

# Of Interest

Spring 2024

## Keys to Overcoming Procrastination

**It's 5 pm and everyone's leaving work—except you, because you still have to do the weekly sales report. You knew the deadline but waited too long to get started. Why do you put off doing things until the last minute?**

"Many people don't realize procrastination is an automatic habit pattern they use to avoid tension," says William Knaus, EdD, a psychologist and author of *The Procrastination Workbook*. "It's kicked off by some form of discomfort, such as feeling uncertain or insecure about something. These habit patterns are the barriers to overcoming procrastination."

Dr. Knaus divides these patterns into the following three diversions:

### 1. Mental diversions

If you think, "I can't do it right now because I'm too tired. I'm not alert enough. I won't be able to concentrate well enough. I'll get to it later when I'm better prepared to think more clearly," then you've fallen into a procrastination trap known as the Manana Diversion. You've fooled yourself into thinking later is different from now, and that later will be better.

### 2. Action diversions

With this barrier, you procrastinate by going to the water cooler, doodling, calling someone on the phone or doing something else on your computer.

### 3. Emotional diversions

Some office tasks aren't inspiring or motivating—they're drudgery. If you wait to be inspired to do something you consider a drag, you'll be waiting a long time.



### Keep in mind the factors that can hinder productivity:

1. Don't be too much of a perfectionist as you move through tasks. Focus on getting the task done, rather than always getting it done perfectly.
2. Don't take on everything yourself; delegate duties to appropriate coworkers or people in your life, when possible.
3. Don't get off track. Learn to say "no" instead of sacrificing valuable time.
4. Don't spend too much time on minor decisions. Save knit-picking for bigger things.
5. Don't burn yourself out. Take breaks and go for a quick walk, talk to a friend, eat a nice lunch, etc. Giving your brain a rest and rejuvenating your body will make you more productive in the long run.

To overcome these barriers, Dr. Knaus recommends the following steps.

## **Five-minute system**

Commit to the task for five minutes. For example, tell yourself, "I'll work for the next five minutes on gathering the information for developing this report."

At the end of that five minutes, decide whether you'll commit for another five. Continue this pattern until you complete the task, run out of time or have a good reason to stop.

"By doing the task for at least five minutes, you're already living through the frustrations that are a part of the activity, and you're making a series of forward-moving decisions," says Dr. Knaus.

## **Plan in reverse**

Many people set goals but don't have a plan. To create a clear, directed and purposeful plan:

First, visualize your goal as a target and imagine shooting an arrow into the target's center. Imagine the arrow's trajectory as you pull it back, release and hit the center.

In other words, visualize your outcome first, then work back from there. Where do you want to end up? What do you do just before that, and before that? By doing this, you're automatically creating a plan at the same time you're reminding yourself the plan is a series of small parts.

## **Building frustration tolerance**

If you can develop a high frustration tolerance, you'll achieve more in life because fewer things will burden your mind. By persistently tackling challenging tasks until you complete them, you build frustration tolerance.

"Even if you don't overcome the discomfort, you've lived through the frustration, which creates this powerful message: You can organize and direct your activities for a productive result, and you do have control over yourself," says Dr. Knaus. "It's better to recognize that doing reasonable things, in a reasonable way, within a reasonable time, gets things done -- and you end up doing rather than stewing."

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