

ANUx - SP | Procrastination

Hello, my name is Bernadette. I work as a counselor in the counseling center, here at ANU. I'm going to talk for a few minutes on procrastination.

Procrastination-- we all do it, some of us more than others. We procrastinate tasks that have both negative and positive outcomes. So why do we do it? And how do we combat it?

Different people have different drivers for their procrastination habits. Some of us fear failing. This makes sense. Why start something if it appears to big or complex and is therefore going to fail? Others are perfectionistic and don't want their results to be less than perfect. And some people even fear success. This might sound strange, but the underlying cognition with procrastinating can be complex.

For example, you need to prepare a presentation for your supervisor. Imagine you do really well in this presentation-- that sounds good. But then, people might start to believe that you were really capable, and they might ask you to do more presentations and more complicated presentations, for a more critical audience. And that would be hard.

What if you're not good enough and the critics laughed at you or dismissed you? What they thought you were a fraud?

That would be terrible. Perhaps, that's too stressful to contemplate. Why don't you go out for coffee and think about it later.

So sometimes, procrastination is just a habit. It's a way to avoid doing tasks we think might be unpleasant or uncomfortable to do so we automatically avoid them by putting them off or distracting ourselves with something more enjoyable.

Knowing what the drivers are for your procrastination habit can help you figure out how to reduce it. Ask yourself, what's stopping me from starting this project? What do I think will happen when I finish it? What will the process feel like? This will give you an idea of why you might be procrastinating.

Once you are aware of the thinking around the task, then it's easier to find the solution to stop avoiding it. Some of the tricks to overcome the inertia of procrastinating are known as the Swiss Cheese approach, the Pomodoro Technique, the Salami Method. Others relate to setting the scene, evaluating the more pleasant aspects of the task, creating rewards, and the choice of language and self-talk.

The Swiss Cheese approach is starting a task in any way possible. This is good if the task appears huge or overwhelming. You start by doing anything at all related to the tasks, making holes in it to reduce the size of it. This might mean starting to type your references before actually finishing the readings for an essay so that at

least some part of the assignment is already done.

The Pomodoro Technique involves setting a timer for 25 minutes. You start the task, then take a five minute break when the alarm sounds. The idea is that you repeat this until 100 minutes have elapsed, then you take a well-deserved break for about 15 minutes.

The Salami technique is similar to the Swiss Cheese approach in that Salami is un-appetizing in a large chunk, but slicing it up makes it delicious. So this involves listing the different steps required to complete your work, then concentrating on the first step exclusively, then the next, and the next, rather than broadening your view to the entire sausage, so to speak.

Another way to stop procrastination is to make sure your environment is attractive and inviting to work in. This reduces some of the unpleasant feelings you might have when starting to do a task.

Sometimes, a change of environment can help with stagnation. It can be as simple as moving your study from your desk, to reading material on your bed for an hour instead.

Make goals and sub-goals, and reward yourself when you complete them. See if what you've set yourself to do is achievable. If you've set the bar too high, you will risk overwhelm and perceived failure. If getting started is the issue, set the bar really low and enjoy your success.

An example of this might be starting a regular exercise program. Initially, you could simply commit to a five-minute brisk walk. When you do the walk, fantastic. Tick the box. If you're out in the fresh air and five turns to 10 or 20 minutes, then that's a bonus. And rewards don't have to cost money. It might just be having a cup of tea in the sun after you've done your 100 minute study.

Finally, be conscious of the language you use when speaking about the work you need to do. Try saying these sentences and notice how they feel differently.

I should do my assignment after lunch. Now try, I could do my assignment after lunch. Which statement feels more onerous? One is a duty and the other is an opportunity.

So I hope this talking tip has been helpful to you. You can access more tips in PDF format called, Procrastination Stoppers, on this website.

Don't forget, too, that if you think you might benefit from a face-to-face talk with a counselor at the center, just call 6125-2442, to make an appointment.

Thanks for listening, and have a great day.

