

MIND TOOLS

Procrastination Workbook: Kick the Habit

“Procrastination is the art of keeping up with yesterday.”

- Don Marquis

The exercises in this workbook will help you pinpoint the areas of your life where you need to be more productive, ask you some questions to help you figure out WHY you put certain tasks off, and most importantly, help you choose the right approach to getting the ball rolling.

Overcoming procrastination is not a one-shot deal, and this workbook is not an instant cure-all. But it can help you narrow in on the specific behaviours to develop...so they will hopefully become life-long habits!

Section 1 Diagnosing the Procrastination Bug

Before you can begin kicking the habit, you need to pinpoint your weak points.

Procrastination Checklist - What areas do you procrastinate over?

Note: At the end of each section, there is space for you to write down some specific information. (How your procrastination of this task affects your life, why you think you might do it, or anything else that comes to mind when you think about this task. These notes might help you later on.)

Personal health and well-being:

- ☐ Eating well
- ☐ Getting enough sleep
- ☐ Exercising
- ☐ Health care (doctor, dentist)
- ☐ Keeping track of finances (budgeting, balancing chequebook)
- ☐ Recreation/hobbies
- ☐ Missing deadlines (applications, other important things)
- ☐ Other _____

Notes:

Household Chores:

- _ Cleaning
- _ Doing laundry
- _ Grocery shopping
- _ Home maintenance/repair
- _ Paying bills
- _ Other _____

Notes

Work:

- _ Being on time
- _ Researching/gathering information
- _ Making important calls
- _ Speaking to boss/colleagues
- _ Finishing projects
- _ Writing reports
- _ Looking for a job/making resume
- _ Other _____

Notes:

School:

- _ Being on time
- _ Doing research
- _ Writing essays/papers
- _ Keeping up with reading
- _ Group work
- _ Doing homework on time
- _ Other _____

Notes:

Personal Relationships:

- ☐ Making time for friends
- ☐ Making time for partner
- ☐ Making time for family
- ☐ Calling people
- ☐ Writing letters/emails
- ☐ Remembering special occasions
- ☐ Dealing with problems/conflict
- ☐ Asking someone out
- ☐ Other _____

Notes:

Section 2 What's in it for ME?

In order to complete this section, you need to choose one task from your life (something you checked off from the list above), preferably the one you're most concerned about.

The trouble area I want to work on is:

Now answer the following questions about the above task:

What's in it FOR YOU if you get this task done? (What do YOU stand to gain?)

Why is it important in the long run? (Go further beyond what you wrote above, like "to pass the course" or "to make my boss happy". What does it bring your life – a step towards your future career, experience you can use later on the job, etc? You can also examine the emotional impact achieving it will have; i.e. boost self-confidence, make you feel proud, etc.)

Write a Mission Statement for this objective. It should include what specific task you want to accomplish and what the positive results of carrying it out are. (For example: I will get up half an hour early and exercise in my living room because I will feel physically better and more energized.)

My mission statement is:

Rewrite it on a card and post it somewhere visible, where you will see it every day. This mission statement will help you focus on your goal and remind you why you want to stop procrastinating in this area.

Section 3 Getting to the Heart of the Matter

Now you are ready to take a deeper look at your objective. (Don't worry – this won't hurt. It will simply help you realize WHY you are stuck in this rut and lead you to some possible solutions).

Imagine you are about to sit down/get up and tackle this task, right now. Check off which of the following thoughts would most likely be running through your head:

- A_ "How boring! There are a million other things I would rather be doing."
- B_ "I don't even know where to start!" or "It's just too overwhelming!"
- C_ "I'm so busy, how can I squeeze in the time?"
- D_ "I'm feeling a bit lazy; I'd rather just relax."
- E_ "What if things go wrong?" or "What if I royally mess up?"
- F_ "I'm never going to do it to my satisfaction."
- G_ "I have so many great ideas, but I'm not sure where to begin!"
- H_ "Why should I do it just because my boss/teacher/other authority figure wants me too?"

Use the letter code above to find your Procrastination Style(s) below.
(Later, we will give you tips on how to deal with these blocks to productivity.)

A: Blasé. This surely comes as no surprise to you, but you don't find this task the most fascinating thing on earth.

B: Molehill into mountain. You have the tendency to turn tasks into a big drama, which gives you the perfect excuse to put them off even longer.

C: Over-doer. You appear to have too much going on in your life – or you may be mismanaging your time so that it seems that way.

D: Chilled out. You'd simply rather be having fun than getting things done, and you're so relaxed about things that you never feel any urgency to do them.

E: Worrywart. You're nervous that things will go wrong, or that you don't have the necessary skills or traits to do a good job.

F: Perfectionist. You don't want to do anything unless you can do it flawlessly. (And you may not even realize it!)

G: Dreamer. You likely have tons of great ideas but you're not sure how to carry them out.

H: Rebel. Essentially, you don't like doing anything you are obligated to do. You don't like the feeling of others having control over you.

You can use these questions to pinpoint the cause of your procrastination in different areas of your life:

Task: _____

Style: _____

Task: _____

Style: _____

Task: _____

Style: _____

(These styles are based on: Sapadin and Maguire procrastinator types, 1997)

Section 4 Procrastination Boot Camp

Now it's time to choose some strategies to overcome your procrastination. Find the ones that match the code letter for your particular Procrastination Style (which you found in Section Three), but feel free to read through the others too! Check off the ones you are going to employ in your plan to beat procrastination for the specific task you've chosen to work on – but be selective. Choose only the ones you will realistically use!

A: Blasé

_ If you can, find a way to make the task more interesting. Incorporate an element of fun, or something that personally interests you. If, for example, you have to do a report, try to choose a topic you like or take breaks to do something that you enjoy as a reward for hard work.

_ Get a buddy involved. Making it a team effort can help you beat the doldrums.

_ Look at it as a personal challenge; even if it's not something that fascinates you, what can you learn from the experience?

_ Post your mission statement somewhere (on your mirror, in your wallet, on your computer monitor) and read it regularly. Remind yourself why you want to accomplish the task. A good motivational quote wouldn't hurt either.

B: Molehill into mountain

_ Look at it one step at a time if the big picture is too much for you to handle. Break it down into a detailed list of each step, and get started on the small tasks.

_ Incorporate stress-relieving tactics into your work schedule. (Whatever works for you; music, hot bath, a walk, meditation, sports, writing poetry...)

_ Keep perspective by looking back at other "jobs" you found overwhelming; in the end, they probably weren't as bad as you originally thought. After all, you lived! Make a list of what you have "survived" to remind yourself of your resilience.

_ Take the plunge: do the first step of the job before you have a chance to get anxious; you will probably see that it's not as bad as you think it is.

C: Over-doer

_ Is there anything in your schedule that can be postponed or cancelled to open up some time? Learn to PRIORITIZE; make a list of everything you have to accomplish, then order them according to the most important. Get those done before you even dream of tackling the others.

_ Ask for help/recruit. See if you can job-share with someone.

_ Ask whether you'd rather do a quick job or a good job; trying to squeeze in too much results in less energy spent on important things.

_ Learn to say "no". Sometimes you have to be a little selfish and put limits on what you can do. You'll probably be surprised at how well others take it.

_ Develop shortcuts; why reinvent the wheel? Try to use things you've already done to ease the task; used a tried and true recipe for a dinner party, for example, rather than trying out a new complicated dish.

D: Chilled out

_ Post your mission statement somewhere (on your mirror, in your wallet, on your computer monitor) and read it regularly. Remind yourself why you want to accomplish the task. A good motivational quote wouldn't hurt either.

_ Reward yourself. Plan to give yourself a nice bonus when the job is completed.

_ Include elements of fun in the task. If, for example, you have to do a report, try to choose a topic you like or take breaks to do something that you enjoy as a reward for hard work.

_ Mix in spurts of hard work with spurts of relaxation.

_ Scare yourself out of relaxing – remind yourself of the dire consequences if you don't get off your behind. Relaxing won't be any fun until you put your mind at rest.

_ Get a buddy involved. Inform someone of your plan and ask them to have check-up meetings with you, or tell you friends to refuse to do anything fun until you've completed certain steps.

_ Focus on your long-term objectives, the REASON why you have to do this task.

_ Buy a day planner, plug in a schedule with sufficient "reward" breaks after periods of work.

_ Eliminate as many distractions as you can from your surroundings – hide the novel you've been reading, give the remote control to a friend, unplug the phone...whatever it takes!

E: Worrywart

_ Look at it one step at a time if the big picture is too much for you to handle. Break it down into a detailed list of each step, and get started on the small tasks.

_ Incorporate stress-relieving tactics into your work schedule; exercise, music, massage, whatever works for you!

_ Keep perspective by looking back at other "jobs" you found overwhelming; in the end, they probably weren't as bad as you originally thought. After all, you lived! Make a list of what you have "survived" to remind yourself of your resilience.

_ Talk to someone you can trust about your fears – getting them out might help you put them behind you.

_ Take the plunge: do one the first step of the job before you have a chance to get anxious; you will probably see that it's not as bad as you think it is.

_ Work on your confidence if self-doubt is plaguing you. Do things that make you feel good, remind yourself of your strengths.

F: Perfectionist

_ Ask yourself this question: What is worse; not doing it perfectly, or never doing it at all? How else will you improve if you never tackle things?

_ Set deadlines for the time you will spend on each task, so if you are obsessing over details you have to just stop and let them go.

_ Incorporate stress-relieving tactics into your work schedule; exercise, music, massage, whatever works for you!

_ Focus on the big picture; how important is it in the long run, for example, that page numbers on a report are in a certain font?

G: Dreamer

_ Rather than getting all pie-eyed over an idea, take a realistic look at the steps to achieving a task. Are they really realistic? Are they worth all the effort? If they are, go for it...but be prepared for all the hard work involved!

_ Have a back-up plan. If you want to hire a famous band for a party, for example, have a few more realistic choices in case it doesn't work out.

_ Take things one step at a time. Before you decide to record an album, learn to play an instrument or get some singing gigs.

_ Focus on one project at a time. If you get over-excited and put too much on your plate at the same time, you'll spread yourself thin and decrease your chances of completing anything.

H: Rebel

_ Keep a focus on what's in it FOR YOU. It must benefit you in some way (even if it's only in the long run).

_ Post your Mission Statement somewhere you will see it every day to remind you WHY you want to accomplish the task.

_ Don't think about the person/organization behind the task; focus on the task itself. It's not a personal issue (the authority probably has no idea you're not enthused about the task).

_ Consider putting your own personal touch on the project, so you feel more ownership; research a subject you like for a school report, or use a certain talent or strength to your full advantage.

_ If you really feel forced to do something you think is a waste of time, consider talking constructively to the authority figure (your boss, teacher, etc.) and express your concerns. It may help to have an alternative project to suggest, one that you feel is more valuable (be prepared to give solid reasons why they should let you change tasks, like using your strengths).

Section 5 Creating the Conditions for Success

Now you're going to make a plan to accomplish the task/goal you've chosen to tackle! First, you're going to get organized and put all the necessary elements into place. As you make the list, set a date for each one to be satisfied. (Be specific – and the sooner the better.)

Checklist of things I need:

Task: _____

Equipment/stuff (i.e. paper, wood, hammer, computer):

Deadline: _____

Help (aunt's advice, friend's muscles) :

Deadline: _____

Place (what's the ideal setting for me to carry out this job?):

Deadline: _____

Information (contact numbers, cost):

Deadline: _____

The right attitude (get myself in the right mood – physically relaxed or energized, positive or reflective, etc.):

Deadline: _____

Comfort stuff (snacks, comfortable clothes, lighting, and music):

Deadline: _____

Now get out there and get these things ready...and don't come back until you're done!

Section 6 The Plan of Attack – Ready, Set, Go!

Great – now you've got everything you need to tackle the task. The next step is to make a solid Plan of Attack. This doesn't have to take long, but it should help you focus your energies on what you need to do.

My Plan of Attack:

Task from Mission Statement:

Final Deadline: _____

Why is completing/carrying out this task important?

Strategies I will employ to help me get it done (from Section Four):

Note: Be specific. If you choose “Get help” as a strategy, write here WHO will you ask, and how they will help.

Smaller steps:

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My Personal Reward:

VERY IMPORTANT:

Now transfer the steps of the Plan to your day-timer or calendar, somewhere you will see them daily. Do one thing on that list TODAY. Get the ball rolling and don't stop! Then come back here after you've carried out the steps.

By the way: As a little extra motivator, sign a contract with yourself. You can ask someone to witness the official signing...preferably someone who will remind you about it from time to time!

My Personal Contract

_____, promise to

_____ by _____
(date). In exchange for my hard work and perseverance, I will receive

_____ (reward). If I do not stick to the terms of
this agreement, the consequences will be:

_____ Signature _____

Date _____ Witness _____

Section 7 Reminiscing (after you've completed your tasks or the allotted amount of time has passed)

Congratulations, you've taken steps towards kicking the procrastination habit! Regular reassessment is part of staying on the right path. You may be tempted to skip this step, but this is as important as the beginning sections – it's where the digestion of what you have learned takes place!

Rate how well you kept your plan: (1: didn't stick to it at all; 10: stuck to it as closely as possible).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What were your successes?

What were your weak points?

Can you pinpoint the cause for your weak points? (see Section Three if necessary)

What specific action can you take next time to avoid those pitfalls?

Conclusion In a Nutshell

You can use your answers to the questions in Section Seven to modify your original plan or incorporate what you have learned into your next plan of attack. Kicking the habit is an ongoing process! Some of these skills will start to become more automatic the more you practice them and others will be something you need to think about each time (creating a schedule, for example, will always be a good idea, no matter how organized and motivated you become). What works best for one person may not work at all for another, and different approaches may succeed in one area of your life and flop in others. Just pay attention to what works for you and give yourself a pat on the back when you reach your goals. Bravo!



How did you find this exercise?
I love hearing your thoughts and reflections.

Did you know that sharing your goals with a positive person improves your chances of success? :)
What would you like to develop in your life?
What are you hoping to achieve in your future?
Let us know! Get involved here at www.brighterprospectscoaching.com