

Next year *Later* *Tomorrow*
Maybe *Someday*

Perhaps

COMBAT PROCRASTINATION

Next month
18 Essential Beliefs & Strategies

In the future

Next week

Not yet

Other day



XCEL Quest
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Reality of Procrastination



Who hasn't wrestled with procrastination—both the enticement it initially offers and then the frustration and regret it delivers afterwards. Despite the accusations and negative connotation, **procrastination is NOT a character flaw!**

Rather procrastination is a strategic response to a negative thought the brain generates either consciously or unconsciously. That negative thought produces pain sensations that alert the survival-focused aspect of the brain to **AVOID pain** and **SEEK pleasure**. All approaches to combating procrastination must contend with the reality that procrastination is serving as a survival strategy, protecting you from perceived danger.

Yet take a closer look! Notice that the perceived dangers are fears of failing, embarrassment, public humiliation, revealing inadequacies, etc. **None are really life threatening**; and ironically, procrastination often insures your worst fears are realized.

5 Essential Beliefs to Adopt If YOU are Ready to Combat Procrastination:

BELIEF

1

Believe that you are **capable** and **resourceful**. Trust that you either have the skills, knowledge, and resources needed or that you can develop and/or find them.

BENEFIT

This belief combats negative thoughts such as I don't know what to do; I can't do it; it's too hard; I'm inadequate for the task, etc.

BELIEF

2

Believe that mistakes, missteps, errors in judgment, detours, misconceptions, underestimating, and overestimating **are inevitable** and simply part of the doing.

BENEFIT

This belief combats the fear of being wrong and the dread of what being wrong might mean. Inaction is the antithesis of success. Because success is rooted in experience, which depends upon learning from mistakes. Mistakes are data that educate us about what to do next!

BELIEF

Believe the science that demonstrates that the brain continuously, and outside our consciousness, percolates on ideas we have pondered and seeks answers to questions we have asked. Take advantage of your **mind's amazing ability** to work overtime at the subconscious level. Once you understand this, you will want to schedule a brainstorming session soon after you commit to a new project because you will want to cash in on this bonus capacity the brain offers to work on your ideas while you're doing other things.

BENEFIT

3

This belief combats the negative thought that I'm confused, overwhelmed, and can't move forward; I don't know how or where to begin. This belief also combats the alluring self-deception that you will do better later when the deadline approaches, time is short, and sufficient pressure will spur you to action. True, mounting pressure often creates the motivation and focus needed to complete a task. But imagine the value of more time to revise and refine your work. Imagine the benefit of the same motivation and focus without first experiencing the terror, anxiety, and pressure procrastination generates.

BELIEF

4

Believe that the rational part of your brain (prefrontal cortex), when intentionally engaged, can override the emotional "fight or flight" part of your brain (amygdala). This emotional response is quick and certain. Combat strategy: Begin to notice and develop an awareness of what's happening. Pause, remind yourself that **you can consciously choose** to ignore the automatic emotional response, which frequently sends "false" warning signals of pending doom, and choose ACTION instead.

BENEFIT

This belief combats the source of the negative thoughts that trigger procrastination.

BELIEF

5

Believe that the temporary relief and pleasure that procrastination provides you is very expensive—**costing you** time, accomplishments, quality of your work, peace of mind, and self-worth.

BENEFIT

This belief combats the negative thought that acting now will be a waste of time and exposes the hidden costs.

13 Strategies to Consider when YOU are Ready to Combat Procrastination:

Long-Term Strategies:

1

Schedule adequate fun and downtime. Procrastination can be a strategic response to the negative thought that you never have any fun or time to relax. If that's true, heed this warning! Being overworked and over scheduled extracts many tolls and one is procrastination.

Power of Balance & Health

2

Develop decision-making strategies. Thoroughly exploring and weighing options is valuable and rational, but set a time limit. Choose a deadline for deciding. Develop a team of informal advisers to consult on decisions that exceed your expertise. Delegate some decisions to others (spouse, partner, friends, colleagues) and accept their choice.

Power of Delegation and Deciding Ahead of Time

3

Develop advanced decision-making strategies. Embrace the radical notion that there are no right or wrong decisions! Since the outcome of any decision is beyond your control, think of decisions with less definitive judgment. Consider that your decisions are the best possible given your experience, perspective, and available information. Increase your confidence in your own intuition. Believe that you can solve future problems if the decision turns out to be merely adequate, unhelpful, or even ill-advised. Accept that perfection isn't possible!

Power of Reconsidering Assumptions

4

Adopt Steven Pressfield's recommendation in War of Art to be a pro and pros show up to do the challenging work every day no matter how they feel.

Power of Others' Wisdom

Immediate Strategies:

5

Choose the project/commitment you are most enthusiastic about but has stalled from procrastination. Brainstorm (and write down) every thought about this project/commitment that comes to mind. Review your “thought dump” to discover as many component parts as possible. As you make the large, nebulous thing more tangible and manageable some of your resistance may ease. You will also discover a way forward on the project as you see the pieces of the project on paper rather than in your head. Select the very first next action you can take.

Power of Making Thoughts Visible

6

Choose the project/commitment you most dread even thinking about. The strategy is similar but the goal and steps are different. Brainstorm (and write down) every thought about this project/commitment that comes to mind, but limit the time to only 3 minutes. Review your “thought dump” to discover (not all the component parts) just ONE task you are willing to do, and it should not take longer than 5 minutes to complete. This task might be as simple as finding a phone number, or a relevant file, or a recommended book title.

Power of Small Steps

7

Spend 30 minutes daily working on your dreaded procrastinated tasks. After two weeks, you will have spent at least five hours on the tasks that have been draining your energy and cluttering your mind. Doing this consistently will generate momentum and energy as well as whittle down some long-neglected tasks.

Power of Consistency

Triage Strategies:

8

Prioritize your responsibilities, projects, and tasks. This requires that you postpone working on some of them. Consider this postponement as intentional procrastination, the upside of procrastination, or decide that such an approach is not procrastination at all since you postponed with intention rather than as an impulse to escape. Either way it is a positive, strategic response to the reality that you have too much to do.

Power of Accepting

9

Choose to let go of some responsibilities or projects. When habitual procrastination signals that you've lost interest or the once-meaningful activity no longer fits with your long-term goals, simply acknowledge reality and move on!

Power of Culling

Daily Strategies:

10

Limit your daily to-do list. Select three essential must-dos that advance your priorities. Of course, you can and will likely do more. But you can avoid the feelings of overwhelm, frustration, and confusion that lead to procrastination when you isolate the essentials and disentangle them from the rest.

Power of Focus and Clarity

11

Choose tasks in advance. Ideally, at the end of each work day select tomorrow's most important and/or first task. This reduces the resistance of deciding and bargaining with yourself.

Power of Deciding Ahead of Time & Reducing Decision Fatigue

12

Set a timer for 25 minutes. Remove distractions from your phone and computer. Focus on only one task. Take a 5-minute break after the 25-minute work session. Repeat and after four sessions take at least a 30-minute break. This describes the classic Pomodoro technique for combatting procrastination. Feel free to adjust the times and frequency as desired.

Power of Intention and Focus

Anytime Strategy:

13

Hire a coach who will partner with you to implement these beliefs & strategies and explore other beliefs & strategies that can propel your progress toward fulfilling your aspirations!

Power of Partnership

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