

## **BEATING PROCRASTINATION**

As a well-seasoned procrastinator I will find almost anything to do as a diversionary tactic from the task I know I *should* be doing. It's amazing how many trivial jobs just have to be done when I'm faced with a gnarly project or challenging task.

Why do we procrastinate? There are lots of reasons, but I think these are key:

**FEAR.** There's almost always some element of fear underlying a tendency to procrastinate. Fear of failure (or success); fear of not doing something well enough (perfectionists will recognise this); fear of being exposed ... Fear is an instinctive reaction which is designed to make us get as far away from the cause of the fear as possible - no wonder we'll do anything to avoid the activity associated with it!

If you can, the best thing to do is to get to grips with the fear. Get to know it, "take it out to dinner" and find out more about it. Grab it by the collar and shake it. Ask yourself "What am I afraid of? What's stopping me?" Perhaps you can get your thoughts down on paper or discuss it with someone objective who can help you think it through. When you're clearer about what the fear is, see if you can find a creative way to address it. Do you need to challenge your beliefs and think differently? Find out more information? Get some help, advice or support? Once you understand what the elements of fear are, they're easier to address.

**LACK OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, UNDERSTANDING.** We can also put off doing things because of a gap in our knowledge or skills. In this case, ask yourself, "What's missing? Where are the gaps?" What do you need to find out? Where could you get this information? Is there someone with expertise in the knowledge or skills you lack who could give you advice or support? Do you need some training to fill a specific skills gap?

*FEELING OVERWHELMED.* Another key reason for procrastination is because a task feels too overwhelming. It's been said many times, but it really does help to break a large project or task down into small, manageable steps. Writing a book feels like a huge mountain to climb, but if you break it down into chapters and then set yourself a goal of writing, say, two pages a day it feels more achievable.

*YOU DON'T ENJOY / AREN'T GOOD AT THE TASK.* Let's face it, there are some tasks that we aren't naturally good at and probably don't enjoy. I know many self-employed people who are brilliant at what they do but loathe picking up the phone to speak to prospective clients - and consequently put it off as long as they can. If this is the case, is there someone you could delegate the task to? Or perhaps you could barter or do a skills swap with someone who would find the job easy.

*INABILITY TO GET STARTED.* Getting started is the hardest thing for procrastinators. My favourite remedy is Mark Forster's ([www.markforster.net](http://www.markforster.net)) strategy of "just getting the file out." Having reassured yourself that you're not actually going to DO the task at hand, ask yourself ... if I were going to do it, what's the very first thing I'd have to do to get started? In Mark's example, this might be to simply get the file out. It could be to switch on the computer; find the phone number of the person you need to call; sit down at a table with a pad of paper ... More often than not you do end up doing that first thing and, having done that, you'll probably get stuck into the task. Just taking that first step is the key.

Everyone knows the procrastination rules: you should set your priorities; you should do the task first before you do anything else; you should chunk it down into smaller steps ... But you need lots of self-discipline to actually do it, and in my experience that often doesn't work. As Dr Joseph Ferrari, Professor of Psychology at De Paul University in Chicago and an expert on procrastination, says: "Telling someone who procrastinates to buy a weekly planner is like telling someone with chronic depression to just cheer up."

So what's the answer? In my experience the number one best way to beat procrastination is to make yourself accountable to someone else. You just can't beat it. Whether it's a friend or family member, your boss or your coach, making a firm commitment to someone else makes a huge difference to your actually knuckling down and doing it.

SO... try making yourself accountable to someone for those task(s) you've been putting off. Or you could "buddy up" with someone else: make a commitment to each other, agree a deadline and check in with each other to make sure the job is done. It really does work.