

# 5 Tips for Avoiding Procrastination

Most of us procrastinate. Correction: ALL of us procrastinate. Heck, I even procrastinated writing this article. We've all been there at some point. Here are 5 tips for avoiding procrastination that can help you break out of paralysis and start producing at your peak.

## **1. Reduce the Number of Decisions You Need to Make Throughout the Day.**

Every decision we make has an energy consequence. If you wake up in the morning, and you need to ask yourself, "What do I need to do today?" — well, you're about to procrastinate the shit out of today. If you approach each new day without having given thought to what you want it to look like *ahead* of time, then you'll waste a large portion of your energy thinking about what to do and what not to do.

*Should I hit the gym today, or go tomorrow?*

*Should I say Yes to lunch with Barry Boombatz from Accounting, or should I do a quick lunch solo so I can get back to the office and finish up this presentation?*

*Should I wear this or wear that? Eat this or eat that? Reply now or later?*

We're asking ourselves questions like this all day long.

Problem is, questions compel us to respond with answers, which compel us to make decisions... This drains you of your self-control and makes you tired—which leads to you procrastinating on whatever matters most in your life.

**Tip #1** for avoiding procrastination is to reduce the number of decisions you need to make during a given day by making those decisions ahead of time and/or creating habits around certain areas of your life to boost your effectiveness and prevent you from draining your energy by thinking about whether to do them or not. Some examples:

- *decide* in advance exactly which days of the week you'll exercise, instead of deciding the day-of;
- pick out your clothes the night before rather than the morning-of;
- choose the most important thing that needs to get done tomorrow, and schedule time to do it;

These are just a few simple examples, but it's usually the simple things that matter most. What are some examples you can think of to reduce the number of decisions you make in your own life? Doing this will free up the energy you'll need in order to stay focused on doing the big + meaningful stuff, rather than procrastinating on it by doing the little + meaningless stuff.

## **2. Finish Your Day Before It Starts.**

This tip picks up where tip #1 leaves off. The best decision you can make towards avoiding procrastination is to plan your days in advance.

Rather than frantically figuring out what you'll do on any given day, a better way

to approach your day would be to take a few minutes at the end of each day to quickly map out the following day.

For example, every night, before bed, I write-down/review my plans for the next day, which includes:

- My One BIG Thing (OBT) that needs to get done that day. This could be a big task, a goal, or a project I need to make progress on.
- My No Matter Whats (NMWs) — these are my non-negotiable daily habits: exercise, my nature walk/daily meditation, reading (30 minutes minimum), mastery-related work, and time spent with the people I love.
- Whatever else needs to be done the following day. This way, my most important goals and projects are given ample time to be crushed—and to *not* be procrastinated on.

### 3. The Nothing Alternative.

“The Nothing Alternative” is a tip for avoiding procrastination that was coined by an influential crime-fiction novelist named Raymond Chandler. He used it as a way to avoid procrastinating on his daily writing. Chandler had difficulty sitting down at the keyboard and cranking out a predetermined word-count every day like some successful writers. So, he developed another method for overcoming procrastination and getting himself to do the work—he would set aside 4 hours every morning and give himself an ultimatum: **“WRITE, OR DO NOTHING AT ALL.”**

And Chandler advises writers—and presumably people of all professions—who suffer from procrastination to do the same: “He [the writer] doesn’t have to write,” says Chandler, “and if he doesn’t feel like it, he shouldn’t try. He can look out of the window or stand on his head or writhe on the floor, but he is not to do any other positive thing, not read, write letters, glance at a magazine, or write checks... Write or nothing.” That was Chandler’s philosophy, and for him, it worked. The rules are pretty straight-forward:

- A) You don’t have to write, or work on whatever you need to work on.
- B) But you can’t do anything else.

With these two options in mind, at some point, you’re *gonna* start working—even

if nothing else but to keep yourself from getting bored! And although your own work might not be as simple and clearly defined as Chandler's, you can certainly benefit from the clarity that comes from setting aside the time to either: **Do nothing, or focus on your ONE** most important thing.

To try this out for yourself, figure out your most important goal for tomorrow morning and set aside 90 minutes of totally uninterrupted time to focus on that goal.

No email. No smartphone. No facebook. No non-sense. Shut-down your wifi if you need to. This is your time to turn it up to high gear and fucking focus.

#### **4. The Next Action Habit—focus on something do-able.**

In his book, *Getting Things Done*, David Allen discusses the power of intelligently “dumbing down your brain” by figuring out your very **NEXT ACTION** for any given thing you're working on. It's one of the most powerful ideas in the book — just figure out the next specific action you need to take in order to move yourself closer to completion, then **DO IT...**

Now, it's no secret that procrastination causes lots of stress and pressure... but the way in which we relieve this pressure is where the secret comes in.

The key to this tip for avoiding procrastination is to figure out the very next physical action—no matter how small—you need to take to move something forward; be it a task, a project, a phone call, or whatever else.

Want to learn how to stop procrastinating? Learn how to shift your focus. Shifting your focus to something your mind perceives as do-able makes the difference that makes a difference. Let me explain:

Think about something you've been procrastinating on; like, finishing a presentation for work. Now **FOCUS** on how it makes you **FEEL** whenever you think about how you have to do that presentation. Think about all the work involved. Sucks right? How's it make you feel? Overwhelmed?

Now shift your **FOCUS** to **ONE SIMPLE** thing you can do right now to move this presentation even the tiniest bit closer to 'done.' Maybe you need to google some images to include in the presentation. That's do-able, right?

Make that you're **NEXT ACTION**. Do it.

The rationale behind this Next Action method is simple: when you do something your mind perceives as do-able, your energy will go up, your sense of direction and drive will increase dramatically; and you'll be able to motivate yourself to get whatever you need to get done—**DONE!**

Actionable insight: Anytime you feel the procrastination creeping back up again, you should take it as a trigger to CHUNK down whatever you feel like procrastinating on into something simple and do-able... Even if it's something as small as opening KeyNote and naming your presentation...

One small step leads to another... and another... and another... and before you know it, you've got momentum.

## **5. Adjust Your Environment.**

If you're an alcoholic, you don't keep booze in the house and you stay away from bars and people who can't respect your decision to lay off the whiskey.

In similar vein, my final tip to avoid procrastinating all over yourself is to remove the cues that trigger your procrastination-habits in the first place.

If you can't work in public places because of the constant movement and noise, then find a quiet place to sit down and focus.

For me to be able to avoid procrastinating and focus on what I've decided to focus on, I need to remove every possible distraction from my work environment—both physical and digital...

I used to switch my iPhone to 'Do Not Disturb' and put it on my desk while I worked, but the temptation to glance over and check it led me towards the path of procrastination more often than the path of productivity. Now, I take my iPhone, put it on 'Do Not Disturb', and then put it in a drawer that requires me to physically get up in order to check it...

This keeps me focused.

My notifications and alerts are also disabled on all my computers, too. I've also stopped wearing my Apple Watch any time other than when I workout.

Basically, I need to *un-plug* before I can *plug-in* and focus.

### **NOTES:**

- Sometimes procrastination can be a good thing—allowing an idea or important piece of work to percolate for a certain length of time can spark new, creative insights. Try it—start something, walk away, and come back to it later... While you're away, you may notice an idea pop-up for whatever you were working on before. There's a term for this; it's called the *Zeigarnik Effect*.
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