

**HOW TO OVERCOME PROCRASTINATION:  
A KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY**  
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Procrastination is the thief of time. People often find that they have difficulty accomplishing goals and completing tasks because of procrastination. Motivational psychologists have shown that there are some cognitive and behavioral strategies that can be helpful in overcoming procrastination. For these strategies to be effective, you must begin now—not later. In other words, attempt at least one of these strategies today—don't wait until tomorrow. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, "You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."

**Consider changing your attitude.** Procrastination sometimes works. Some people procrastinate because they give themselves an excuse for poor performance. They can always say, "I just didn't have time to do a good job." On the other hand, others procrastinate because it actually works for them. By waiting until the last moment, you may increase the sense of urgency so much that you focus your attention more effectively when you do get to the task. Otherwise, you may give the task only minimal attention because you know you have plenty of time or you know there are no consequences for an uncompleted task. If this is the case, then the worst part may be that you blame yourself and rob yourself of a lot of good feelings for a behavioral style that may not be so bad because it actually works for you. Before you try to change your habit of procrastination, check first to see if it works for you.

**Consider letting your mood work for you.** Sometimes it is our mood that stops us from getting things done. If you're not feeling up to a particular assignment, ask yourself: "Is there anything—no matter how small—that I am willing to do in my present mood?" If you get an idea, do

it as soon as you can. In this way, your mood can work for and not against you. Because our emotions are the fuel of our actions, getting in touch with our emotions can get us into motion with action.

**Consider using imagery to get started.** When you know that you're foot-dragging about doing something, and everything you've tried has failed to break the deadlock, try using imagery to move you off dead center. Lie down and imagine yourself taking the first steps to doing the project. See yourself as vividly as possible, going through the motions confidently and without hesitation. Visualize yourself succeeding and feeling good about completing a task. Remain as relaxed as possible all through the imagery. The rationale for using imagery before beginning something is based on the theory of *ideo-motor action*, which states that when we imagine an action, we initiate a process of neural activity in our muscles, which is essentially the same process we would start if we actually performed the action.

**Consider the use of self-imposed deadlines.** When a person can honestly admit that he or she is procrastinating about doing something that is disliked or unpleasant, it can sometimes be helpful to use a self-imposed deadline. A self-imposed deadline can often be enough to create action. Of course, it's even better to tell others about the deadline, which may elicit some additional social support. Consider getting an *accountability partner*, which is someone you respect who will hold you accountable for your decisions. Although we may break commitments to ourselves, we're less likely to do so with someone we respect.

**Consider behavioral “chaining” to get started.**

A procrastinator who is running out of time to get a job started can sometimes make the task easier by using a time-tested technique known as behavioral chaining. Suppose that you’ve delayed washing the car. Get the process started with a *leading task*. The leading task is an initial small step toward a goal. It should be a quick and easy task that does not require any planning. It might mean simply backing the car out of the garage, or getting the hose out, or finding a bucket and soap. Other examples of leading tasks include buying a paint brush to lead you to getting started with painting a room, putting a stamp on an envelope to lead you to pay a bill, and jotting down an outline to lead you to writing a paper. Remember, once you start a task, it’s half-way over.

**Consider progress rather than perfection.**

Some people procrastinate because they are perfectionistic and fearful of making a mistake. Rather than making a mistake—or being criticized by someone for making a mistake—they end up not doing a task at all. However, most important tasks do not need to be done perfectly or all at once, but rather they require small steps over a period of time. If completion of a large task is a goal, then consider taking the small steps each day that move in the direction of the goal. Unless you are landing a helicopter or performing brain surgery, there are few tasks that need to be done perfectly. To overcome procrastination, strive for progress rather than perfection.

**Consider learning to say no.**

If a job is not worth doing well, then perhaps it is not worth doing at all. Sometimes we obligate ourselves to take on tasks that we should not be taking on in the first place. In such situations, procrastination may be a form of passive-aggressively saying no. Rather than using passive-aggressive behavior, considering using assertive behavior by simply saying no when you are asked to do things that you will not do in the first place.

**Procrastination vs. Patience.** Sometimes a concrete example is easier to understand than an abstract definition. *Procrastination* would be avoiding and delaying filing an income tax return, whereas *patience* would be waiting on a refund over which one has no control. As one counselor stated the difference on a more abstract level, “*Procrastination* is about avoiding something I don’t want to do. *Patience* is about waiting for something I do want” (D. Midkiff, personal communication, June 13, 2024). Patience is also one of the Seven Cardinal Virtues. In the words of St. Teresa of Ávila (1515 – 1582), “Patience attains all that it strives for.” When striving to live by spiritual principles, any destination can be reached by the Three Ps—patience, persistence, and perseverance.

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