

One of the only things that is likely to change your behavior is to make incremental progress. You really don't want to make dinner? Make something simple for your family to snack on while you cook dinner later. You're having trouble writing that big speech for next month's conference? Just write the keynote to the speech now. You're overwhelmed by the amount of reading you need to do for your economics class? Set a goal for yourself of reading the first chapter. Like the wise counselor, you must take it one step at a time, one day at a time. What you'll notice in all of these scenarios is two things. One is that they present you with something achievable—a win on the way to reaching the championship of getting this job done. The other is that they all put you in a situation where you're likely to get even more accomplished. You're already in the kitchen now, so you might as well finish making dinner. You've gotten through the keynote and you're on a roll, so maybe it makes sense to draft some more pages. The first chapter of your economics text wasn't nearly as dry as it seemed from the outside, and you already have the book open; you can handle a few more chapters. By breaking a task that you're procrastinating about into smaller pieces, the path to getting it done becomes clear. The best way to deal with the tension between what you want and what you've done so far to achieve it is to remember what the Zeigarnik effect teaches us. You're not going to be able to ease your mind about this task until you complete it, so get yourself moving toward completion. Start somewhere. Anywhere. Even if you don't have the energy or the motivation to get the entire thing done, get started on getting it done. You'll be thankful for the relief.

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