



CONQUERING PROCRASTINATION

The word procrastinate comes from the Latin procrastinatus, which means, literally, "forward tomorrow." If you've been putting off till tomorrow what you could - and should - do today, then recognize that procrastination is a habit that can be broken. But it won't happen overnight. It takes 21 days to form a new habit. So set a date, (Mondays work well, because they feel like a fresh start) and track 21 days to stay the course.

To start, give yourself a reason to stop procrastinating. Maybe you'll improve your financial situation because you'll pay your bills on time. Or you'll impress your family, friends, and coworkers because you'll appear productive and efficient. Or you'll be less stressed because you are on top of your to-do list and arrive on time. Whatever the goal, keep it in mind throughout the first 21 habit-forming days.

To get a handle on procrastination, start writing. Use a spiral notebook or planner to capture all your tasks. Do not use scraps of paper or sticky notes. You'll want everything in one place. Keep a running master list of tasks that need to be done. (It might be really long.) But then, each evening, make a smaller "to do today" list for the upcoming day, either on a separate page in your notebook, or on the next day's planner page. List only the most important things you need to accomplish that day, and keep the number of tasks realistic and attainable. (About five things usually works well.) The next morning, you'll know exactly what needs to be done, and you can concentrate on those above all else. That evening, evaluate your list. Anything not completed moves forward to the following day's task list, and a few more items are added. And take a moment to permanently remove tasks from your list that no longer contribute to your goals or happiness.

As you're writing your to-do list, make sure to break tasks down into realistic-sized chunks. If your goal is to organize your messy kitchen, the enormity of it will seem daunting. Instead, break it down into one-hour tasks: toss out all expired foods in pantry; clean out refrigerator; organize junk drawer; set up mini-filing system for kitchen. Completion dates are important, so assign specific tasks to specific days. You won't organize a kitchen in a day, but over the course of a week, you can do it! And each day's successes will give you the drive to keep going.

For truly unpleasant tasks, set a timer for 15 minutes, and just do it. Nearly anything is palatable for a quarter of an hour. It's also helpful to see that most unpleasant things don't take nearly as long as we think they will. You may hate going through your in-basket at work. But just 15 minutes each morning and evening is enough to review, sort, do the quickie tasks, and assign the longer ones to your planner. If you're feeling sluggish, complete an easy job first, to get your momentum going. Also, do the toughest tasks when your body is most alert - some people function better first thing in the morning, while others perk up later in the day.

Treat time like a precious gift. Are you a people-pleaser? If you're truly behind in your own tasks, don't add any more optional to-do items until you're caught up. It's okay to say no. It's okay to delegate. It's okay to take some time for yourself. And stop saying, "If I can't do it perfectly, I won't do it at all." Limit choices, let good enough be okay, and move forward. Perfection is not realistic or required in life.

Reward yourself. After 21 days of "just do it" action, treat yourself to something nice... lunch with a friend, a luxurious nap or bubble bath, a hot-fudge sundae, a concert, or an afternoon with a favorite book or movie. You've earned it!

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