

The Art of Procrastination

It's inevitable. We've all done it. Just as everyone breaks the law at some time or another by jaywalking or speeding or what have you, everyone procrastinates. And for high school students, it's more than something we *might* do—we just *have to* do it, squeezing a few drops of relaxation out of our busy, working lives.

And with this period of relation in procrastination comes an interesting mixture of stress. If the task is a one mile time-trial, the well-trained runner who has to get under six minutes for a tryout gets an even one-and-a-half minutes per lap on the track or quicker; the procrastinator, equally determined to finish in the provided time, walks the first two laps in five minutes, looks at his time, and then runs a record-shattering one-minute half-mile to finish the time. In terms of average rate, a procrastinator—who will henceforth be known as “the high schooler”—performs just as much work as a well time-managed person—who will be known henceforth as “Joe”—in the same time. The average intensity should be the same as well.

But not all statistics are born equal; look at the average energy spent, and the high schooler is far higher in energy consumption than Joe. With the same amount of determination going into the time-trial, the high schooler has the leisure of two laps of walking; Joe spends four laps running in pain. The high schooler only has to focus on work for a quarter of the total time; Joe works through it slowly. The high schooler has half of the distance to contemplate or relax, which may in turn boost his morale and determination; Joe's steady pace slowly grinds him down.

In other words, it is the ultimate rendition of the tortoise and the hare—except that this fable's hare does not have the tendency to oversleep. Had the hare not underestimated the tortoise's steadfastness and overestimated the length of his nap, it would have captured an easy victory, and had the ability to take a brief, refreshing nap.

But it isn't my place to challenge this twenty-five century-old allegory; the tortoise definitely has its merits. Because it is already traveling near its maximum speed, there is little more to ask of it. Likewise, the high schooler's extreme performance for the last minute of his run (when he travels at 120mph to achieve the goal) makes the analogy illogical; there is a physical limit to the rate at which a person can achieve. Similarly, a steady pace is easier to maintain, something that puts less wear and tear on a person. A slow tortoise lives dozens of times as long as the eccentric hare, and procrastinating high schoolers consider themselves burned out and infected with “senioritis” after only four years of their youth, even before the tortures of college or a mid-life crisis.

But the inherent limitations and risks of procrastination should not undermine its positive effects, among which are an efficiency achieved by little else. Only a burning passion—such as that which powers a computer programmer to debug or a competitive soccer player to practice footwork for hours on end—can surpass its efficiency, but passion is a personal metric and is prone to distraction. Procrastination, however, is universal so long as there is a deadline that the high schooler feels the need to complete; the feeling of “I *have* to get this done” that is fueled by the 2:00a.m. adrenaline and the motivation of high grades and a better future are too good to pass off.

If done correctly, it can almost be an art.

This art would be those adrenaline boosts and a sense of obligation to finish. But like any art, many decisions are left to the artist, and a master comes only with practice. If the stress is unbearable, it won't work. If there is too much time given for the task, it won't be effective. If the assignment is something that the high schooler is passionate about, it wastes the passion's increased effects. And even with too much practice, the procrastination's degenerative effects take a toll on quality of life.

Therefore, like any art, procrastination requires temperance and some lucky experimentation.

I hate to call procrastination an art. Something so foul, so detested by Wellness teachers trying to benefit our time-management and well-being. Something that creates pockets of unproductivity and wasted time. But it's there, and it's a reality. The average Joe would want to follow runner Joe's example, but he is really a high schooler at heart. Steady working is a virtue, but it's unideal. Even the ugly can be beautiful sometimes.