

Recognizing Reasons Why We Procrastinate (1,311 words)

Usually we have the courage to take action. However, sometimes we get stuck and freeze and don't do what we need to do. Usually it is fear that stops us from taking action, sometimes it's the pain attached to the activity, sometimes it's perfectionism, and sometimes it's simply indecision.

Sixteen Fears and Procrastination: There are many fears that can immobilize us and cause us to procrastinate. I will share with you sixteen reasons why people procrastinate.

Fear of imperfection: It is hard for some of us to accept that some things need to be done perfectly and everything else doesn't. **Fear of not being ready:** This is the concern that we may not have all of the information we need to move forward.

Fear of the unknown: We find ourselves asking, "What will people think?" **Fear of being overwhelmed:** This is when the task is so complex that we don't know where or how to start. **Fear of making mistakes:** Mistakes are a part of life. We need to ask ourselves, "What can I learn from this?"

Fear of pain and dread: When we postpone an unpleasant task, attempting to make life easier and avoiding the distasteful. **Fear of success:** The concern that we must continue to succeed more and more as we move forward in our life. **Fear of bad timing:** This is battling our natural biological rhythms and energy cycles. Trying to do a task when we feel fatigued.

Fear of having to live up to a high standard: Hoping others won't expect such high-quality work from us again. **Fear of no pressure:** Some people believe that they need pressure to focus and to finish. **Fear of change:** When we worry that the change will render us incompetent or irrelevant.

Fear of difficulty: When the task seems so difficult that we won't even start. **Fear of too much responsibility:** Once we start something, the concern becomes, whether we will be able to consistently continue the work. **Fear of finishing:** The concern that if we finish this task, there will be just another awful job to do.

Fear of being rejected: It is hard not to take it personally when there is proof that we are flawed in some ways. **Fear of making the wrong decision:** We get busy with trivial activities to avoid making a decision. So, consider what's holding you back. As they say, "Feel the fear and do it anyway." Release the brakes and move forward and enjoy the adventure.

Pain-Pleasure Principle and Procrastination: Procrastination is often caused by the avoidance of unpleasant or painful tasks. We all would rather do something pleasant rather than unpleasant. When we postpone an unpleasant task, we are attempting to make life more pleasurable and avoid the miserable or the painful. Unfortunately, the unpleasant task seldom disappears, thus once the consequences for not performing the activity become more painful than the unpleasant task, we take action.

So, what can we do to break procrastination?

One of the best strategies to overcome this reluctance to take action is to schedule and handle the unpleasant task first. Just like when we were kids and we would eat our spinach first, get it out of the way, and enjoy the rest of our meal. I still do the same thing, today, when it comes to salad. I don't enjoy it, but I know it's good for me.

Here's another strategy. Sometimes considering the costs of delay can help us get on track and take action. What problems are you creating by waiting? How much anxiety and frustration will you feel by waiting? What opportunities or options will be lost by delay? Also, it helps if we can break up the painful task into small pieces. Slice and dice the task into five, ten, or fifteen minute chunks. We can endure anything painful for a few minutes.

Finally, setting deadlines, and sticking to them can help to get you started on an unpleasant task. Promise to reward yourself promptly after completing the deed. Consider inviting a partner or coworker to work with you. The task may still be unpleasant, but it will be completed more quickly and it may be less painful with some company. Find a way to appreciate the challenge of finishing unpleasant tasks. Give yourself a pep talk along the way. Reward yourself when you are done, you will have earned it.

Perfectionism and Procrastination: Perfectionism can certainly be a contributor to the habit of procrastination. Sometimes it is the perfection we seek in the outcome or final result. Sometimes procrastination occurs because we are waiting for the perfect conditions to even get started.

We sometimes wait until we are in just the right mood. Sometimes we wait until we have the ideal time set aside to start and finish. We wait for the perfect conditions, the perfect factors, and unless these ideal circumstances present themselves, decisions, actions, moves, careers, and lives are put on hold. We might have to accept the fact that these perfect conditions may never come. It is difficult for perfectionists to accept that this is an imperfect world and we are imperfect people.

We may have to simply strive for excellence, and be happy with work that is frankly, just well done. Sometimes good, is good enough. Be prepared to negotiate the three Q's. Quickness, Quantity, and Quality. If deadlines are moved up, then something will have to give, and it may affect the quantity or a degree of quality. If the quantity changes it may affect the quickness or quality. If the quality expectation is increased, then

quickness or quantity might need to be modified. These three Q's help us to accept that this time, the task may not be perfect, but is plenty good enough. Remember, some things need to be done perfectly, everything else doesn't. It is vital, for personal and professional success, to do our best with our most important tasks and in our most important relationships. Doing our best is usually enough.

Indecision and Procrastination: It is important to be decisive, but obstacles and potential problems can paralyze our thoughts and actions. When we have a strong desire to be right or a strong desire to avoid being wrong, we may delay decisions. Indecision and perfectionism are often dance partners.

There are four stages of decision-making: Framing the situation, gathering information and intelligence, reaching conclusions, and reviewing and evaluating the process and the product. Spend about 25% of your time on each stage. There is a time for deliberation, and there is a time for action. Being decisive is one of the keys to unlock the grip of procrastination. If analysis paralysis is the problem, set a deadline for gathering the best information available and then unleash the courage to make the best decision possible. There is a terrible diminishing return on perfectionism.

To be more decisive, consider Pareto's Principle, or the 80-20 rule: For many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. Many natural phenomena have been shown empirically to exhibit such a distribution. So, recognize the few critical activities that will have the greatest impact and focus your attention on doing those things first.

If you are still worried that something may go wrong, be sure to clearly focus on what you want to accomplish, write down the potential obstacles or difficulties you may face, think of a variety of possible solutions, and select the ones that seem to have the best chance. This type of positive planning will keep procrastination at bay. Sometimes we think about the worst thing that can happen and we stall. Do some planning to prevent the worst from happening and make the decision. You'll be all right.

Kit Welchlin, M.A., CSP, is a professional speaker and author and can be found at www.welchlin.com.