

Ask a Job Coach

How to Overcome Procrastination

Based on a Coaching Clinic with Sharon Juden at the Mind Tools Career Excellence Club.
Mind Tools Ltd., 2007, "Why Can't I Just Do It?", Mind Tools Newsletter 73, 5/2/2007,
www.mindtools.com/pages/Newsletters/01May07.htm

How many times have you asked yourself the question "**Why can't I just get on and DO it?**" You find something more interesting to do or stare at a blank sheet of paper. You ask yourself the question again, only to come up with no answer at all! Next time, you tell yourself, you'll be better organized, more motivated, but somehow next time turns out to be like all the other times.

Procrastination is an all too common issue. Whether you're having trouble getting started, getting finished or you're stuck somewhere in between, it's very frustrating indeed.

The following information may help shed some light on the problem. If you stop and ask the question: "Why can't I just DO it?" it can help you get to the root of the problem, and help you get "unstuck". Let's consider the question in more depth:

- **Why**
What is it that's holding me back?
Are you afraid that you might fail, or perhaps even afraid that you might succeed?
- **Can't**
Am I in the wrong frame of mind to start (or finish) this task?
Are you feeling de-motivated by it or bored at the prospect of having to do it? Is it the "wrong" time? Do you feel you aren't able to do the job; lacking enough experience or information to do it properly?
- **I**
Do I feel inadequate in myself?
Do you lack the self-belief and self-confidence to do the job?
- **DO**
Am I clear about the tasks?
Perhaps you can't see the bigger picture and how this particular task fits in with your overall desired outcome. You think, you plan, you make notes, but you don't actually know what to do.
- **It?**
Are my priorities clear?
Are you mixing up important issues with urgent ones and setting your priorities in the wrong place? Are you failing to do what you really should be doing at this moment?

Exercise

Consider each of the questions above, and brainstorm the reasons why you are procrastinating. Think about both practical reasons and how you feel about this task. Once you have written down all your reasons, identify any tangible blockers. These are resources, information that you need to gather from other people, research that you need to do, and so on. All these are things that you need to action promptly or they'll keep on stalling you.

Procrastination-Busting Tactics

There are lots of reasons why you might be procrastinating, and, once you've acted on the tangible blockers, it's all about making sure you have the right mindset and approach. So let's look at some of the ways to achieve this:

- **Take a first step forward**

Sometimes, we feel we've bitten off more than we can chew. And one of the most effective ways to get over that feeling is to do something (anything really!) just to get things going. Choose something that you know you can achieve, and do it, congratulate yourself and then move on to the next task.

- **Know your goals and motivation**

Often we put things off because we don't have a clear "vision" of what we want our final outcome to be. When your goal is fuzzy, this impacts your energy levels, your motivation and naturally your output. You need to be very clear about what it is you want to achieve and how this will benefit you. If you know how something is going to be of benefit to you, you're more likely to do it.

- **Plan your deadlines**

We all need deadlines! If you don't have a specific end point in mind, you're far less likely to achieve it. So be very clear on when a particular task needs to be done by, and then work backwards from that date, identifying smaller steps leading ultimately to the main goal.

- **Focus on what's important (rather than urgent)**

Rather than being sidetracked by lots of perceived "urgent" issues, remember it is the important tasks which get you closer to your goal. When you organize work so you meet all your deadlines, you become more efficient, and therefore accomplish a lot more. You will also probably be calmer and easier to be around, because you're not bouncing from one crisis to another. And this means that you will be better able to deal with truly urgent situations as they arise.

- **Listen to yourself**

Each of us has a unique body clock and concentration curve. By matching your task to the right time of day, and how you are feeling, you can have a big impact on your effectiveness. Choose to deal with the most demanding tasks when your natural energy is at its highest and you will get more done in less time. If you think most creatively and concisely first thing in the morning, plan your creative tasks accordingly.

- **Acknowledge your achievements**

Very importantly too, after achieving each major step towards your goal, take time to acknowledge and congratulate yourself, for having done so. You would do that for a good friend or colleague, so why not do it for yourself? It's motivating; it makes you feel good about yourself. And when you believe that you can actually do it, and that you want to do it, you'll have banished procrastination, once and for all.