

Do It Now! – *You’ll Never Have More Time Later*

By David B. Burns

Procrastination is a major barrier to productivity. Many people have great ideas, formulate great plans, and then spend too much time before taking action. They often wait so long that the action becomes irrelevant, the time is past.

There are many reasons (really excuses in disguise) for procrastination, including: “I’m waiting for the perfect block of time to do it in.” “It’s overwhelming.” “I don’t know where to start.” By far, the most common reason I hear is, “I just don’t like this task/project/job.” Whatever your reasons, here are four ways to break through your procrastination barriers and get things done.

First, understand that procrastination is not based in logical thinking. It is based in an emotional, gut-reaction. One way to break free and get started taking action is to spin it around and look at in a logical way. When you do that, it is easy to see that it just doesn’t make sense to put it off.

For instance, if you procrastinate because you don’t like the task, spin it logically like this. “Let’s see, I have two weeks to do this project I don’t like. I think I’ll put it off until I only have a day or two left. I’ll like it a whole lot more then.” Does that thinking make any sense? Of course it doesn’t.

Another example is, “It’s so overwhelming. I don’t even know where to start. So I’ll put it off until I have only two days left. I’m sure I’ll know exactly where to start then.” Here again, your thinking just doesn’t make sense. Looking at it logically is a great way to break through procrastination and get started.

A second way to break through procrastination is to break the project/job down into small, manageable pieces. By definition, a project is finished by completing a series of tasks in sequence. Do one task, then another, until completion. So before you even start to do a project, break it down into small manageable pieces, put them in sequence, and tackle them one at a time. Looked at *en mass*, the entire project might look overwhelming, but you can handle it piece-by-piece. As the old saying goes, “It’s best to eat an elephant one bite at a time.”

The third way to break through procrastination, especially helpful for those activities that recur, is to recruit an accountability partner. In less formal language, I once heard this method called – hiring yourself a nag. Pick someone you trust, someone who will help you, support you, remind you, and encourage you. Your nag’s job is to gently (or firmly, depending on what’s needed) prompt you to get to work. Examples of recurring procrastination jobs might be your annual tax returns, the performance reviews you must give, or the quarterly reports. People generally don’t like these jobs, but they must be done. An added benefit is that once these jobs get completed, your stress level goes way down.

The last way to break through procrastination is something I did more than 20 years ago, but only recently got a name for it after reading Marlene Caroselli’s book [Defeating Procrastination](#). One of her tips is to find a procrastination anti-hero. Pick someone with the worst procrastination habits you can find. Notice how those habits impact his or her life. Notice what it costs in terms

of money, productivity, and relationships. You'll also discover your anti-hero wastes too much time and energy scrambling for excuses. Now vow to behave the opposite way.

I started college with a procrastination anti-hero, I'll call him Harold. I graduated in four years. Harold also graduated from college, but Harold was a master procrastinator. Going to school full-time, Harold graduated in only seven years. Think what that cost in terms of money, relationships, and stress. Find an anti-hero and do the opposite.

A final thought to keep in mind when you are tempted to procrastinate is that you will not have more time later. Your schedule will not magically open up; you will not suddenly have more free time to do those important things you are currently pushing aside. A key trait of successful people is that they take action, even on the things they would rather not do. So to send you off taking action, here's a quote from philosopher and psychologist William James:

“Do every day or two something for no other reason than you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test.”

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