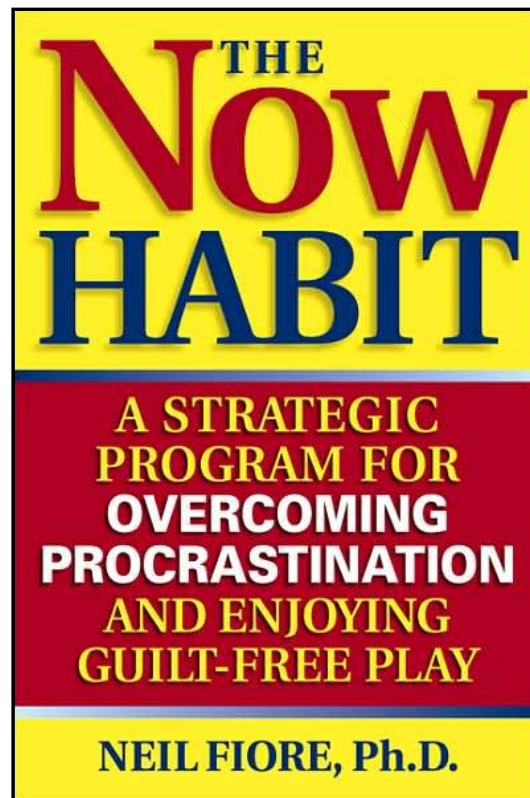


**A Strategic Program  
for Overcoming Procrastination  
and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play**

## **THE NOW HABIT**



**(Neil Fiore/Tarcher/April 2007/224 pages /\$14.95)**

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## **THE NOW HABIT**

### **A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play**

#### **MAIN IDEA**

Despite the fact procrastination is a known drain on personal and organizational productivity, very few people ever take the time to define precisely what procrastination is.

A good working definition of procrastination is:

“Procrastination is a mechanism which people use to cope with the anxiety or stress involved in starting new tasks or completing old ones.”

When you adopt this definition, it then becomes clear the key to overcoming procrastination isn't the usual collection of clichés:

- “Just get out and do more.”
- “Try harder.”
- “Get better organized.”
- “Stop being lazy.”

Instead, to genuinely overcome procrastination you've got to deal with your more deeply seated inner dialogues and your own personal definitions of “failure”, “perfectionism” and “work ethic”. Instead of a collection of how-to advice and tactics, you need to have a strategic system in place which will give you the tools needed so you can mentally shift gears into a higher level of functioning. Once you take more control over the way you think about your work and motivate yourself, you will then naturally become more efficient and productive.

“The procrastination habit catches people in a vicious cycle: get overwhelmed, feel pressured, fear failure, try harder, work longer, feel resentful, lose motivation, and then procrastinate. The cycle starts with the pressure of being overwhelmed and ends with an attempt to escape through procrastination. As long as you're caught in the cycle, there is no escape. Instead, you can cultivate the Now Habit: the ability to put aside the

fear of failure, the terror of feeling overwhelmed, and low self esteem, and focus your mind on what you can start now. The skills and strategies of the Now Habit program will let you think of yourself as a producer, feel like a producer, and act like a producer. To overcome procrastination you need a positive attitude about the human spirit.”

– Neil Fiore

### **About of Author**

**NEIL FIORE** is president of his own business consulting and executive coaching firm. Trained as a professional psychologist, Dr. Fiore has also served as a Lieutenant with the 101st Airborne Division, as a manager with Johnson & Johnson, as a Statistical Analyst for Shell Oil, and as a psychologist and career counselor at the UC Berkeley. As an executive coach, Dr. Fiore has worked with companies such as Bechtel, AT&T and Levi Strauss. He is the author or co-author of three books *Awaken Your Strongest Self*, *Conquering Test Anxiety* and *The Road Back to Health*. Dr. Fiore is a graduate of St. Peters College and the University of Maryland.

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## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

1

### Create a mental safety net

Realize that whatever happens, you will survive and keep moving forward with your life. Therefore, if you fall short from time to time, accept that and move forward. Don't treat temporary setbacks like the end of the world.

Why do we procrastinate and put off doing what we know is good for us? There are actually loads of good sounding and reasonable reasons, including:

- We procrastinate because our lives feel crowded with obligations to others – and therefore we assume that no matter how much we do, it won't be enough so why bother starting.
- We're unrealistic about how long things take – and thus we figuratively bite off more than we can chew.
- Our goals and values are too vague – we say “yes” to things we know deep down we should be saying “no” to.
- We're perfectionists – and assume that if we can't do something exactly right, we might as well not even attempt it.
- We're afraid of being criticized by others – and thus we spend so much time worrying about what others think that we never get around to actually doing what we know needs to get done.
- We have low self-esteem – and therefore blame outside events for our failures and distractions.
- We become our own most obnoxious critics – and feel like we are worthless because our results are not as good as we would hope.
- We are expressing our resentment – by avoiding doing what others have said is good for us.
- Procrastination is rewarding – it gives us temporary relief from the stresses in our lives, even though it may generate even bigger problems later on.
- We can avoid our fear of success – and the hard choices we may need to make in the future by failing to get done now what is needed.

If you're really serious about trying to figure out why you procrastinate as much as you do, try keeping a log where you write down your reasons as they crop up. That kind of log will reveal any patterns in your thinking which you can then address directly rather

than dealing with generalities.

Once you better understand why you are procrastinating, it's time to do something about it. The best approach is to work towards creating a mental "safety net" which will allow you to perform at a higher level without feeling bad about it. Doing that is actually quite straightforward – tell yourself: "Whatever happens, I will survive. I will find a way to carry on, and this will not be the end of the world for me. If the worst case scenario actually eventuates, I will work to find a way to lessen the pain and move on."

By giving yourself permission to suffer a few setbacks as you try to move forward, you protect your sense of worth and provide a safe place for your ego. You free yourself from any feelings of guilt or impending doom. In effect, this is like creating a mental safety net that will catch you if you fall off the high-wire you're trying to balance on.

Most highly successful people work through some catastrophic failures and setbacks before they achieve lasting success. If they were to give up at the first hint of a setback, they would never get anywhere noteworthy. By giving yourself permission to join their ranks, you can relax a little and work harder.

Never link your personal self worth directly to your day-to-day performance. There are just too many outside factors which can influence results, even when you've done everything right. Instead, draw your sense of worth from the fact you're in the process of developing good work habits and those habits will position you for long-term success even though they can't guarantee you won't hit a few speed bumps along the way.

"We all need an occasional whack on the side of the head to shake us out of routine patterns, to force us to rethink our problems, and to stimulate us to ask new questions that may lead to other right answers."

– Roger Von Oech, author

"Procrastination has been learned, and it can be unlearned. You need to develop alternative tools for coping with your fears."

– Neil Fiore

Always have a positive dialogue running inside your mind. Give yourself positive mental images to work from so you can direct your energy towards achieving more rather than worrying more.

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

2

Use positive self-talk to reprogram your attitudes

Always have a positive dialogue running inside your mind. Give yourself positive mental images to work from so you can direct your energy towards achieving more rather than worrying more.

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If you change and enhance the way you think, you'll automatically procrastinate less. Why? This is simply due to the fact procrastinators unconsciously focus on feelings of being a victim to circumstances, burden and resistance to authority. For many procrastinators, drawing things out and taking longer to do them is the way they choose to get back at authority figures.

To achieve more, focus on results rather than affixing blame. Leave the blame game to someone who is prepared to settle for less. Direct your inner thoughts to what you're choosing to do and then make a commitment to get started today.

Specifically, there are five ways you can and should change your inner dialogue from that of a procrastinator to that of a producer:

**1** Procrastinator: *"I have to....."*  
Producer: *"I choose to....."*

Procrastinators usually feel like victims – like they are being forced to do something when they'd much rather be doing something else. Forget that. Tell yourself nobody is forcing you to make something of your life or career, but you're choosing to excel. When you change a "have to" into a "chose to", you'll feel a genuine burst of empowerment and energy.

**2** Procrastinator: *"I must finish ....."*  
Producer: *"When can I get started on....."*

If you're focused on finishing, it'll always feel a long, long way away. Instead, talk about when you can get started on what needs to be done. Having a clear focus on doing something tangible on a project will generate energy and increase your commitment. When a few minutes crop up, you're then primed and ready to roll.

**3** Procrastinator: *"This project is so big....."*  
Producer: *"I can take one small step....."*

If you think about how big and important something is, you'll get overwhelmed. Instead, think about one small step in the right direction. Take that step, and then the next, and so on until you get there. Think about a single small step you can take right away and the project will become much more manageable.

**4** Procrastinator: *"I have to be perfect....."*  
Producer: *"I can be perfectly human....."*

If you tell yourself you have to be perfect right out of the gate, you'll never attempt anything hard. Instead, give yourself permission to make some mistakes when you're first starting out. Every project of worth always has a development curve with some



early attempts not quite working out the way you had in mind. That's fine and to be expected, so go with it rather than becoming a perfectionist.

**5** Procrastinator: *"I don't have time to play..."*  
 Producer: *"I must take time to play so....."*

If you have to work when you'd rather be doing something else, you'll feel resentful and that will make you drag your heels and feel reluctant to work. To offset this, promise yourself a reward once you've done some work on your project. Looking forward to some time to play will help you focus on producing more.

In changing your thinking, you don't have to wait until you have completely eliminated all negative thinking before you can become more productive. Instead, make positive and proactive decisions to think more positively as much of the time as possible. Gradually, these new patterns of thinking will embed themselves and help you form the habits of a producer rather than those of a procrastinator.

Make your personal mantra something along these lines:

*"I choose to start on my key projects  
 one small and imperfect step at a time,  
 knowing that when I get things done,  
 I then have time left over to play."*

### Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

**3**

Use the symptoms of  
 procrastination to trigger the cure

Every time you make a conscious decision not to procrastinate, you make it easier to do the same in the future. The habits of procrastinating can be unlearned in just the same way as they were formed but in reverse.

There are two basic approaches to human motivation:

1. The "push" method

Punishment



The push method of motivation is used where people try and motivate themselves to do

something by focusing on all of the problems which will arise if they don't do what they say.

## 2. The "pull" method



The pull method of motivation is where people focus on the rewards of what they're trying to achieve. These rewards become so alluring that everyone becomes motivated and gets into action working towards realizing those rewards.

We all become so well versed in the push method of motivation from our school and educational experiences that when we approach a difficult assignment, we automatically revert back to using the push method of motivation. It's the same with trying to overcome procrastination. Our natural inclination is to focus on all the problems that will arise if we do nothing.

Numerous studies, however, have shown we are far more likely to work productively and longer if we are anticipating the rewards of success rather than attempting to get things done in an atmosphere of isolation and anxiety.

So how does this work in practice? Assume you are facing a large project which you know from experience will take at least 20 hours of solid and tedious work on your part. Instead of subjecting yourself to a series of threats to try and get you going, try doing this instead:

1. Come up with a large reward which you will give yourself on completion of the overall project. This reward has to be personalized – it must be something that motivates you alone and is not necessarily something which anyone else will find appealing.
2. Think up some appropriate milestone rewards as well – little things you can buy yourself once you've completed 25-percent, 50-percent and 75-percent of the project.
3. Write down your rewards – so you can make sure you follow through and actually give yourself the rewards you earn.
4. Now sit down and set aside some time when you can start working towards your first milestone reward – even if you spend only 15-minutes or so at a time on doing that work. Instead of trying to carve out of your schedule big blocks of time where you'll be uninterrupted, be happy with little chunks which crop up all the time and usually get wasted.
5. Now keep trying to progressively add more and more blocks to your project time – and try to make a little bit of progress each day rather than waiting until you have some big chunks available.
6. Interlace short periods of work with pleasurable activities over and over – so you actually increase the possibility you will get started on the project each day rather than putting it off.

"Personally, I'm always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught."



– Winston Churchill

“It is not discipline, willpower, or pressure from others that facilitates adherence to a challenging course of action. Rather, it is the freedom to choose among alternatives, the personal commitment to a mission, and the willingness to take responsibility for the consequences of our decisions that steels the will and emboldens the spirit.”

– Neil Fiore

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

4

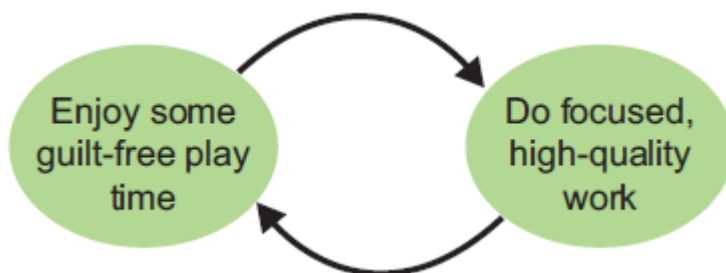
Strategically schedule  
some guilt-free play time

Shift your focus from how much you work to how much play time you can create. By doing that, you'll create some powerful incentives to get things done. You'll also be aligning your life with patterns of success.

Counterintuitively, high-level producers actually spend more time playing than do procrastinators. Producers have high levels of motivation to get in and get the job done to the best of their abilities so they can then go off on holiday and relax. If you plan on joining the ranks of the producers, this might be a mind-set you should adopt as well.

By and large most procrastinators tend to see themselves as being undeserving of a rest. They feel like they have not done enough to warrant taking a break. Producers, by contrast, know that some guilt-free play time is essential to avoid getting burned out and stale. Most exceptional producers intuitively understand they can't do quality work all the time so they don't even try. In fact, they aggressively schedule as much down time as feasible in order to recharge their batteries so they can do good work when they get started again.

To achieve more and be more productive, you need to plan on playing more. You'll then have some personal motivation to do quality work as rapidly as possible so you can get through what you need to do and get into your preferred leisure activities. You start a healthy cycle of productivity which looks something like this:



The more play time you schedule, the greater the freedom you'll feel and the more motivated you'll become to do quality work when required. The better you work, you'll

then feel like you've genuinely earned some play time and the more you'll enjoy it.

The benefits of having some guilt-free play time in your schedule will be:

- You'll find creative ideas about your work and fresh insights will come to mind while you're at play. Your subconscious mind will keep on churning over new ideas while you're playing golf, jogging, reading a book or whatever.
- You'll be healthier because you're out and doing things rather than staying chained to your desk.
- You'll get a good balance in your life so you can avoid becoming a burned out workaholic.
- You'll create a positive work atmosphere where you're there because you want to be, not because you have to be.
- Periodic periods of intensive play will give you a fresh outlook on your work assignments.
- You'll be able to build up friendships which are important for your sense of balance and well being.

"One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon – instead of enjoying the roses that are blooming outside our window today."

– Dale Carnegie

"What sparked everyone's imagination and harnessed powers few had known they possessed was the realization that they were taking part in a project that would fulfill one of mankind's oldest dreams. They had a mission. I saw men and women of average capabilities tapping resources of personal energy and creativity that resulted in extraordinary human accomplishments. I saw their excitement and pride come alive, affecting everyone around them, kindling imaginations with the possibilities that arose from what they were trying to accomplish. One thing that became very clear to me – it is not the goal, but the ultimate mission that kindles the imagination, motivating us toward even higher levels of human achievement."

– Charles Garfield, author, Peak Performance

"Great works are performed, not by strength, but perseverance."

– Samuel Johnson

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

5

### Use three-dimensional thinking and reverse calendars

These are tools which combat the terror of feeling overwhelmed. If you can stop feeling overwhelmed, then more than likely you will also stop procrastinating. The two usually go hand-in-hand.

When you have a very large project to tackle, it's sometimes difficult to know where to start. Furthermore, anything you do seems quite puny by comparison with the task ahead, and therefore you sit back and feel glum.

To offset this, try using some three-dimensional thinking and a reverse calendar in this way:

1. Look at the overall project – and break it down into some smaller logical parts. Keep in mind you don't have to achieve everything at once but will be spreading these subdivisions out over the days and weeks ahead. (This is three-dimensional thinking rather than looking solely at the project as a whole).
2. Work backwards from the project completion date – and schedule in reverse order what milestones you need to reach. To take an example of this, suppose you're given an assignment in early-April to have a major project finished by June 1. Your reverse calendar will look something like this:
  - Jun 1 – Have the project on my boss's desk at 9am
  - May 28 – Make final corrections, write document
  - May 15 – Have first draft completed
  - May 1 – Complete research, start on first draft
  - April 25 – Complete follow-up calls, compile data
  - April 18 – Start follow-up calls
  - April 14 – Send out questionnaires
  - April 10 – Finalize questionnaires to be used
  - April 5 – Complete background research
  - April 1 – Meet with boss to discuss project aims
3. On your reverse calendar, schedule each step – and make certain you have enough time and resources available. Control the deadlines and make certain you are realistic about how long each step will take.

Your reverse calendar will in practical terms become your project outline. You will have control over your deadlines and a better feel for how what you're doing today fits into the bigger picture. Even more importantly, however, a reverse calendar helps you feel less overwhelmed. Instead of having some huge deadline externally imposed, you have a series of chunks each of which you can manage.

A reverse calendar also has some other key benefits:

- You can make sure you and your boss are on the same wavelength about what is

involved in getting this project finished.

- You can figure out which tasks you need to handle and which can be safely delegated to others, thereby increasing your effectiveness.
- You can alert yourself to the key milestones where decisions need to be made and where you may need to consult with your boss or others to make sure you don't go off on a tangent.
- You'll be able to anticipate any unforeseen scheduling difficulties which may arise inadvertently.
- You'll be more likely to finish what you start.
- You'll actually get moving on what needs to be done rather than getting bogged down in excessive and unnecessary preparation work.
- You'll head down the learning curve by starting out slowly and then getting better and better at what's required as the project proceeds.
- You'll avoid any worries about needing more time than is available because you've looked at this right at the outset.
- You'll also avoid getting bogged down in perfectionism because you'll be so busy meeting your commitments.
- You'll get a good feel for when the time is to have hands-on personal involvement and when it's better to let others bring their skills to bear in finishing things off to a professional standard.
- You'll look forward to getting started rather than sitting back in awe of the magnitude of the job ahead.

"All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally unsolvable . . . They were not solved logically in their own terms but fade when confronted with a new and stronger life urge."

– Carl Jung, author

### Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

6

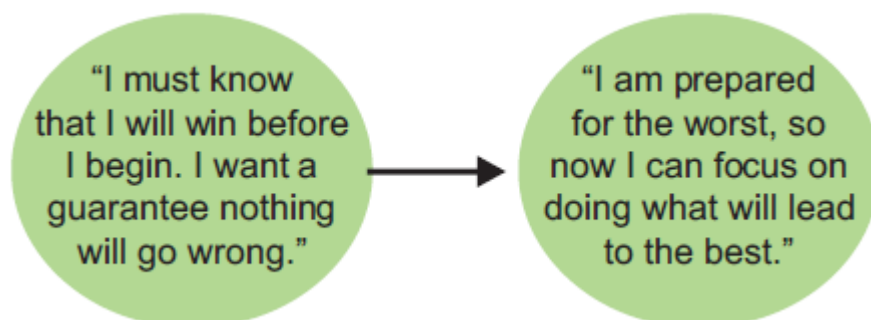
**Make worry work for you  
rather than against you**

Worry can be an ally when it forces you to do your best work. Develop an action plan and then stick to it and you'll find your worries about projects just naturally dissipate.

Worry about work is ever present. If you're smart, you'll make worry and anxiety work for you rather than against you. How can you do that? Get into the habit of asking yourself six key questions:

1. "What is the worst that can happen in this situation?"  
Make sure you let your imagination run free and come up with some vivid and dire situations.
2. "What exactly would I do if that worst case scenario really happened?"  
Spend some time pondering how you would handle that kind of disaster. For example, would you get some help or soldier through on your own? You'd probably feel upset initially but after you settle down, what would you do next? The more you think this through, the more confident you should become that you'd be able to carry on. In fact, you should start feeling there's actually no event you can visualize which would be so terrible it would stop you moving forward.
3. "How would I lessen the pain and move on to generate as much happiness as possible if the worst did occur?"  
If all else fails and the worst case scenario does arise, there would still be some practical things you could do to lessen the impact. For starters, you could forgive yourself for being human and therefore vulnerable and imperfect. For another, you could get back to building on the strengths which have got you this far. Or you might be able to draw strength by bringing to the fore memories of your past glorious victories and achievements. There will be a number of things you can and should do to offset the pain and keep moving forward. Remind yourself of that.
4. "What other alternatives would I have?"  
If you increase the number of options you have, then you feel less stress. Remind yourself there's generally more than one way to get things done so ponder what other alternatives would be available. They might not be your first choice but then again, some of these options might have some other advantages as well.
5. "What can I be doing right now to lessen the probability of this dreaded event occurring?"  
If there is something you can be doing right away to lessen the chance of your worst case scenario eventuating, then get into action and do that. Do everything feasible to increase your chances of ultimate success.
6. "Is there anything tangible I can be doing right now to increase my chances of achieving my goal?"  
Now that you've prepared for the worst, get focused back on making good things happen. Spend your best efforts on achieving your goals. You've got your bases covered if things go awry so forget about that and act positively with confidence.

In effect, you're trying to bring about a change in mind-set along these lines:



True confidence comes when you know regardless of what happens, you'll be able to do your best even if that means you have to pick yourself up and try again. This kind of confidence is far better than worrying because you can't control everything. If you're trying to control every single aspect, you'll spend enormous amounts of energy in a futile effort. You're far better off staying calm and collected because you know things will turn out alright over the long haul. That's a much more powerful and sustainable form of self-confidence.

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

7

### Create and use an unschedule on a daily basis

To find quality time to work on your projects, create some gaps in your schedule. Then seize upon those gaps and use them to nudge your projects forward. Put more time into leisure and more quality into your work.

Even high producers need a system to get things done. The unschedule revolves around the concept of scheduling everything you need to do each day. You then try and carve out some quality time where you can focus on your highest priority projects. The challenge then becomes to gradually week-by-week change your schedule so you spend more time on your projects and less time doing everything else.

The unschedule uses a nice bit of reverse psychology. If you deliberately set aside time for work projects, you'll feel resentful because you're being forced to do that. If instead you're challenging yourself to try and find more time for your high priority projects each day, this then becomes a personal challenge which is fun rather than something you're being forced to do. Over successive weeks, using an unschedule builds your subconscious desire to work more and play less.

Some suggestions for using an unschedule:

- Schedule both work and nonwork activities.
- Take credit for project time only after it is used.
- Take credit only for 30-minutes or more of work.
- Reward yourself with a break after each period worked.
- Emphasize what you did do, not what you did not.
- Leave at least one day a week free of work.
- Before you do stuff you like, try and work 30-minutes.
- Focus on starting projects, not finishing.
- Think small – 30 minutes of work at a time.
- Keep starting and finishing will take care of itself.
- Try and end each work day with something good.

"The unschedule guarantees your guilt-free play and the legitimacy of your personal time. That will help you avoid scaring yourself with overly ambitious, overly dictatorial plans for work that lead only to failure, disappointment, self-criticism and procrastination."

– Neil Fiore



Hours	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6 - 7 A.M.	Sleep	Sleep	Jog	Sleep	Sleep	Jog	Sleep
7 - 8		Breakfast					
8 - 9		Commute					Breakfast
9 - 10	Jog	Staff Meeting	Mail/Calls	Sales Calls	Mail/Calls	Sales Calls	Flea Market
10 - 11	Paper	Sales Calls	Manager	Quota Meet	Meeting	Mail/Calls	
11 - 12	Brunch	E-Mail	Meeting				Soccer
12 - 1 P.M.			Lunch	Mail / Calls		Staff Lunch	
1 - 2	Park/Kids	Lunch	Seminar	Lunch	Lunch		
2 - 3		Meetings		Errands			
3 - 4							Cars
4 - 5				Meeting			
5 - 6	Dinner		Commute	Gym	Commute	Gym	Feed Kids
6 - 7	Kids	Gym	Dinner	Pizza Out	Wife	Commute	Dinner Out
7 - 8	TV	Commute	Premiere	Kids Time		Kids	
8 - 9	Plan	Dinner				TV	
9 - 10	Read	TV	Nightcap	DVD Movie		Read	
10 - 11	TV	Sleep	Laundry		Sleep	Sleep	Music
11 - 12 A.M.	Sleep		Sleep	Sleep			Sleep
1 - 2							
2 - 3							
3 - 4							
4 - 5							
5 - 6							
Work	1	1, 1	.5, .5	.5, 1	1	.5, .5, .5, .5	—
Subtotals	1	2	1	1.5	1	2	—
Total	1	3	4	5.5	6.5	8.5	8.5

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

8

Set a few realistic goals  
which deserve your attention

When it comes to goals, less is more. You're far better off having a few goals you really care about than you are having a suite of goals which you consider have been forced on you. Be highly selective about your goals.

When you first start using the unschedule approach to time management, you'll probably realize:

- You're already a lot busier than you thought – and you actually have less time available for key projects than you would like.
- Some days are more productive than others – and therefore you need to be keenly alert to distractions on those days.
- There are some days where it's not realistic for you to get in much quality time – and you shouldn't sweat it when that's the way things pan out.
- Even spending half-an-hour on a project is beneficial – because it maintains your momentum. This will free you of the vague feelings you should be spending more time working and less time playing. Half-an-hour is good as long as you focus on making that time worthwhile.
- You may be able to schedule a specific half-hour where you can focus on your projects every day – and let everyone else know not to interrupt you at those times. If this comes together, that's nice but if it doesn't, don't worry.

Overall, your unschedule approach should illustrate that you're better off having a few realistic goals you actually work on rather than an array of nice sounding goals you never get around to. By focusing on genuinely earning and then enjoying your play activities, you'll find that you naturally overcome any tendency you may have to procrastinate. In the absence of guilt, you can focus all your energy on being a producer. This will only happen if you're working on projects that are worthwhile and deserving of your commitment and support. If your projects are of only marginal value, you won't be too highly motivated to spend time on them.

To set better goals:

- Make commitments only to those goals you can wholeheartedly embrace – and say no right at the outset if you consider a goal to be unattainable or unnecessary.
- Differentiate between your “must haves” and the things that would be “nice” to have if they aren't too much trouble – and set your priorities in light of the fact your time is limited. You're far better off having one goal that dominates your life than you are having a handful of goals you don't really care about one way or another.
- If you can't find the time or motivation to work on a goal – take that as a strong signal your subconscious is telling you that goal really isn't that important so drop it altogether or set a more realistic time frame.
- Be perfectly happy to downgrade some of your goals to “wish” status instead – and let go of them for now so you can focus all your energies on other more important matters.
- Never forget to achieve anything takes work – so don't fantasize you will be escaping work by procrastinating. On the contrary, procrastinating increases your workload because feeling guilty takes at least some effort. Be willing to pay the price.
- Think about how you word your goals – because that will impact on their effectiveness.

Instead of stating “I will work on...” put your goals in this format: “I freely choose to work on...”. That will remind you achieving something is a deliberate choice, not a chore.

- Create functional and observable goals – rather than vague goals which end up confusing you. A realistic goal will state what you want to achieve, a deadline, and your cost component in terms of time or money. For example: “I will complete painting the house before June 1st by investing at least ten hours each week over the next three weekends in the effort”. Then consider what you can do today to get closer to achieving your goal.

In all, remember you are the master of your goals and not the other way around. If you set unrealistic goals, you’re setting yourself up for self-criticism and more procrastination. If you want to be a producer, set just a few goals you pursue passionately and wholeheartedly.

### Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

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Learn how to work in your most productive flow state

Don't wait until you feel like doing something. Instead, get into a “flow state” – where you block out distractions and focus all your energy on the task at hand. Learn how to place yourself in this state at will to achieve more.

Professional athletes talk about getting “in the zone” where they block out everything and perform to an exceptionally high level of competency. When they enter this state of enhanced concentration, they perform to the best of their abilities and have an inner calm which transcends the pressures of the moment. If you can learn how to place yourself in just such a similar mental state on demand, great things can happen.

When you're in the flow state, you're accessing both sides of your brain – the logical and the creative. Learning how to move into the flow state is not the work of a moment and will take some time to master.

Ideally, you want to create a little routine that you go through whenever you start work on a project. Allow a few minutes for you to shift into a creative and noncritical state of mind where you feel curious, motivated and highly creative.

To get into your optimal flow state:

1. Start by sitting upright in your chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands on your thighs.
2. Focus your attention on your breathing. Breathe deeply, hold your breath for a moment and then exhale completely. Do this three times, counting each time you exhale. As you exhale, visualize letting go of any tensions you may be feeling.

3. Next focus on the feel of your chair against your back, buttocks and legs. Visualize yourself floating down into your chair and it supporting you.
4. Now focus on the feeling of your feet resting on the floor. Let your leg muscles relax and feel the muscle tension drain away as you keep exhaling. By this stage, your eyelids will feel heavy so let them float softly over your eyes. Allow relaxation to engulf your entire body.
5. Next take three deep breaths and with each, let go of any and all thoughts and images you may have collected in the past. Clear your mind of any self-criticisms, challenges and so forth. Let go of the past entirely and completely.
6. Now take another three deep breaths and let go of what you anticipate may happen in the future. Let go of any thoughts or worries about deadlines or anything else. Let go of the future.
7. With your next three deep breaths, focus on the present moment. Take note of any sensations you are feeling and choose to be completely engaged in the present moment. Tell yourself: "With each breath, I am becoming more alert, curious and interested in the project at hand. I am beginning to tap into all the faculties of my mind so I can come up with creative yet practical ideas which will prove to be winners. I am ready to come to full alertness and to work intensively using both my rational and my creative minds."

Admittedly, going through this exercise will feel strange at first but with practice on a regular basis, you should find you can place yourself in the flow state in just two or three minutes. It's well worth investing that time right at the outset because it makes your entire project time more productive.

The advantages of learning how to get into the zone on demand are numerous and obvious:

- When you're in the zone, there is no emotional need for you to procrastinate. You want to make progress towards your goals.
- Doing this on a regular basis helps you offset your fears and gain a better perspective on things.
- When you're in the zone, you get a different perception on time. Instead of wanting the clock to hurry up, you try and cram as much activity in as you can. That also allows you to be more creative .
- You'll find that as you learn to get into the zone more often, you will form positive attitudes about your work and see it as an opportunity to achieve rather than as a line of unpleasant tasks.

## Ten strategic tools for overcoming procrastination

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### Turn setbacks into opportunities to move forward

Everyone has setbacks, but successful people persist until they achieve their goals. If you can learn how to find the golden lining in every obstacle you encounter, you'll do fine.

The only thing that is guaranteed in life is that you will suffer some setbacks and obstacles. Not everything will go to plan. If you can turn these setbacks into opportunities to move forward, you'll achieve more.

That all sounds fine but how can you actually turn setbacks into opportunities for growth? The process is:

1. Go through a few "planned setbacks" first – and see what your natural response is when you don't want to do something. For example, do you do more background research, waste time making unnecessary phone calls or suddenly think mundane tasks are all important? Understand how you have behaved in the past.
2. Now you know how you will probably respond, rehearse your reactions – what you'll do differently to stop yourself falling back into old habits. If you have an inclination to keep doing research, practice saying: "I choose to start now, even though I may feel like putting it off. Doing this will help me feel like more of a producer, which is good."
3. Become more resilient – by immediately putting into place your planned response whenever your initial tendency is to procrastinate. Refuse to let one setback define all your futures. Tell yourself: "One mistake is not the end of my world. I refuse to accept that. Instead, I will pick myself up and try again and again until I get to where I want to be." Remind yourself setbacks are to be expected when you're trying something new and it's your response to those setbacks that counts. Your self-worth is not determined by the fact you never make a mistake but by the fact you hang in there and keep going until you get it right.
4. Develop personal hardiness – which is a combination of commitment, control and challenge. Hardy individuals don't feel powerless or alienated by temporary setbacks but see these as opportunities to correct their course and keep moving forward. Hardy individuals choose to do more than is expected because that develops self-discipline. They focus on taking small steps forward, even in the face of obvious problems. Life cannot defeat you if you're hardy because you'll always find a way through, even when the most obvious paths are blocked.
5. Concentrate on the task at hand – and let the future sort itself out. Don't get distracted by inconsequential ideas or emotions but stay involved in what needs to get done. Write down what distracts you if needed and deal with those issues at the appropriate time but let nothing distract you from giving your projects your full attention when the time is right.

“Experiment with these techniques. Fine-tune them to fit your personal style and your situation. Stay open to change, with the assurance that you have the new tools of the Now Habit to replace old procrastination patterns and underachievement. Avoid statements such as ‘I’ll try it’ or ‘It’s not working’ which reveal a testing attitude rather than a firm commitment. The feeling behind ‘I’ll try’ is that you will make a halfhearted effort and then fail. Defeatist statements such as ‘It’s not working’ mean you’ve failed to find a tool to take away all the anxiety, that once again your problem remains unsolved, and that you are likely to rely on your old attempted solution, procrastination, to escape fear and discomfort. “How can I make this work for me?” reflects a greater commitment and drive towards success.”

– Neil Fiore

“I hope you’ll use the Now Habit program to get in touch with your own abilities, motivation, and inner genius. With the Now Habit as your ally, look forward to having a positive attitude toward work, control over procrastination, resiliency against setbacks, and a new identity as a producer.”

– Neil Fiore

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