PERSONAL GROWTH | PSYCHOLOGY | WISDOM

Procrastination Doesn't Make Perfect

There is actually no such thing as a "future" decision; there are only present decisions that will affect the future.

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Perfectionists are often great procrastinators. Having stalled until the last minutes, they tear into a project with dust flying and complaints about insufficient time. Perfectionist-procrastinators are masters of the excuse that short notice kept them from doing the quality job they *could* have done.

But that's hardly the only variety of procrastination – which is one of my own favorite hiding places when I try to blame external conditions instead of myself for some difficulty. Mine comes with a gnawing feeling of being fatigued, always behind. I try to tell myself that I'm taking it easy and gathering my energies for a big new push,

> ***but procrastination differs markedly from genuine relaxation – which is truly needed. And it saves me no time or energy. On the contrary, it drains both, leaving me with self-doubt on top of self-delusion.***

We're all very busy. Every day we seem to have a giant to-do list of people to see, projects to complete, e-mails to read, e-mails to write. We have calls to answer and calls to make, then more calls to people with whom we keep playing voice-mail tag.

Henri Nouwen's classic book *Making All Things New* likens our lives to "overstuffed suitcases that are bursting at the seams."

Feeling there is forever far too much to do, we say we're really under the gun this week. But working hard or even heroically to solve a problem is little to our credit if we created the problem in the first place. When most people refer to themselves as being under the gun, they want to believe, or *do* believe, that the pressures and problems are not of their own making. In most cases, however, the gun appeared after failure to attend to business in good time. Instead of being proactive early, they procrastinated until the due date became a crisis deadline.

By the Inch Life's a Cinch, by the Yard it's Hard

One of the best escapes from the prison of procrastination is to take even the smallest steps toward your goals. People usually procrastinate because of fear and lack of self-confidence and, ironically, become even more afraid when under the gun. There are many ways to experiment and test new ground without risking the whole ball game on one play.

Experience has shown that when people go after one big goal at once, they invariably fail. If you had to swallow a twelve-ounce steak all at once, you'd choke. You have to cut the steak into small pieces, eating one bite at a time. So it is with prioritizing.

Proactive goal achievement means taking every project and cutting it up into bite-sized pieces.

Each small task or requirement on the way to the ultimate goal becomes a mini-goal in itself. Using this method, the goal becomes manageable. When mini-mistakes are made, they are easy to correct. And with the achievement of each mini-goal, you receive reinforcement and motivation in the form of positive feedback. As basic as this sounds, much frustration and failure is caused when people try to "bite off more than they can chew" by taking on assignments with limited resources and impossible timeline expectations.

Two major fears that sire procrastination are fear of the unknown and fear of rejection or looking foolish. A third fear – of success – is often overlooked. Many people, even many executives, fear success because it

carries added responsibility that can seem too heavy to bear, such as setting an example of excellence that calls for additional effort and willingness to take risks. Success, without adequate self-esteem or the belief that it is deserved, also can create feelings of guilt and the result is only temporary or fleeting high achievement.

> ***Playing it safe can seem more tempting than a need to step forward with determination to do it now and do it right.***

Moving from Procrastination to Proactivation:

Here are some ideas to help make you a victor over change rather than a victim of change:

1. **Set your wake-up time a half hour earlier** tomorrow and keep the clock at that setting. Use the extra time to think about the best way to spend your day.

2. Memorize and repeat this motto: **"Action TNT: Today, not Tomorrow."** Handle each piece of incoming mail only once. Answer your e-mail either early in the morning or after working hours. Block out specific times to initiate phone calls, personally take incoming calls, and to meet people in person.

3. When people tell you their problems, **give solution-oriented feedback.** Rather than taking on the problem as your own assignment, first, ask what's the next step they plan to take, or what they would like to see happen.

4. **Finish what you start.** Concentrate all your energy and intensity without distraction on successfully completing your current major project.

5. **Be constructively helpful instead of unhelpfully critical.** Single out someone or something to praise instead of participating in group griping, grudge collecting or pity parties.

6. Limit your television viewing or Internet surfing to mostly educational or otherwise enlightening programs. **Watch no more than one hour** of television per day or night, unless there is a special program you have

been anticipating. The Internet has also become a great procrastinator's hideout for tension-relieving instead of goal-achieving activities.

7. Make a list of five necessary but unpleasant projects you've been putting off, with a completion date for each project. **Immediate action** on unpleasant projects reduces stress and tension. It is very difficult to be active and depressed at the same time.

8. **Seek out and converse with a successful role model and mentor.** Learning from others' successes and setbacks will inevitably improve production of any kind. Truly listen; really find out how your role models do it right.

9. **Understand that fear, as an acronym, is False Evidence Appearing Real**, and that luck could mean Laboring Under Correct Knowledge. The more information you have on any subject – especially case histories – the less likely you'll be to put off your decisions.

10. **Accept problems as inevitable offshoots of change and progress.** With the ever more rapid pace of change in society and business, you'll be overwhelmed unless you view change as normal and learn to look for its positive aspects – such as new opportunities and improvements – rather than bemoan the negative.

There is actually no such thing as a "future" decision; there are only present decisions that will affect the future. Procrastinators wait for just the right moment to decide.

> ***If you wait for the prefect moment, you become a security-seeker who is running in place, unwittingly digging yourself deeper into your rut. If you wait for every objection to be overcome, you'll attempt nothing.***

Get out of your comfort zone and go from procrastinating to proactivating. Make your personal motto: *"Stop stewing and start doing!"*

Denis Waitley is one of America's most respected and beloved authors, keynote lecturers and productivity consultants on high performance human achievement. He has inspired, informed, challenged and entertained audiences for over 25 years from the boardrooms of multi-national corporations to the control rooms of NASA's space program. Denis has been voted business speaker of the year by the Sales and Marketing Executives' Association and by Toastmasters' International and inducted into the International Speakers' Hall of Fame.

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