

deadlines at all. These students who did not space their deadlines sufficiently pulled the average grades of this class down. Without properly spaced deadlines—deadlines that would have forced the students to start working on their papers earlier in the semester—the final work was generally rushed and poorly written (even without the extra penalty of one percent off the grade for each day of delay).

Interestingly, these results suggest that although almost everyone has problems with procrastination, those who recognize and admit their weakness are in a better position to utilize available tools for precommitment and by doing so, help themselves overcome it.

SO THAT WAS my experience with my students. What does it have to do with everyday life? A lot, I think. Resisting temptation and instilling self-control are general human goals, and repeatedly failing to achieve them is a source of much of our misery. When I look around, I see people trying their best to do the right thing, whether they are dieters vowing to avoid a tempting dessert tray or families vowing to spend less and save more. The struggle for control is all around us. We see it in books and magazines. Radio and television airwaves are choked with messages of self-improvement and help.

And yet, for all this electronic chatter and focus in print, we find ourselves again and again in the same predicament as my students—failing over and over to reach our long-term goals. Why? Because without precommitments, we keep on falling for temptation.

What's the alternative? From the experiments that I have described above, the most obvious conclusion is that when an authoritative “external voice” gives the orders, most of us