



Beating Procrastination

Be Happier and Achieve More!

By Jack Webster

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Contents

Please Read This First.....	2
<i>Terms of Use</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Disclaimer.....</i>	<i>2</i>
Contents.....	3
About the Author	5
Introduction	6
The Truth about Procrastination	8
<i>What we Feed our Children.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>There's no Cure for Procrastination</i>	<i>9</i>
How Procrastination Starts	10
Why do we Procrastinate?	12
Signs of Procrastination.....	15
<i>Focus on minor Tasks.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Interruptions.</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Waiting for the Right Moment.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Last Minute Dash</i>	<i>16</i>
Effects of Procrastination.....	17
The Rocky Road to Recovery.....	19
<i>Don't let Regret hold You Back.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Please Adjust Your Mindset.....	21
Handling the Bumps	22
Change the Message.....	23
Quick Procrastination Reducers.....	25
<i>Do it for Just 20 Minutes.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Last Minute Lift</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Compare the Benefits</i>	<i>26</i>
Reduce Your Load	27
<i>Avoid Negative People</i>	<i>27</i>

<i>Switch off your TV.....</i>	<i>27</i>
The Power of Simple Processes	29
Multi-tasking.....	31
Taming Your Environment	32
Exercise: Review a “Busy” Person’s Day.....	33
<i>The “Busy” Person’s Schedule.....</i>	<i>34</i>
My Suggestions for Improving Their Day.	36
Your Health	40
<i>Sleep.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Exercise.....</i>	<i>40</i>
Lists and Schedules	42
Whittling away Writer’s Block.....	44
Your Legacy	47
Last Word from Jack Webster.....	48

About the Author

Jack Webster has worked in various sales and advertising positions. A couple of years ago he recognized the effect that his procrastination was having on his progress in business and also his personal life.

Jack found it difficult to work up from his situation at that point. But, he knew that he had little choice unless he wanted to give up on ever reaching the goals he had set for himself. Jack worked through his own problem but confesses that it was not easy or a completely smooth path.

He found that many people had old and discredited ideas about the causes of procrastination and those who suffered from it. He tried a variety of methods. Some were more useful to him than others. So, he started writing this book to help other people by sharing his experience and explain the problem without technical language or untested theory.

He shares the tips and strategies which helped him over the rough spots to his present situation with a much better job and, he feels, almost unlimited prospects for the future. Jack understands how hard it can be to break through procrastination when it has affected our self-confidence and caused damage to our personal relationships and business prospects. He has been there and can show you the methods which can help you and those you care about. He goes beyond the usual "break big tasks into small pieces" and "make a list", though those things can help.

Jack shows you how he dealt, mentally and physically, with his procrastination and how he can help you to break its hold and reduce it to just be a memory.

Introduction

You have taken a very important step to improving your life.

Procrastination prevents us from achieving and being seen to achieve what we are capable of. It puts us in the position of someone who might die of thirst in the middle of a lake of fresh water. Everyone procrastinates sometimes. But, if you let your procrastination become a habit, there could be serious effects on your health, employment and relationships unless you find a way to deal with it.

I'll show you the way that I dealt with my procrastination habit. There is no quick fix for this problem but I will explain the most powerful techniques that have given good results for me through this e-book. You will see that most of the techniques which I share with you are as simple as they are effective.

The particular methods which worked for me may not appeal equally to you but you will be able to adapt them to more closely suit your own circumstances. I have also included some ideas which I know have been very useful for other people. Please don't try to find the perfect method for you. Delaying your first attempt to reduce the effect of procrastination on your life will give the habit more time to get a stronger grip on your mental processes and your path back to a more productive and happier life will be that much harder.

Read through the book so that you have an overview of the suggestions and my experiences with them. Then, **pick something and get started.** That, in one sentence, is the most important step in your campaign to conquer procrastination.

The best motivation you will get as you take those first steps toward making a better life for yourself is when you have completed your first tasks in a shorter time and with better results.

Then, you will realize that you really do have within you the ability to succeed at whatever you want.

Don't spend time regretting past disappointments. Focus your eyes on the horizon and keep pushing toward your goals.

Some of the tips will be things you already know. It may be that you have lost some confidence in your ability to put them into practise because of earlier disappointments or negative feedback from other people.

Don't let the old wounds hold you back.

I know that you will probably have some moments when you feel that the battle is much harder than you expected. I've had several points like that myself.

But, overcoming those bumps was usually easier than I had thought possible.

The alternative, sliding back into a negative mindset where I had little control or optimism about the future, was never a worthwhile option.

Read the book, take action and live your dreams.

Jack Webster 2009

The Truth about Procrastination

Almost everyone procrastinates about some things in their lives at some time. Instead of focusing on the task we have to start, we choose to let our mind drift to more pleasant areas such as our plans for the following weekend.



We put off something which is boring or challenging and focus on something which is more comfortable or enjoyable; a "quick fix". But, many people let it become a habit because they don't realize how powerful and destructive that long-term procrastination can be for the person who does it and their families.

What we Feed our Children

Do you think that you or some people you know were **born procrastinators**?

This idea probably comes from parents and teachers who tell children that they are bone lazy and will never improve because they cannot stick to any task through to its completion. This might encourage the child to think that they do not have the qualities necessary to become successful or make them less willing to try hard to overcome the sort of challenges we all encounter while growing up.

But, everyone starts life with a strong, instinctive desire to achieve and succeed. If they grow up with supportive parents who encourage as well as guide them, they will have the best chance of achieving whatever skills and potentials that they have. If they grow up continually hearing negative feedback about their abilities, the intensity of their desire may be blunted.

But it's still there and can be rejuvenated at any time - it just needs a little sincere encouragement. When they have their first success, they will be reassured and more comfortable about their own ability. Another thing that reduces some children's desire to improve their self is when their parents do too much for their child. Or, they make excuses if the child

avoids its chores or other responsibilities. But, no one is born lazy, we all have to battle our way ahead from the moment the sperm meets the egg.

Do you believe **procrastination** is just a trendy term for **L-A-Z-Y**?

Most people who are affected by procrastination actually put in a lot of effort to accomplish their goals and meet their work obligations. But, they aren't organized or effective performers. They need help to beat the problem so that they can focus better and start getting the results their efforts deserve. My definition of procrastination is "the habit of choosing to delay important actions". Essentially, procrastination is when "we don't do what we know we have to do".



There's no Cure for Procrastination

It's important to realize that procrastination is never cured; you can only hope to achieve a level where you control the urge, but have to be watchful that you don't have a relapse.

But, my experience shows that it most people find it is easy to control when they keep in mind the amount of suffering which they and those close to them went through before they firmed up their resolve and took the steps to break from its grip. That's all that most people need to make sure that procrastination never again gets a hold of them and that it becomes little more than a distant memory.

How Procrastination Starts

The tasks which we do may be divided into just a few categories:

- 1)** Critical tasks: These are important and urgent.
- 2)** Important tasks: These must be done but are not urgent.
- 3)** Can do tasks: These are the tasks which you are used to doing but which could be, and probably should be, done by somebody else.
- 4)** Trivial tasks: These are tasks which could be left undone without affecting your productivity.

It might surprise you, but it is quite common for people to keep busy with tasks in the last two categories while some with a higher priority and potential payoff are not even started.

Another factor which encourages us to delay starting some tasks is that they are boring or unappealing in some other way. Most of us do not realize how strongly procrastination can limit our attempts to achieve our goals or even just to maintain our reputation as a productive member of the workforce.



This simple explanation will show you why it can be very hard to break the procrastination habit.

Procrastination starts, like many other dangerous habits, with a very small step. We choose to delay action on something where the most important option requires more effort or is somehow less appealing than the less important choice.

After that, it is likely that we'll do that again when presented with a choice where we prefer the one which is less important but easier or more enjoyable. Procrastination soon has a grip on us which becomes very tight as we let it affect the internal dialog from which our subconscious takes its instructions.

Delaying more hard choices causes a noticeable increase in the pressure we feel. Then, we have to put more time into our work to try to catch up.

This puts pressure on our relationships at work and also with those we make commitments to privately, especially our family. That's when we start to find less time for exercise or to share with our family and friends.

Also, we get less enjoyment from the time we do have with them. We find it difficult to relax because of the growing dark cloud of concern about our unfinished work. People in this situation often start to try to blame others for their situation and its consequences. They become resentful and lose any enthusiasm for their work. They get further behind and the effects become more dramatic.

We increase our efforts as the negative affects on our personal and business activities grow. But, we find it even harder to get the expected results because our procrastination has become habitual. Simple, "quick fixes" can help but it becomes very tempting to slip back into the habit or to choose to delay any attempt to break it. I will help you through the process, but it will be your achievement.

I know from my own experience that you will soon start to feel very happy that you took this step. When you start to experience the feeling of freedom as you again start to be more effective in your work and can once again enjoy more quality time with your family and friends, it will boost your own self-confidence enormously. Then, you will know you are really back on track to reaching your goals. That will encourage you to imagine and plan how to achieve even greater success.

Why do we Procrastinate?

Let me start with the obvious. There are many excuses which people can use to justify their procrastination but only a few basic reasons:

- They have poor time-management skills.
- They are under-motivated about dealing with the tasks assigned to them.
- The task is boring or less appealing than other, probably less important options for filling their time.
- They say that they need more information. This may be true or just the excuse of a person who likes to have everything “perfect” before they start something. It usually is a mask for a deep-seated fear of failure and causes them to achieve much less than they are probably capable of.
- They say that they need more time than they currently have available to do the task. This person is insisting on having everything “just right” before they begin. Unfortunately, the demands of modern business mean that we often have to start tasks from where we are and with what we have. If we delay our attempt to take advantage of an opportunity, a rival within the company might take it from us or it will require more time and possibly money as well to complete the task.

Any delay will always increase the cost of completing the task.

- They are not sure that they can do it successfully. This person is really worried about how they will feel or they will be viewed by others if they do the task but do not produce a good result.

That's “fear of failure” which is probably the prime reason for most of the procrastination which we indulge in.

It may be a learned response after getting a bad result from an earlier, similar task. But, sometimes it happens because the person has been indoctrinated by their family, friends or colleagues who have told them continually that they are just not capable of achieving success with this type of task.

- They don't see this task as important. That's fine if the task is one that they have given themselves. Then, they can either delegate the task to someone else or decide that it does not need to be done. But, it's a recipe for trouble if they were directed by their boss to complete the task.
- They believe that they have too much to do. This person might actually have become overcommitted. Many people are unable to say, "No" to any request. It is very common for people to take on more tasks than we are able to handle efficiently. This person needs to deal with future tasks by setting up a schedule for themselves and sticking to it.



But, they need to do the tasks they have already accepted or ensure that it is done by someone else in good time. The worst option is to let it lie in their bulging in-tray.

- They say that they don't want to do it now. They probably mean that they just don't want to do it.

Many people resist doing what needs to be done because they are not happy with the situation they are in. They feel that the situation should be different and their procrastination is a silent form of rebellion against how things are. This is against their own best interests because the people who rely on them to perform the task will judge them on the results, or lack of them; not their view of "what should be".

Their resistance will not help them in any way to achieve a change in the situation which they are frustrated by. The only way they might produce a positive result from the situation is to complete the task in good time, despite any perceived drawbacks. Then, they might ask for better terms on similar tasks which they do in the future.

I found the word "should" was a trap. The day I realized that I had to focus on dealing with what I could change for the better and ignore stuff that I thought "should be changed" but that I could not have any noticeable effect on was an important one in my own battle with procrastination.

Signs of Procrastination

An important step on the path to becoming more effective is to learn to recognize when we start to procrastinate.

Focus on minor Tasks.

It can be easy for us to think we are prioritizing our tasks when we are really just putting off the ones which don't appeal to us. That's when we waste our time and effort on minor tasks which we know we can easily accomplish or those which we enjoy more than the others, rather than challenging ourselves by getting on with the critical ones.

You might go for a coffee or make a couple of non-urgent phone calls before starting on the main task. If the task is important, then don't delay the start to indulge yourself.

Start the task first. Then, make the phone-calls while you have your coffee after you have made some progress with the important task. That progress will probably put you in a better mood which will help you to enjoy your coffee more.

It is also likely to make a better impression on the people that are depending on you to do the task as well!

Interruptions.

We should try to minimize the effect of other people interrupting our attempts to do our work without good reason.

Phone calls, e-mails and trips to the water cooler are inevitable but they also eat away at our productive time.

Many people don't realize that there is an extra significant hidden cost with each interruption. Research has shown that we all need extra time to refocus our mind on the important task which we put aside to deal with the interruption.

I've read various figures for the time it can take someone to reset their focus, from 5 to 15 minutes after each significant distraction. Those unprofitable interludes could be losing us up to an extra hour and a half from our working day!

Waiting for the Right Moment

There will never be a better moment to start an important project than right now. After you review the information provided to you and ensure that you understand the result which you are expected to produce, any delay in starting the task should have to be justified because it is likely to add to the cost in time, money and other resources to complete the project.

Last Minute Dash

If you always have to increase your speed and burn the midnight oil to finish anything, you are either taking on too many tasks or you might be letting procrastination interfere with your progress. The cost to your health and progress in your job may not be obvious right now. But, I can promise you that adopting at least some of my suggestions to remove the procrastination which is holding you back will show fairly quick and lasting benefits. That will include letting you make better use of the late night hours than trying to meet deadlines.



Effects of Procrastination

The effects of delaying action on important tasks or commitments can be severe. The immediate impact may only be fairly small, but the stress which people inflict on themselves as they struggle with their inability to complete the important tasks can stay within their subconscious and continue to affect their morale and also their ability to successfully tackle other tasks for years into the future.

They soon discover that they are overlooked for other opportunities which may arise as the word gets around that they miss deadlines and arrive late for meetings and social functions. Their reputation suffers and their own self-image is damaged through the negativity which they constantly feed into their own mind.

The irony is that people that procrastinate keep making greater and totally sincere efforts to accomplish the tasks they are committed to do. But they don't address the issues which are at the base of their problem. So, they remain unfocused and their attempts to improve the situation are not effective.

They also start to miss family events and cancel their participation in other social functions as they desperately try to catch up with their backlog of work-related commitments.

Their increasing negativity and the anger which they feel as their disappointments mount, causes further friction with family members, their friends and the people they work with. The effect on their personal relationships grows as they spend less time to with their family and friends and are poor company when they do. They react to the pressure by skipping meals, reducing the time when they try to sleep and exercise which further reduces their capacity to catch up.



This vicious cycle can seriously affect their health within a short time and make them prime candidates for more serious health problems. This can

be the start a dangerous spiral of worsening health problems that need examination and, possibly, treatment as soon as possible. But, of course, they are likely to put off seeking the professional medical attention until they become too ill to continue their efforts to catch up.

Many take their obligation to their work more seriously than their need to maintain their own health. Their low self esteem and energy levels affect the quality of the work which they do complete. They are likely to make more errors, especially those due to lack of attention to detail. Then, they need to find more time to fix these problems which put more pressure on them. These are heavy penalties and they can only get worse unless they start to takes steps to break their addiction to procrastination.

They also begin to realize that they are wasting their most valuable and limited resource, time. The good news is that procrastination is one serious habit which you can beat even after it has become an unconscious part of your daily routine.

The Rocky Road to Recovery

At some point, every procrastinator tries to break through and restart their climb back to a more productive and enjoyable life. It may feel like we're a fish trying to swim against a flood tide. We will get pushed back and even bruised at times. But, we must keep pushing until we break through.

Start by reviewing all the important aspects of your current situation. That's not easy when you're already under heavy pressure to deal with the problems your procrastination has caused. But, give yourself some private time so that you have a clear idea of the factors which are contributing to your current problems. Only then, can you start to deal effectively with them. You know that your path out of procrastination will take effort.

To encourage yourself, give yourself short periods of rest, preferably with supportive friends or family, after you have completed a small but clearly defined part of your current task. You may feel the need to keep pushing but giving yourself an occasional small reward can boost your determination and effectiveness and help you to deliver your best work.

Please don't confuse personal time spent with family and friends or just alone reading a book or fishing with procrastination. Having some "me-time" is essential for our personal well-being. That time only becomes procrastination when it occurs while we should be finishing some major commitment. When we start to give those commitments their proper place in our schedule, we will find that we have more personal time and we enjoy it more as well.

These short breaks can be one of the best incentives when your campaign against procrastination hits a bump or seems to be taking much longer than you hoped.

Of course, you need to save the long breaks until your new mindset is firmly in place and you are getting consistent results. You will be surprised by the improvement in your outlook after just a little planning and effort.

Don't let Regret hold You Back

One thing which often has a severe negative effect on what we accomplish and how much enjoyment we get from our lives is when we continually fill our minds with useless regret and bitterness about past errors and disappointments. People often relive these past dramas and blame the other people involved for their own current troubles and lack of progress.



The current problems may have some connection to those past events but those people will not help you. You must accept that your focus on the past is holding you back from being able to focus on your current goals.

Then, discard those feelings and set your mind to achieving your current goals. This is another negative habit and you probably won't change your mental attitude overnight.

Some people find it helpful to write brief details of the past events on paper and physically destroy it. Then, they take a fresh sheet of paper and start planning their new, happier future without the baggage that has been holding them back.

This is also a good time to start clearing any physical clutter which is only serving as a reminder of those past disappointments. Then, you can start clearing out anything else which is just costing you time to maintain but not providing benefits to your present working or personal activities.

Do you have old computers, boxes of hobby gear that you haven't touched for years, tools or kitchen gadgets that you never got around to fixing or just never use? You might be pleasantly surprised how much better you will feel when they are gone along with those old regrets.

Please Adjust Your Mindset

The first thing to do is accept that you can make the changes in your attitude and your situation, whatever bumps that you may feel on the way. I believe that we should eliminate the word "try" from our speech and our thoughts. I hear someone almost every day say something like, "I will try to" It seems to make people think they have not really committed to doing whatever you asked of them. They just have to "try".

Unless there are specific reasons, like the availability of equipment or the necessity to get approval from another person, then just say, "I will ..." and do it. Tell the person you make a commitment to about any factors that might prevent you from doing what you said before you start the task so they know the whole story and don't get a completely unexpected disappointment when it is too late to do anything about it.

Few people realize that everybody conducts an almost continuous conversation with themselves through all their waking hours. While some people can be seen actually talking to themselves, everybody feeds their subconscious a string of mental messages that reflect our current belief about our own capabilities and future prospects.

Unfortunately, this is often negative input. This may result from our having been unable to complete a similar task in the past or it may have become ingrained because of negative messages we received from our parents and those around us while we were growing up. We must remember that our subconscious will accept what ever messages we feed to it.

Make the change now so that your mind is fed content with a strong and ongoing focus on our belief in our own self worth and abilities.

Handling the Bumps

Many people procrastinate because they fear what might happen if they start to take action. Their idea of their self-worth is tied to their day to day performance and other people's view of them. If this sort of thinking affects you to any extent, please realize that nobody ever got through their life without making mistakes. Not even my friend that once told me, "I thought I made a mistake yesterday. But, of course, I was wrong!"



The trick is to learn from the inevitable mistakes. They are not a problem unless you keep making the same one.

Don't let how you think someone else thinks about cause you concern or stop you from taking action. You cannot do anything about someone else's opinion of you by worrying about it. But, you can cause distress to yourself and limit your progress if you let that worry into your thinking.

It's a good idea to consider what might happen if your plans don't work out. Then, decide what you can accept in the way of negative outcomes and how you will recover from them.

Often, the real outcome could be nowhere as bad as your imagination conjured up to torment you. Also, give equal consideration to the potential benefits if things go to plan. Then, take action. Further delay will definitely cost you.

Change the Message

It's amazing how self-destructive many humans are. People that have great skills find it hard to accept and acknowledge their own potential. They talk down their achievements and they tell themselves that they cannot succeed with a new task because they tried something similar in the past and it did not work. They forget that most successful people only started to achieve their potential when they recognized their early disappointments as necessary learning experiences which they would not have to try next time.

These people are often hamstrung by disappointment over past failures and keep their focus on the past. There's no disgrace in making mistakes, Thomas Edison made quite a lot. Just try not to keep making the same ones. While they keep clinging to irrational and unproven mindsets, they also fail to take action – the most important step in achieving their dreams for themselves and those they care about.

When you get a job which offers little reward for some time, many people focus on the effort and the time they must put in. Instead of looking on the task as something that was imposed on you, tell yourself that it is something that you choose to do. If we tell our subconscious that we "must" and we "should" do a new and important task now, we might react to it as if we are being compelled. We may not have much choice but we do have some. Doing it well and on time is really the only practical choice. Make the best of the situation and consciously focus on the positive aspects of getting the new task to do:

- ✓ When somebody gives you an important task, they demonstrate their belief that you are the best person available to accomplish it.
- ✓ It is an opportunity to show what you can do.
- ✓ Performing it well and on time could lead to more important and profitable opportunities in the future.

When you tell yourself this, your subconscious mind accepts it without question and you will start to see a noticeable improvement in your outlook and attitude within a very short time.

I used to fear the start of every day when my alarm clock brought me out of a troubled sleep. I didn't realize the benefits which I had over many people; reasonable health, a well-paying, though boring, job and a loving family.

I read that Zig Ziglar, a motivational speaker, suggested that people start calling their clock an "opportunity" clock instead of an alarm.

But, I think a friend of mine put it better when he said, "If you wake up and can get up, you're already a winner!"



Quick Procrastination Reducers

The simple steps which I outline here can help almost anyone to become more productive and get them back onto the path to reach their goals. These techniques will not take much effort or time to start using them. They will show some positive results fairly quickly which will help to motivate you.

Do it for Just 20 Minutes.

One of the hardest things for most of us is to start that new project even when we know it is important and the deadline is looming. We look at the size of the task and choose to delay it until we have more time, information or energy.

Now that you are resolved to make better use of your time, I suggest that you just give yourself 20 minutes of concentrated effort on that stalled project. After all, almost anyone can spare 20 minutes for something important, can't they? In truth, many people actually find it hard to focus on a single subject for as long as 20 minutes. When you actually do that regularly and see the improvement in your output which results, you will find that it is not difficult at all. You can use this for both physical and mental tasks.

If you are someone that finds it difficult to fit visits to the gym into your week, give yourself three twenty-minute slots this week for self-paced exercise in your home or by cycling or just walking nearby. If the project you are focused on is part of your work, you may think that twenty minutes is not enough time to produce anything worthwhile. But, it is my experience that 20 minutes of focused effort will give you a measurable result, far better than you would probably get if you grudgingly set aside, say, an hour where you were less focused.

There are some bonuses which this technique gives you. The most obvious is that it removes the depressing fear of the unknown which will grow in your mind until you actually start on the project. Your 20 minutes of concentrated effort will often give you the motivation to keep on with the task after the allotted time because you can see that you are making inroads.

Of course, you must make sure that you don't start getting behind with your other work when you do this. You will also have a better idea of what is involved in completing the task after you start to do it. You may find that it is more interesting than you knew. Even if you stick to the 20 minute slots, you will be increasing your knowledge related to the task. Your subconscious will keep processing that information while you are busy with other things. The more information it has to work with, the better you will be able to handle the task. You might find, as I have from time to time, that it will produce shortcuts and enhancements that will help you to get better results more quickly than you had thought possible.

Last Minute Lift

Some people have told me that they get a buzz by subjecting themselves to the pressure of a rapidly approaching deadline.

But, they could get the buzz and improve their productivity while avoiding stress by completing each task earlier.

Then, they might just add another task to fill up the time they save and that could bring them in more money, either directly or through improved performance reviews leading to more rapid advancement.

Even better, they could reward themselves for the early completion of task by using the time they save to relax with their family, friends and re-energize themselves.

Compare the Benefits

Ben Franklin made good use of a selling tactic which has become known as the "Ben Franklin Close". It is still used by many successful salespeople. They put a piece of paper on the desk in front of their prospect, draw a vertical line down the center of the sheet and asks the prospect what benefits they see in the product. The sales person lists these benefits on the left side of the page.

Then, they ask, "do you see any possible drawbacks to using the product?" The sales person lists these on the other side of the line. It's a fair way to see what the prospect likes about the product and those factors which may be stopping them at this stage from buying it.

We can use this system to get a better focus on the advantages for us in tackling our procrastination habit and also listing on the other side of the center line things which may be holding us back from doing that. Making a quick list of the if potential benefits you'll get when you reduce and eventually eliminate procrastination and comparing them against whatever factors keep you from tackling it now will perhaps be a spur to encourage to when you have a set back that might shake your resolve.

Reduce Your Load

Most people accumulate too many things which demand our time and attention in our personal and business relationships. These will include some time and energy consuming activities that are no longer of much interest or usefulness to us.

They may actually have changed from having a positive effect on our lives to becoming a negative influence.

Avoid Negative People

Many of the people we associate with generally have similar attitudes to ourselves. That makes us feel more comfortable around them as they help to re-enforce our views. So, people that procrastinate tend to cluster together and that may make it harder for us to break our own habit.

At some point, you may have to decide that you spend less time with other people that are giving you negative input and look for support and motivation with people that have a more positive and successful outlook.

Switch off your TV.

One of the biggest drains on our energy is television! Many people have it on in their work area, believing that it will help them relax or keep them in touch with events that they are interested in on a personal or business level. But, the depressing effects on our state of mind make it an unwise choice.

Some people use it as a way to relax just before going to bed. But, some research suggests that this will actually cause interruptions to your normal sleep patterns and you will get less of the most relaxing type of sleep after even a short session in front of the box.

Some people like to have music or a radio program playing in their office to relax them or perhaps to mask less pleasant background noise like traffic or machinery near their work area. If that works for you, okay. But, if you are only doing that from habit, you might want to try a day without the music to get a better idea whether it really is a help for you.

Ask a friendly colleague for help or your supervisor for some counseling. That's part of their job. Most people will be very willing to help when they see that you are making a genuine effort to break the grip of procrastination and improve yourself.



The Power of Simple Processes

Since my own battle against my procrastination habit became just a matter of making sure I didn't slip back, I've found that my work could be improved by putting some simple systems in place and then following them.

This is not to be confused with planning of any particular project. These systems are step-by-step guides about how to do the tasks which I do frequently.

I soon realized that this approach to standardizing my regular and specialized processes might have reduced the chance of procrastination getting a hold on me if I'd had been doing things this way much earlier. I can guarantee that it will repay you over and over if you invest some time to standardize the way that you do repetitive tasks, even those which are fairly simple.

There are three main advantages for me in setting out the steps which I've found give the most efficient results from a process, like writing a sales letter, pruning a rose bush, changing a light bulb over the stairs in my home or packing for a vacation trip.

Those advantages are:

1. I don't miss any steps. Some tasks become almost second nature but the confidence which that encourages can mean we overlook an important point.
2. I can let someone else can do the task if I'm too busy or otherwise unavailable. I will be fairly sure that they will do it safely and without mistakes.
3. I know about how long the process will take, so I can write that time in my schedule. If I get someone else to do it, I know about how much I would be prepared to pay them and about how long they should take to do it.

As the inclusion of the light bulb and rose bush examples in my list show, this does can also have great benefits for your personal life as well as you

work environment and tasks. And, the benefits which you gain will flow through to all aspects of your life.

Yes, having these procedures documented does help to reduce procrastination. One of the most common excuses which people use to avoid or delay starting on any task is that they don't know how to do it. Other common statements are that they don't have the time or experience to do it well enough.

These excuses are not applicable when the processes are all laid out so clearly that someone straight off the street could be expected to do them fairly well.

When you write the procedure down, be sure to check it carefully.



Then, ask someone else to check it again. Make it clear to them that you want to know about anything which is not clear to them as well as all mistakes, even if they seem elementary. Otherwise, you may find that the employee or family member does not mention something which is very obvious because they may not think that you will handle the criticism well.

Multi-tasking.

Multitasking is doing this more than one task at the same time, the equivalent of a circus performer juggling several balls at once. That sounds like a great technique when you have several tasks to do. There have been some significant funds spent on research about whether women or men are better at multi-tasking.

But, a better question is does multi-tasking have benefits for a particular person? You will need to do some experimenting to find out how comfortable and effective you are when you do more than one task at the same time. Don't try it if you are already feeling pressured.

The results are likely to be less than you could usually achieve and you are likely to be even more uncomfortable through the whole experience. Trying to get more than one task done at the same time may give you poor results for each of the tasks or require you to redo some of them and use up more time than if you did them separately.

I only use it for some routine tasks and always give my full focus to critical tasks like driving or writing a report where speed is less important than safety and accuracy. But, I know some people that can handle multiple tasks simultaneously very well. Of course, they carefully choose which tasks they combine and they don't have any tendency to procrastinate.

Taming Your Environment

Are your surroundings helpful to you or are there problems which interfere with your focus and enthusiasm for the work which you have to do?

Many people find certain types of music help them by injecting a light optimistic tone into their mind. But, I know several people that prefer to work without any music or other background sound.

If your work area is cluttered and you cannot easily find the materials and information which you need to start your new project, you are penalizing yourself.

You need to change it from a breeding ground for procrastination to an area which supports efficient production. You may be anxious to get started but you will achieve the best results if you take some time to plan your attack on the task and gather the necessary materials.

Clear your desk as you clear your mind. Does your desk have sufficient clear space for you to do your work efficiently? Are files and other materials from past projects still taking up space that you need for your current work?

Check your current storage. Is it adequate and organized?

Does your lighting help or harm your ability to work efficiently?

Do you have a standard and efficient system for handling correspondence which comes into your office? Or, does it accumulate in a bulging in tray?

Try to set everything up so that you handle and deal with most of the memos and other messages you get only once. Double handling (putting things aside to be completed later) increases the cost of processing each item.

Exercise: Review a “Busy” Person’s Day

This Chapter contains a record of a typical day’s activity for a person that has some problems with organizing their time and being productive. Their day and evenings are filled but they aren’t able to enjoy much time with their family or friends. Nor do they have much control over their own life. This may not reflect your personal situation in all its details but there are likely to be similarities. Please read through it.

You will probably find some things in their daily pattern which you realize they could adapt, combine or even eliminate to help them be more productive or just give them a chance to relax and start to restore their depleted physical and emotional reserves.

I’ve included my suggestions of some ways that they might do that at the end of the section. You probably will come up with some better ones. Nobody has all the good ideas.

This exercise been very helpful for me and some people I know have also gained from this sort of exercise.

I hope that this example will encourage you to get a small paper notebook and record one average day in your own week.

Add a column to the side of the page and write in a rough estimate of the amount of time which each activity takes. There is no need for exact figures - that would take more time.

Then, review it as you have done this example. To get the best results, try to look at everything as if it was another person’s activity log. This is very helpful for seeing more clearly where things might be improved or even removed from your schedule.

It can be very hard to review our own performance unless we develop this ability to step away and look at it from outside yourself, making the review as impartial as you can. You will find that it is not hard to do and really worth the effort. Just give it a try.

I have some further suggestions which will improve the results you get from the exercise:

- Always try to focus on the positive aspects so that you feed positive messages to your subconscious. You are not a bad person if you find some areas where you can significantly improve your time management. The positive message here is that you realized that you weren't getting the best outcomes from all the effort you put in and you have started taking action on it as a matter of importance.
- Please make no more than a couple of changes at a time. Start with one or two at the most which you feel will give you some measurable improvement because this will encourage you to take the further steps.
- If you try to make a lot of changes at once, it can be hard to sustain the momentum unless you are a very purpose-driven individual. It can also make the people you have usually spent more time with think that the changes in your behavior mean that you have changed in your attitude and feelings toward them.

Make sure that you give yourself some small reward for even small achievements, especially in the early stages of your campaign or you might subconsciously feel that the changes are a form of punishment. That could make it harder for you to build your enthusiasm and make other changes when you feel they are necessary. The best kind of reward might be some guilt-free time to relax. You need and deserve time to relax and socialize. You probably have not been getting full value from any spare time you have had for a while because of the pressure or guilt from the incomplete work or missed family commitments.

So, you will soon start to notice that you get more enjoyment and relax much better as you take action and adopt more of the suggestions in the later sections of my book.

The “Busy” Person’s Schedule

A typical day for this person starts when their alarm clock makes them open their eyes. They don't get up right away. They luxuriate in the

warmth of their bed because they know the clock will buzz again in ten minutes.

On that second alarm, they reluctantly get up and do some stretching exercises before jumping into their shower. They don't rush their shower unless they know that day will be particularly busy. They eat breakfast while catching up with their personal email or watching a light-weight program on television.

They update their To-Do list. There are several items to be carried forward from the previous day but that always happens. They travel to their job. They listen to a motivational or business related audio through headphones.

They buy a coffee from a shop near their office. That takes about ten minutes because it's usually crowded. If there are few customers, they will exchange some chatter with the staff for a few minutes.

At work, they chat with other employees and list their main tasks for the day. They check email, phone messages and mail. They don't call clients because they think the clients don't want to be disturbed too early. Then, it's coffee time. They get through some work until lunch time. They don't call clients too close to lunch-time. They think this is showing consideration for their clients. They try to pay bills during their lunch break, when everyone else has the same idea.

After lunch, they return calls from clients that called them while they were at lunch. They start preparing to leave about 15 minutes before they actually leave their desk. They travel home. They often do some shopping but don't make a list or leave it at home. They watch television to relax but the depressing and intense reporting does not relax or energize them. They prepare the meal or help with it. The family watches TV while they eat – sometimes that's their only family time for the day. They look through their household accounts. They check their emails and surf the web. They go to bed and try to sleep.

My Suggestions for Improving Their Day.

When they:

- Don't get up right away.
- Stay in bed for just a few minutes to delay feeling the cool air in the room.
- Set the clock to buzz a second time in ten minutes.

They are procrastinating and robbing themselves of a chance to set a pattern of prompt action. They are also probably slowing their body's adjustment from their sleeping state to full awareness, so they are less ready to deal with the day opportunities and challenges.

It's good if they get up and do some stretching exercises before jumping into their shower. Let's hope they have time for other kinds of exercises slotted into their day. There are even some you can do at your desk!

When they take an un-necessarily long shower, they keep their body and mind in slow mode as well as wasting precious water and adding to their power bill. "Unless they know that day will be particularly busy". They should try to be fully prepared for whatever the day hands them. The biggest challenges usually arrive without warning. If they don't have any slack in their working day, a small problem could become a major crisis.

Eating breakfast while doing their personal email or watching television is probably harmless unless they spill their juice or coffee onto their keyboard or watch a downbeat news report which continues to cloud their mind through the first part of the day!

The best time to prepare and update your To-Do list is just before going to bed at night. You will have better recall of all the happenings through that day. Also, if you have something to think about from the day's work, you can give it to your subconscious and may find the answer popping into your mind early the next morning!

If there are usually several items to repeat from the previous day's to-do list, you have either:

- More tasks than you will ever be able to handle.

- The serious possibility that critical tasks will slip down your lists and not be completed in a timely manner.

Listening to a motivational or business related audio through headphones while commuting is okay. But, drivers may cause a safety hazard if their headphones mean they cannot hear sirens or other significant traffic noises.

Stopping to get coffee from a shop near the office can add up to a lot of money from your monthly budget. The time involved can also be enough to cause you to start getting to work a little bit late. That adds up too.

A little chat with other employees is probably essential for maintaining smooth relationships between everybody. But, this has to be on the basis that it doesn't interfere with anyone getting their work done.

As with their personal to-do list, the best time to write up the tasks for the next day is at the end of the business day. That is when their memory of the significant events of the day is still fresh. Trying to recall everything the following day is not likely to be as effective.

I handle urgent or important messages the first time I see them. I reply to all the others at set times, rather than randomly through the day. That saves me a significant amount of time through a week. If you have a secretary or someone to screen your calls, try to organize blocks of time when they take a message, so that you can focus for that whole period on getting important work done without interruption.

The old folk-wisdom that "clients don't like being called too early" was started by sales people that did not like cold calling. I got a lot of sales they missed because I made early calls! I also asked regular customers what time was most convenient for them to take calls from me. Most preferred the early calls or at lunch time because they were usually a little less busy in those periods.



It's never "coffee time" unless all your work is up-to-date or ahead of schedule. Treat it as a reward for work well done rather than a right.

My Doctor told me that I should have more water with my coffee and, better still, less coffee all together. One of the documented effects of the caffeine is to remove valuable water from your system. When your body starts to get low on water, your brain is one of the first organs to be affected. Long-term consequences can be serious and not just for your work performance.

If they don't "call clients too close to lunch-time", they're losing more business to competitors who focus on their clients' real needs.

Also, paying their bills during their lunch break, when everyone else has the same idea, will wear on their temper and their health.

It's worth sending checks, arranging regular direct debits from your bank to the business or paying through the Internet (ask for advice from your Bank or a friendly geek if you know one that is reliable). The time you save and the frustration you avoid will be worth more than the few cents in fees.

If they find clients called them while they were at lunch, it's a sign that they could possibly do more business with those clients if they stayed in the office for lunch and called them then.

Most people are probably better focused when they are ready to leave work than when they arrive.

It's a good idea to make a shopping list, but little use if they routinely leave it at home. If you sometimes do that, it will be much harder to stick to your list. You are more likely to make impulse purchases that can affect your budget.

Start writing it out the night before and then put it in the pocket of the jacket you're going to wear the next day.

Try to do your supermarket shopping when you have just eaten. If you are feeling hungry, you are more likely to go over budget with impulse purchases.

Watching television will not relax you because the programs, the news and the advertisements are designed to stir up your most basic emotions.

Preparing or helping with the evening meal is great way to show you care about your partner. If you're a man, you might even consider doing the washing up on her birthday sometimes.

Anyone that watches television while they eat is probably doing some harm to their digestion in the long-term.

All families can benefit from an opportunity to discuss matters which are important to each person. The dinner table is usually a good place to start those conversations. But, it's not going to work if your discussion has to compete with the latest baseball scores.

Some people have taken the drastic step of eliminating most television drama and news from their diet. The only negative effect has been their inability to join some of the water cooler discussions at work.

It's a good idea to keep all your household accounts well organized in a folder. Record the details and note the action you need to take in your diary when you first open the envelope or get the notification on your computer.

Using your computer, like watching television, can be a poor preparation for a good night's sleep.

Your Health

Sleep

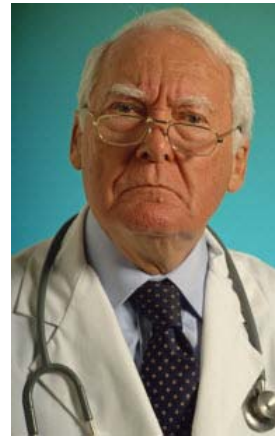
I worked late night shifts for a while and began to better understand the problems of people that regularly did shift-work or that had insomnia or other sleep problems.

Don't think that you can find some extra time for doing your work by cutting down on sleep without having to suffer some form of physical penalty.

Cutting down the amount of sleep you have may be okay for a limited time. Some people can cope better than others but most of us probably need at least seven hours a night.

Sleep is a fairly complicated process and very important to our continued health. It should be as smooth as possible so that the body can recuperate and cells can regenerate.

If you are having problems sleeping, try to isolate the reasons and tackle them. If you're not getting enough rest when you sleep, consult your doctor (don't just take the advice of any of those people in white coats on television).



Exercise

If you exercise regularly, you help your body to cope with the stresses and possible medical problems that can occur. Your improved physical condition will also assist to maintain and improve your self-confidence and general outlook.

Many people underestimate the value of regular exercise. It doesn't have to take a lot of time or be expensive.

People that spend most of their working time at a desk need to take a walk around their office and do some flexibility exercises on a regular basis. You can slowly build up your general fitness and possibly reduce the risk of developing the airline passenger's nightmare, deep vein thrombosis, just by following these simple steps.

Take a short, brisk walk every half hour, moving around helps to keep the blood pumping through your legs. Serious problems can occur when you let your legs remain still for long periods. The blood pools in your legs and some parts do not get the fresh blood or the new blood cells and nutrients which it carries.

Your legs will actually swell but the process is gradual and many sufferers are not aware of the development until the process is well advanced. That's why D.V.T. is called a 'silent killer'.

Your veins can also become cramped and even blocked if you keep your legs bent too sharply.

A good rule is to set your chair so that your knees stay at ninety degrees and your feet are comfortably settled flat on the floor.

Make sure that your work area is well lit, about equivalent to a bright day. But, avoid setting your lighting or your computer monitor so that you are staring into glare for long periods.

My doctor said that our comfort and our productivity depend greatly on our eyes and our feet. Most people don't realize how important they are because the problems which so many people suffer from usually only develop late in life after the damage has been done.

Lists and Schedules

A quote, "If you fail to plan, then you plan to fail", is usually attributed to Harvey McKay. The truth of this statement is demonstrated every day. But, lists and schedules are boring to prepare and easy to overlook when we are actually working. Skipping on them will have a negative effect on your ability to perform your business activities well. But, many people procrastinate about them.

For these people, goal setting means making a few New Year's resolutions and we know how long they last!

The reality is that a goal which is not written down is just a dream and unlikely ever to be realized. You won't know the advantages which having your day planned gives you until you give it a fair trial.

Don't limit yourself to planning for just the next week. Put your personal and professional targets for at least the next three and six months on paper, even if you are still mired in your battle with your procrastination habit.

Having a set target helps you to focus on something beyond the next crisis. Setting that target beyond tomorrow is also a great help.

I read about a group of young farmers that were contesting a ploughing competition back when the ploughs were powered by real horses.

The less experienced people focused on the earth just ahead of the plough's blade but the winner ploughed his area while keeping his eyes focused on the far end of the paddock. He probably hit a few small rocks but his plough stayed straight because he was focused on his long-term goal.

You don't need to tell anyone else about your goals at this stage unless you want to. But, it's a good idea to involve the other members of your family, especially your partner, when you start to plan your personal goals and activities.

Their support will be vital to your reaching your targets so that you give appropriate time and attention to your family and friends, exercise and relaxation.

If you can find a mentor or advisor to help you map out ideas to help you improve your performance and prospects in your business, grab it. This might be someone where you work or a friend, even someone that has retired after a successful career, with a track record and some interest in your welfare.



Whittling away Writer's Block

I've met several writers and discussed with them their experiences with the dreaded Writer's Block. I think it's a form of procrastination, so the suggestions which I've explained through this ebook should be of some help.

But, there are a few suggestions here which are specifically targeted to help writers who find their output affected by this problem.

Just write: The standard suggestion is to start any session with some writing even if it is not inspired or the type of writing which you usually do.

The idea is that the physical act of writing will start to focus your mental resources on writing as well, so that the words will start to flow. It's been recommended by almost every writer and certainly in every book about writing that I've seen.

Don't wait for inspiration: Get started and let your muse catch up. By then, you may have written something which will put some money in your pocket even if it doesn't any awards you can put on your shelf.

Try something different: If you usually write articles but the block is stopping them, try writing something different. Maybe you could start a story about an article writer who

Or, is there a relative you haven't heard from or contacted for some time? Send them a letter – yes, the kind you need to put a stamp on. They'll probably be happy to hear from you and you will brighten their day because a letter is something special to many people today.

Use whatever time you have: Don't try to write the next section of your new book while you're waiting for the train but you might be able to jot down a few ideas for how your story might develop or some short pieces of description you could polish and then use in later work.

Writing Prompts: Writing Prompts are idea starters to get you writing some sort of written work – just add creativity! Type "Writing Prompts" into an Internet search engine and start sifting through the millions of listings that will harvest.

If you don't have an Internet connection or don't want to go through the connect/login/search routine, just grab a magazine or even your local newspaper. Then, just look for an interesting picture, either a news photo or an illustration for a story and think about something you could write about where a picture like that could be appropriate.

You might also try to turn a news story into a short story if that's what you write.

Avoid sitting and staring: Some writers will go to their typewriters or computers at the same time each day and just stare at the blank screen, expecting that inspiration will strike and great prose will flow. That's like waiting outside the lottery office for your winnings except you have never bought a ticket!



Give your creativity a little help by pushing a few keys.

Don't edit as you write: This is something I had to learn myself. I thought I was the only person who wrote and rewrote almost every sentence but it's apparently very common.

I think editing takes a different focus to creative writing. So, editing while you write interferes with your ability to express yourself. This applies to both fiction and non-fiction.

Just use your first draft to get everything which is important to the piece onto your computer (or paper if that is the way you write).

Don't worry about any fine tuning at all until you've typed FINIS at the end of that draft.

Fine tuning is important for selling the piece but the purpose of the first draft is only to get all the relevant material out of your head

Then, it is much easier for you to examine it without your emotions getting in the way.

Then, you can tidy it up, remove duplications and mistakes or whatever you feel is needed.

You've leapt the first hurdle – **you've beaten writer's block!** Of course, it is not always that easy.

But, you'll find more tips which could help your particular situation, whatever sort of writing you do, in the previous Chapters.

Your Legacy

When you think of the legacy you will leave for your children and other people that you care about, you probably limit your thoughts to tangible things like money, cars, a house and other stuff.

But, we also build a legacy for them with the example we set.



If they see us putting off the hard work and decisions, avoiding action because of risk or a preference for easier options, that has a lasting effect on them.

Showing them by example how you deal with your commitments and any disappointments which you encounter will help them greatly when they have their own challenges in the future.

Last Word from Jack Webster

Thank you for reading my book. I believe that the ideas and tactics which I learned as I pushed my way up from a severe procrastination habit will help you to deal with your problem and also to understand the lack of action and poor attitude of any other people you encounter who are also battling it.

You now know that your habit, however deeply ingrained, can be conquered. You also realize that you will always have to be on guard against the temptation to slide back into your old ways of thinking.

But, the rewards of your future success and the knowledge of the damage procrastination can do to your health, home life and business success will keep your determination strong.

I wish you a great future and all success you plan to achieve.

Jack Webster 2009

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