough. A perfectionist will spend 50% of their time on a task or project getting the last 5-10% perfect. That means if they spend an hour getting something 90% done, they will spend another hour perfecting the last 10%. Most of the time, there's a better use for that time. Unless you're a pilot or surgeon, then work to perfection. Otherwise, procrastinate less and get more done by understanding that done is indeed better than perfect.

Ask Someone to Hold you Accountable – We are less likely to procrastinate and put something off if we've told someone else about what we intend to do. Knowing that person may ask about our progress, we are more likely to act. Share your goal or priorities with someone you trust and ask them to help hold your feet to the fire. An accountability partner can be a powerful productivity strategy.

Go For It – Face the fear of failure (or fear of success) and do it anyway. Take a risk, ask for help if you need it, but make progress, move forward and decide that today is the day.

What are you waiting for? Use these strategies to fight procrastination, get stuff done and reach your goals. Here's to your increased productivity and success!

Shiny Objects – email alerts, paper piles, interruptions, or other distractions can serve intentionally or unintentionally as avoidance factors, causing us to procrastinate on what we really ought to be doing.

False Beliefs – erroneously thinking, "I work better under pressure" makes some people put off tasks until the last minute. They may even pull it off and get the task done by the deadline, but it is often not the highest quality of work than if the task had been given more time.

Fear of Failure – If someone does not have the confidence that they can accomplish the task successfully, they may procrastinate, preferring to be seen as lacking in effort than in skills.

Thrill Seeking – some people enjoy the adrenaline rush that accompanies the last minute push to get something done "under the gun."

Task Related Anxieties – avoiding the difficult, boring or undesired task. "I just don't want to do it."

Unclear Expectations – vague priorities or direction might lead to procrastination if you don't know how to start or what steps to take to get the task done.

Depression – for someone who is experiencing clinical depression, it can be hard to get started on something new. It may feel overly difficult or pointless.

Punitive Parenting – an individual who was raised with highly critical parents may have messages running through their mind that they aren't good enough and/or they fear additional criticism. Procrastination can be seen as a form of rebellion for these folks too.

Perfectionism – This is the #1 cause for procrastination. Perfectionism can be paralyzing to productivity. A perfectionist will put off starting something that they worry they can't do perfectly and they will also put off finishing a task because it never seems "good enough."

Employ these ten strategies to address each cause and combat procrastination:

Eliminate Distraction – clear clutter in your workspace, shut down email to get something done and remove shiny objects from your space.

Gain Clarity – ask questions (of yourself or someone assigning you a task or project) to better understand the objective of the task, as well as the recommended steps to get it done.

Eat an Elephant – Q: How do you eat an elephant? A: One bite at a time. If you feel overwhelmed by a project or task, break it down into bite size pieces. The end result may feel daunting, but each piece should feel very



manageable by itself. If the bites still feel overwhelming continue to break them down until taking the first step, or the next step, by itself feels doable.

Stop Messing Around – Sometimes we just need some discipline to stop any avoidance strategies and buckle down to work. Know what you use as avoidance tasks (i.e.: Facebook, a trip to the water cooler, checking email again, etc.) and don't let yourself indulge until you accomplish a task or reach a milestone in your work.

Establish Rewards – It can be motivating to have something to look forward to. Consider small ways you can reward yourself for staying on task for a period of time (this could be allowing yourself to participate in something that you previously used as an avoidance task – 15 minutes on Facebook, a call to a good friend, a walk around the block, cup of tea, etc.) and identify a bigger way to reward yourself for accomplishing the end result in a timely manner for larger projects. Consider the Pomodoro technique for working – stick to a task or project for 25 minutes and then take a 5 minute break. Alternately, work for 50 minutes in an hour and do something for yourself for 10 minutes. Rinse and repeat.

Block Time – Mark time on your calendar for priority tasks, and then honor it. Make appointments with yourself to work on something that you might otherwise put off. We are usually good at sticking to our appointments we make with others. We can do the same for important work we want to accomplish. When the appointment shows up on the calendar, no procrastinating; that is what you work on during that time block. Yes, some of this takes discipline, but you can do it.

Minimize Interruptions (or at least know how you'll handle them) – If you have an office with a door, consider closing it when working on a priority task or project. Minimally, post something visible that tells others that you are “heads down” for a period of time. Eliminate the candy dish from your desk if it is the reason others constantly interrupt you to chat. If you are interrupted by a colleague, stand to greet them (so they don't sit and make themselves comfortable for a while), ascertain what they need and then make a decision about whether or not their need is a higher priority than what you were working on. If it is, make a quick note on your work about the step you were about to do next (this reduces the time it takes you to recover from the interruption and reengage in the work) and give them your full attention. If what you are working on is a higher priority than what they need, let them know you are on a deadline and need to finish your work, and ask them to come back or meet up at a later time.

Adopt My Favorite “Recovering Perfectionist” Mantra; Done is Better than Perfect – Get started, even if you don't think you can do something perfectly. Most of the time, perfect isn't needed. Know when 90-95% is good enough. A perfectionist will spend 50% of their time on a task or project getting the last 5-10% perfect. That means if they spend an hour getting something 90% done, they will spend another hour perfecting the last 10%. Most of the time, there's a better use for that time. Unless you're a pilot or surgeon, then work to perfection. Otherwise, procrastinate less and get more done by understanding that done is indeed better than perfect.

Ask Someone to Hold you Accountable – We are less likely to procrastinate and put something off if we've told someone else about what we intend to do. Knowing that person may ask about our progress, we are more likely to act. Share your goal or priorities with someone you trust and ask them to help hold your feet to the fire. An accountability partner can be a powerful productivity strategy.

Go For It – Face the fear of failure (or fear of success) and do it anyway. Take a risk, ask for help if you need it, but make progress, move forward and decide that today is the day.

What are you waiting for? Use these strategies to fight procrastination, get stuff done and reach your goals. Here's to your increased productivity and success!

[Listen or Watch Debbie's companion podcast on this subject called, "How to Overcome Procrastination"](#)

Debbie Rosemont, CPO®

Debbie Rosemont is a Certified Professional Organizer, Productivity Consultant and Trainer, Owner of [Simply Placed](#) and author of the book [Six-Word Lessons to Be More Productive](#). Simply Placed teaches organized systems and productive habits that allow busy professionals to maximize their time, focus on their priorities, reduce stress,





KEEPING YOU ORGANIZED



improve their customer service and increase their bottom line.

