



Beat Procrastination

IT'S ALL IN THE MIND

BY ANDREA RICHARDS SCOTT

Procrastination is the pattern of putting off until tomorrow what can be done today. The problem with procrastination is that tomorrow never comes. The six types of procrastinators are Perfectionists, Over-Committers, Lazy-Susans, Messie Bessies, Past-Perfects, and Waiters.

Perfectionists spend most of their time critiquing themselves as well as others. They have precious little time left to get things done. **Over-Committers** don't know how or when to say "No." They take on responsibility for everything and in the end get nothing done. **Lazy-Susans** are so busy doing nothing, they wear themselves out. They occupy their time with useless, mind numbing or ineffective activities that tire them out. **Messie Bessies** can't get anything done because they're so overwhelmed by the clutter that surrounds them. They promise that they'll attack the project just as soon as they clear of their desk or sort through their mess. **Past-Perfects** are stuck in the past. They're either so busy reliving past successes or beating themselves up over past failures that they can't focus on the task at hand. Finally, the **Waiters** are the procrastinators that are standing around waiting for something to happen instead of just making it happen. They're hanging around in what Dr. Seuss calls "the waiting place" in his book, *Oh the Places You'll Go*.

Nothing happens for any of these procrastinators because they're not living up to their potential. They're not taking action to propel themselves towards their goals. They are not living life to the fullest. If you are a procrastinator and you see yourself in one of these descriptions, commit to change. The change you need happens in the mind first. Change can be scary but it is necessary if you want to have real results.

You can break free of procrastination by adding five healthy habits to your life. It is a widely accepted belief

that it takes 21 days to form new habits. This common belief originated with Dr. Maxwell Maltz, a plastic surgeon and author of *Psycho-Cybernetics* who noticed that patients, in most cases, had a rise in self-esteem and self-confidence (usually in 21 days) when some "freakish" feature was corrected. He also noticed that it took about 21 days for an amputee to get rid of the phantom limb sensation. This insight has led to the foundation of the theory on habit formation. Our brains are powerful. Once something is repeated over and over again, it goes on autopilot.

So you can use the principle of habit formation to commit to adding these new habits to your life. Try these things for the next 21 days and build a procrastination-free lifestyle.

1. Set goals

Over the next 21 days, commit to setting at least one effective goal. Each morning review your goal and take at least one action towards accomplishing your goal.

2. Adopt good time management skills

Break things down into order of importance and urgency. Start with the most important and urgent and work your way down the list. Discard the things that are not important or urgent. Do something to whittle down your list every day for the next 21 days.

3. Break things down into bite size pieces

You've heard the old riddle, "how do you eat an elephant?" Of course for those interested in elephant meat as a delicacy, the answer is "one-bite-at-a-time." If you focus too much on the big picture, you may end up getting overwhelmed. In order to tackle any major task, you must be able to break it into manageable pieces. Once you do this and focus only on the task at hand, you will be able to accomplish more. Attack one item everyday for the next 21 days.

4. Set realistic deadlines

In order to overcome procrastination, you must set realistic deadlines. Setting deadlines that are too lax or too tight are counter productive. If your deadlines are too loose, there is no real incentive to work hard to accomplish it. This is a big trap for the procrastination-prone person. If your deadline is too tight, you may feel overwhelmed and you may give up before you reach your target.

Come up with realistic deadlines for the next 21 days.

5. Reward yourself for achieving milestones

And here's the big payoff, you must reward yourself along the way. When you condition yourself to expect something good for achieving key milestones, you are more motivated to keep going. Set intervals along the way where you can stop and take stock. Then do something that will encourage you to stay on track. Set up a 21 day reward system and give yourself a special reward on the last day.

You can overcome procrastination by renewing your mind – or thinking differently. Once you begin to think differently you will begin to act differently. The first step to solving any problem is to admit you have one. So let's be real honest here. Are you a Perfectionist, an Over-committer, Lazy Susan, Messie Bessie, Past Perfect or Waiter?

Once you've discovered your pattern, you must commit to change. The real way to renew your mind is to think differently. So start today: for the next 21 days, set goals, manage your time, break daunting tasks into smaller pieces, stick to deadlines and reward yourself along the way. Before you know it, you'll have completed the task with a sense of great accomplishment. And to think it all started in your mind.

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