Overcoming Your Procrastination

Do you find it difficult to "get started" or to "get things done"? Keep "putting things off"? According to Dr. Linda Sapadin (1997), there are six types of procrastinators and you may be one or more them:

- **Perfectionists** – may be idealistic, unrealistic, or delay starting / completing "onerous" tasks.
- **Overdoers** – trouble saying "no" or asking for help, confused about priorities, and lack self-discipline.
- **Defiers** – feel "put upon", resent authority, avoid expressing negative thoughts, pessimistic by nature.
- **Worriers** – lack self-confidence, fail to commit, dependent upon others, prefer the "known".
- **Dreamers** – avoid difficulty, vague about what needs doing, hoping for a 'miracle'.
- **Crisis-Makers** – tend to dramatize, easily bored / resist the "dullness" rational / methodical action.

Knowing your procrastination styles makes it easier to use strategies to change these tendencies.

Change Strategies You Can Use NOW! (Any that you are using, keep doing!)

Perfectionist Change Strategies

Think: Strive for excellence rather than perfection.
Focus on what's realistic rather than what's ideal.
Practice self-acceptance rather than self-condemnation.
Avoid "all or nothing" thinking.

Say: Change your "should"s to "could"s
Change your "have to"s to "want to"s
Change your "must"s to "choose to"s

Do: Make a daily "to do" list that's short and practical.
Set time limits for completing a task, or ask others to help you set them.
Let others be involved and do things their way.
See mistakes as learning opportunities.
Reward yourself for achievement.

Overdoer Change Strategies

Think: Acknowledge the difference between priorities and demands. You are not Superman/Superwoman.
Give yourself approval and not depend so much on others for approval.
Work on how you are going to gain control over things, instead of how things are controlling you.

Say: "No" to others when it's appropriate. Talk more about your options than about your obligations.
Replace your "I should"s with "I want to"s.
Speak less defensively, and more positively, about the times when you're not working.

Do: Keep a journal of everything you do during the day, so that you can evaluate your use of time.
Make and follow daily "to do" lists that are organized so you make good use of your time and energy.
Incorporate an ample amount of leisure activities into your life.
Take relaxation breaks as needed and enjoy unexpected free time.

Defier Change Strategies

Think: View what others want or expect as a request not a demand.
Generate multiple options for responses to each situation you encounter.
When you are indignant, change to calmer and more practical thoughts about the best course of action.
Pick battles carefully, weighing what's really worth fighting for according to your priorities.

Say: Avoid words of blame or attack.
If you have or haven't done something, own up to it.
Minimize expressions of indignation, be aware of your tone of voice, and avoid being confrontational.

Do: Do what you know needs to be done so that you act rather than react.
Commit to the team goals, work with your team, rather than against it.
Do something specific that will satisfy you because it's done your way.

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Worrier Change Strategies

Think: Avoid mentally "catastrophizing" tasks.
Recognize that making no decision is, in fact, making a decision.
Give each task as much consideration to what's exciting about it as to what is not.
Learn to be your own best friend when you feel the need for encouragement or support.
Use a two-part process: first commit to the goal, then determine steps to achieve the goal.

Say: Change your "I don't know"s to "One thing I do know is…"
Change your "I can't" statements to compound sentences: "I can't…but I can…"
Avoid "What if" questions, Instead, go one step further and state the answer.
Recognize "I'm waiting…" statements and go one step further to "meanwhile I'm doing…".
Reduce the number of qualifiers in your speech. (No Ifs, Ands, or Buts!)

Do: Each day, do at least one thing that you've consciously been putting off.
Each week, do something that you're generally uncomfortable doing.
Develop a personal repertoire of motivational phrases. ("I Can Do It!")
Spend time with optimistic people who inspire self-reliance, and avoid pessimistic people.
Break down every large project into an assortment of smaller, easier-to-do tasks. (Chunking)

Dreamer Change Strategies

Think: Identify the difference between "feeling good" and "feeling good about yourself"
Differentiate between dreams and goals.
Think with "5 W's and 1 H" – Who What Where When Why and How.

- What do I realistically think I can do?
- When will I be able to…
- Where could I…that would enable me to do that?
- Who would help me?
- Why do I want…?
- How can I…?

Say: Change your "wish", "like to", and "try to" to "will.
Change your "someday" and "soon" to specific times.
Replace vague, passive language with concrete active language.

Do: Plan each major project in writing, using a time line.
Keep two lists with you as you go about each day: a "to do" and a "to think about" list.
Schedule at least one special "to do" task each day in addition to several ordinary ones.
Use an alarm, a timer, or a beeper as a reminder to do a task.
Do fewer passive activities and more active ones.

Crisis-Maker Change Strategies

Think: Get involved in the task to increase your interest and use other self-motivators besides stress.
In thinking about a task, focus at least as much on facts as you do on feelings.
Strive toward changing your thinking style from extremist and general to moderate and specific.

Say: Avoid overdramatic, polarized language and use more "thinking" words and fewer "feeling" words.
Stop characterizing yourself in conversation as incompetent or victimized.
When discussing a task or responsibility, try focusing on the positive or active

Do: Identify repetitive crises in your life and find methods to avoid – or manage – recurring crises.
Create your own motivators to change a boring task to a more interesting one.
To avoid creating false emergencies, engage in healthier activities that will get your adrenaline running.

Good luck with your changes as you overcome procrastination!

Adapted from: Sapadin, L. (1997) *It's about time! 6 styles of procrastination and how to overcome them.* NY, NY, USA: Penguin Books.

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