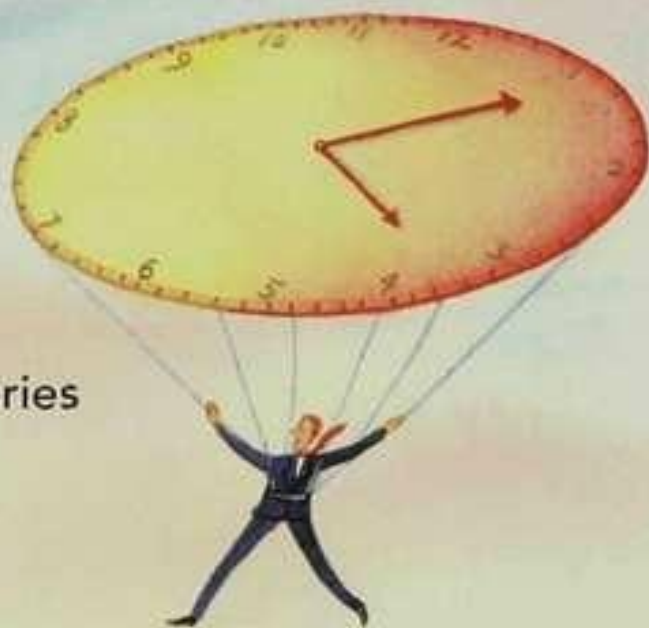


"Don't put off reading this book. Among the techniques and concepts, stories and humor, quotes and 'quick tips,' you will find something to help you get started."

—JACK CANFIELD, coauthor of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series



The Procrastinator's Handbook

*Mastering the Art
of Doing It Now*

RITA
EMMETT



"Masters of procrastination, ALERT! To end your procrastination, read this book."

- Mark Victor Hansen, coauthor of the Chicken Soup for the Soul series

"Since I read this marvelously helpful, entertaining book, the piles of work on my desk have dramatically decreased. We can now see the window! What a pleasure to follow these rules, then—wham! bang!—one job is complete and I pick up the next, knowing I can finish it today."

- Dottie Walters, author of *Speak & Grow Rich* and president of Walters International Speakers Bureau

"This great little book shows you how to eliminate procrastination once and for all—the key to peak performance and maximum productivity!"

- Brian Tracy, Brian Tracy International

"Besides having an outrageous sense of humor and fun, Rita Emmett is, above all, down-to-earth and practical. This book will inspire you, delight you, challenge you, and guide you."

- Barbara Glanz, author of *CARE Packages for the Workplace* and *Care Packages for the Home*

"This is the best book I've read on procrastination. This isn't written for psychologists, it's written for you

and me. You're going to love it."

- Hal Roach, author of *We Irish Talk Like That* and *Write It Dou'n*

The
PROCRASTINATOR'S
HAND BOOK

THE

Procrastinator's Handbook

MASTERING THE ART
OF DOING IT NOW



Rita Emmett



Walker & Company
New York

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To my husband, best friend, and favorite traveling companion, Bruce Karder, and to the shining delights of our lives, our blended family of five kids and four kids-in-law who give us so much joy in so many ways, including blessing us with seven glorious grandchildren (who are also smart, talented, gorgeous, and more, but I don't want to brag). Thank you, God.



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Thank you and God bless you all.

The
PROCRASTINATOR'S
HANDBOOK

Introduction



DO YOU PUT OFF DOING things that are really important to you? Do you sometimes feel anxious or guilty because you just can't get yourself to do what you need or want to do? Is your procrastination driving your family, friends, and/or coworkers crazy?

Procrastination can take a surprisingly high toll on your life, causing stress, illness, and low self-esteem. It keeps you from attaining your goals and fulfilling your dreams. If you're a procrastinator, you might answer yes to one or more of the following questions:

- Do you pay fees for bounced checks, late payments of bills, or high-interest credit card balances because you put off routine personal finance chores? As a result, are you paying so much money to "catch up" that you can never get ahead?
- Do you want to start an exercise program, or begin other healthy habits, or set up an appointment with your doctor or dentist, but you never do?
- Are you losing the battle against clutter on your desk, dining room table, counters, closets, or floors? Does the chaos in the space around you seem to create chaos in your mind and your spirit, leaving you feeling overwhelmed, out of control, and exhausted?

Well, there *is* hope. In this book about the frustrating, fascinating, and—yes—funny subject of procrastination, I will show you how to stop putting off things, become more productive, and develop priorities that reflect your personal goals and values.

As a professional speaker, I give presentations all over the United States, teaching principles and strategies for conquering procrastination. Years ago when I was presenting Time Management seminars, I heard several people saying they didn't sign up for Time Management "because none of that stuff ever works for me." After talking with them, I discovered that they were all procrastinators whose unique needs were not being addressed by time management books and seminars.

People who benefit from time management are like a group that has decided to go on a bicycle journey. They know where they want to go; their bikes are all ready, and time management principles are like the map or directions they need to set off on their adventure.

Then along comes the group of procrastinators meandering down the road. They haven't decided yet where they want to go, and they've forgotten to bring their bikes, which don't work anyway because they haven't gotten around to fixing the flat tire. Maps and directions (time management principles) are of little use to this group. They need something different, so for them I developed my Conquer Procrastination seminars and wrote this book.

When people take my seminars, often the first questions they ask are: "Can a person really stop procrastinating?" "How can people expect to change their basic personalities or character traits?"

Procrastination is not an inherent part of your personality or character; it is simply a habit, an attitude. Can people change habits? Of course they can! Millions of people have stopped smoking even though that habit is extremely hard to break. Can people change attitudes? Sure. Do you know anyone who used to think owning a VCR or sending E-mail was unnecessary, yet now—several years later—can't imagine living without either?

I speak about procrastination from personal experience because I used to put off everything. This is the book I wish I'd had when I was struggling to conquer my own procrastinating ways, and when I was designing those early seminars. The only "conquer procrastination" books back then were written for psychologists and tended to be quite dry.

For as long as I can remember, I practiced every delaying, guilt-producing procrastination tactic imaginable. When I was a college student many years ago, I married, got a job, and continued college part-time. But after our son, Robby, was born, I decided to interrupt my studies and my career and become a stay-at-home mom. I had only one semester to complete, so I was certain I could finish my degree fairly quickly as soon as he was older. However, being a confirmed procrastinator, I did not take even one class during the seven years I stayed home to raise Robb and his younger sister, Kerry.

Then I was hired for a job that required a college degree. The time to register for my last semester came—and passed. I did nothing . . . except wallow in guilt and make excuses to my boss.

People offered advice. I listened. Still I did nothing.

During this period of my life, I read a time management book, which said that we procrastinate for one of two reasons: because we are overwhelmed, or because the project is unpleasant. But I didn't consider one semester to be overwhelming, and I didn't find college unpleasant. From my own experience, I realized that there are many other reasons we procrastinate, starting with fear.

I was terrified of going back to school. And when I started to explore my fears, I realized I was scared of many things: Failure. Rejection. Looking foolish. Competing with nineteen-year-old students. Discovering my brain had turned to mush and that I was now stupid. Facing my kids if I received an F in a class. Having to find time to do my homework. Neglecting my children to make time for my classes and homework, and becoming a rotten mother.

These fears were a huge, unknown force that had the power to immobilize me until I started to identify them. Then I could sort through them, talk about them, face them, wrestle with them, come up with some answers, and ultimately move on with my life. I began to practice all the principles you read about in this book (including a whole chapter on fear).

Did it work? You bet! About a year later, I proudly joined my classmates walking across the stage to receive my bachelor of arts degree. Five years after that, in addition to raising a family and working, I earned a master's degree. Once you begin conquering procrastination, the sky's the limit.

Now I'm a recovering procrastinator and have been for decades. When I first started using the principles in this book, my only expectation was that they would help me stop putting off tasks, errands, chores, and maybe a few goals. But as I began to convert from my old procrastinating ways, over the years I started to make more and more substantial changes in my life. Eventually, my whole life turned around.

Yours can, too.

This book will enable you to:

- understand and modify some of your unproductive ways of thinking
- identify the games you play and behavioral styles you use for putting things off
- apply proven antiprocrastination tips
- develop strategies to move forward when you're stuck or reverting to your old procrastination patterns
- design your own personal action plans

You will recognize yourself in the real-life stories of people who worked through their procrastination tendencies. Each chapter also has quotes to inspire and motivate you. When a particular saying seems tailor-made for you, copy it and put it where you can see it often.

The "Extra Credit" section at the end of each chapter helps you take the information you've read and personalize it by applying the book's principles to your life. If you like answering questions and measuring your progress, this section is for you. If you'd rather skip the exercises, you don't need to do them; but at least look at each exercise. You might find them interesting, perhaps even fun.

Whether you procrastinate all the time, most of the time or only occasionally, this is the right book for you and the right time for you to be reading it. You're on the verge of climbing out of the procrastination pit. Let's get started . . . right now.

PART I



Getting
a Grip on
Procrastination

Tackling the Dread



Emmett's Law: The dread of doing a task uses up more time and energy than doing the task itself.

HOW MUCH TIME, ENERGY, AND emotion have you spent agonizing or feeling guilty about putting off something, only to discover that once you finally get started, the job takes just a short time?

In one of my Conquer Procrastination seminars, a participant named David, who was a sales manager supervising fifty-eight sales representatives, told the following story: He had purchased hundreds of dollars' worth of framed wall prints with motivational quotations to decorate the sales offices in the new corporate headquarters. Five months after the move, the walls of David's division were still bare, the framed prints were still in the storage closets, and David kept putting off hanging them because he didn't have a whole day to devote to "decorating the office."

He didn't want to entrust the job to the maintenance men or anyone else because he was positive they would not hang the prints in the proper spots and moving them would leave holes in the walls. Finally growing tired of all the comments and complaints about the naked walls, David decided he would take some time after lunch each day to hang the prints. When he finished, his whole office area looked marvelous, everyone loved the beauty and spirit of the prints, and David was shocked to realize that the whole job—which he had put off for almost half a year—had been incredibly easy and had taken only forty-seven minutes to complete.

Dreaders often have absolutely no idea how long it takes to do whatever job they've been dreading. Are you living in chaos because you're putting off a thirteen-minute job? You may be living an extremely busy life, but do you realize it takes less than two minutes to hang up your clothes or to put them in the clothes hamper?

Are you constantly shuffling through piles of paper on your desk? You probably spend more time shuffling each day than it would take you to sort through the papers once and for all—filing, processing, tossing out, or recycling.

You may procrastinate because you don't want to devote a whole weekend to cleaning the basement or garage, or a whole afternoon to writing that marketing letter. You don't get around to doing these things because you think you never have enough time. The first step is to realize that the job probably won't take the entire weekend or afternoon or however much time you think it will.

The next step involves the use of an ordinary kitchen timer. You may not have a whole weekend to spend on a certain task, but you may be able to find one hour. (Of course, some really great procrastinators can take so many "breaks" that a one-hour project is still unfinished three months later.) So set the timer for sixty minutes and devote one *uninterrupted* hour to the project. No coffee breaks. No phone calls. If you don't have voice mail and you must answer the phone, put some urgency in your voice and tell the other party you can't talk now but that you'll call them back later.

One of three things will happen:

-
1. You'll finish the job and be amazed at how little time it took. In the future, if you start dreading a similar task, remind yourself that "it takes only thirty-two minutes" or however long it actually took.
 2. You'll discover it is such an enormous project that it will take many more hours to complete but you've made a small dent in it. Decide when to spend another hour on this job. Will you set the timer again once a day? Once a week? Will the timetable be sporadic? Now you have a plan and you've already accomplished something. For today, you are finished and are no longer haunted by the Dread.
 3. At the hour's end you're not finished, but you see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is the most likely scenario. Once you've gained momentum, you won't want to stop. You may actually enjoy pushing ahead to complete the project.

Regardless of how much you do in an hour, you will learn one of the most important lessons in conquering procrastination: What you dread most isn't spending time and energy on the whole job, but simply getting started.

THOSE JOBS YOU HATE TO DO

One of the most obvious reasons for procrastinating is often the most overlooked. The job is put off because it is unpleasant: it's an I-Don't-Like-Doing-It job. For example, Terry can never find time to do routine maintenance on his car because it's a hassle; Deb procrastinates with her physical fitness program because exercise is boring; Tomas puts off calling a client about her tax return because he hates giving bad news.

It's a common human trait to put off jobs we do not like to do. But life seems to overflow with miserable, boring, unpleasant tasks, and somehow they must be completed or problems and stress will result. The problems can be short-term or long-term.

Examples of short-term problems are Terry's car breaking down at the most inconvenient time and Tomas's client becoming unhappy because he didn't call her. Examples of long-term problems would be when Terry has to buy a replacement car before he can afford it, and when Tomas loses the disgruntled client (who finds someone else to do her tax return) and thereby loses a source of income.

It is easiest and most common to put off projects that have long-term consequences. Many people believe they can delay forever planning an exercise program—and they do. To them, it seems that the consequences of suffering poor health will never occur—but they do. Eventually, someone pays the price for procrastinating about any unpleasant task.

So what do you do about the miserable, boring jobs you love to put off? Before coming up with a plan of action, we need to wrestle with some attitudes that foster procrastination.

To begin with, nobody, nowhere, has a life filled with pleasantness, totally devoid of unpleasantness. As Scott Peck writes in the opening line of *The Road Less Traveled*, "Life is difficult. If you are seeking the perfect job or lifestyle that will release you forever from having to do unpleasant chores, you won't find it. It does not exist. So accept the fact that if you want to be a functioning human being, you will be stuck doing some miserable, boring tasks.

The day you say to yourself, "I hate doing this but I have to, so I may as well do it now and get it over with," you will free yourself from the guilt and stress caused by putting it off. And once some

the guilt and stress of procrastination are eliminated from your life, you'll find yourself functioning at a higher level and feeling happier and freer than you could imagine.

Furthermore, doing an unpleasant job often results in pleasant consequences, or at least a wonderful feeling of satisfaction once the job is completed. It's a terrific feeling to say that the bills are paid or a difficult phone call has been made or the project is finished. Even if the boss doesn't notice that your proposal was written before the deadline, you know—and you're the one who can bask in the feeling of satisfaction.

It's amazing how many pleasant feelings in life are preceded by unpleasant or boring jobs. Once you change your attitude and resign yourself to doing those miserable tasks, you'll be ready to discover one of the secrets to conquering procrastination (a secret most of us heard as kids): Do the I-Don't-Like-Doing-It job first.

Jan, another participant in one of my Conquer Procrastination seminars, was the founder of a very successful employment agency. During her first year in business, she took my advice to do the "crummy" job first and was astounded at how quickly it became a habit.

For Jan, the hated task was making cold calls. She would often let herself become so swamped with paperwork and administrative duties that by the end of the day she hadn't made even one call to a prospective client. Meanwhile, the dread and anxiety and guilt surrounding her procrastination about those calls would haunt her, even after she left work. Sometimes at night as she was falling asleep she'd be mentally kicking herself for not making those calls.

When I recommended she get them all out of the way first thing in the morning, she was resistant but finally agreed to try this plan for the next three weeks. She blocked off several hours each morning (marked on her calendar) for cold calling, taped reminder signs around her desk, and stuck to her commitment. By the end of her three-week "trial period," she'd developed the habit of getting her dreaded job out of the way at the start of her day. Now it's just part of her regular routine. She no longer has the dread hanging over her head all day long, causing anxiety and guilt, and she has much greater success in reaching her prospects. She also regularly meets her sales goals, and her agency has become one of the most successful and respected employment agencies in her city.



Initially, it's extremely difficult to force yourself to do the unpleasant tasks first, but in a short time, this can become a habit. And your life becomes easier. Because much of procrastination is a game—a mind game—you can use your mind to change the game. Instead of focusing on how you feel doing the work, focus on how you'll feel when it's finished. Think about the payoff. Visualize the relief and sense of accomplishment you will feel once it is done.

Don't tell yourself, "Woe is me, such misery, I hate doing this." Tell yourself, "I'm going to feel marvelous when this is done." Let your imagination run wild. Picture telling your friends about your accomplishments. Visualize newspaper headlines spelling out every step of your achievement. Harness your mind and imagination to change the procrastination game.

How to Make Boring Jobs More Enjoyable

Are you procrastinating about doing a particular task because it is boring? What can you do to reduce the boredom? Try playing music or listening to the radio while you work. Mickey, an accountant, listens to the radio while she organizes and files papers, and goes through her E-mail

Traci says her children always played their music in the backyard when cleaning the garage, helping the garden, or doing yard work. She grumbled and told them to turn it down, but now she admits she finds music to be energizing (even their music).

Take the sting out of balancing the checkbook, catching up on correspondence, or cleaning out old files by doing the work while watching TV, during the commercials. Call a friend and visit by phone while you wash the dishes, fold laundry, clean the kitchen, or do other routine chores.

Remember reading about the pioneers' quilting bees and barn-raising parties? See if you can work together with a family member or friend on a boring chore. The time flies when you are doing the work with someone else.

Consider the example of two young homemakers in my neighborhood who get together in each other's kitchens to make jelly and can vegetables from their gardens. They also have started sewing, so they cut the material for outfits together too. They have fun visiting with each other, their kids play together, and by the end of the day, they have accomplished a lot of work. Plus they've helped each other learn some old-fashioned skills.

Another example: The public relations director of a fast-growing speakers' bureau used to hate to assemble promotional packets because the job was boring. Now she and the publicist share the collating, folding, and stuffing of the promo material while brainstorming about publicity campaigns.

WHICH PART OF THE JOB DO YOU HATE?

Sometimes you procrastinate not because you find the whole job unpleasant, but because you hate one aspect of it. If that's the case, tackle that part first. For example, if you dread writing a summary of the board meeting because tracking down the statistics makes you crazy, try to find a more convenient way to assemble the figures you need instead of putting off preparing the whole summary.

If it's difficult for you to keep track of the phone calls you have to make, go to an office supply store and see if there's some product or system that may solve your problem. If your employer won't supply what you need to be organized, buy it for yourself. You deserve it. Your investment in yourself will save you time, frustration, and aggravation in the long run and show your employer you are a problem solver who takes the initiative.

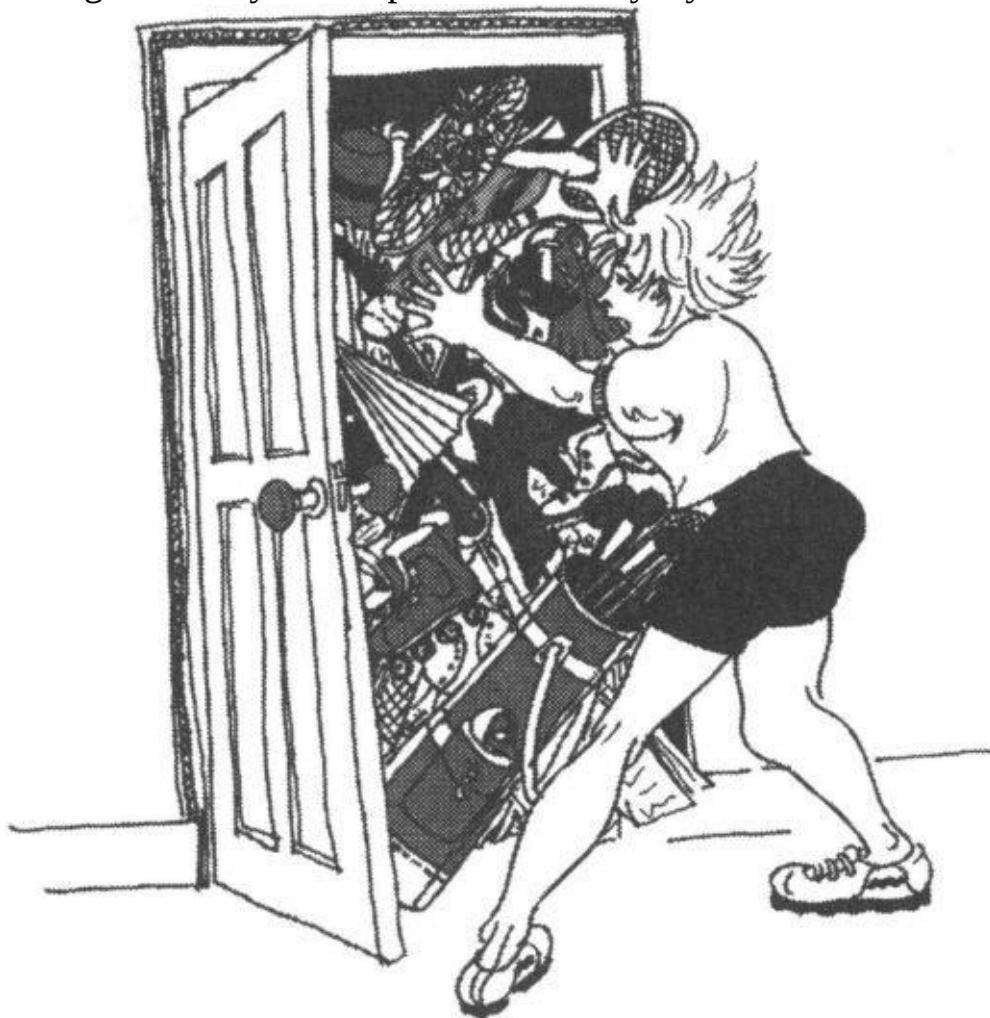
Susan worked at a community college and seemed to be productive in most areas of her work, with the exception of publicity for special events. She would leave everything till the last minute, and as a result, the public wouldn't hear about the event in time and attendance would be low. As Susan analyzed the problem, it occurred to her that she couldn't stand the arrogant attitude of one of the employees in the graphic art department. It embarrassed her to admit that she put off the *whole* project just because she dreaded interacting with this one man once in a while. She considered asking an administrative assistant to do the phoning and picking up in order to avoid having to communicate with this obnoxious guy, but eventually decided against it. Once she became aware of the difficulty, she resolved to handle it herself. She would make certain that she took care of all the graphics at the beginning of the day (to get the job over with), and if once in a while the dread of working with him was just too much, she'd ask for help from a coworker. The more Susan thought about it, the more she realized that she truly enjoyed doing the publicity. Today, it still amazes her that she had put it off just because of this one small aspect of the job.

The trick is to identify which aspect of a dreaded job is the part you hate and to use some creative problem solving to make that portion of your work a little less miserable.

WHAT ARE YOUR TROUBLE AREAS?

Some people procrastinate about everything in the world, but many procrastinate only about specific "trouble areas" of their lives. In fact, merely *thinking* of their trouble areas causes anxiety for some individuals.

To identify trouble areas, write down those tasks and jobs that fill you with dread. Trouble areas can be seasonal: taking down Christmas decorations, doing inventory, tackling the spring cleaning, or working on the annual budget. Or they can be part of our everyday lives.



Helen, a manufacturers rep who is now a recovering procrastinator, used to function fine at work but her house (and much of her personal life) was in total chaos. Among her many trouble areas, one of the most troublesome at home had to do with sending out mail. She'd pour her heart into writing a letter to a friend and feel wonderful when it was finished. Then, three weeks later, it would still be sitting around the house because she hadn't yet found the address or tracked down an envelope and stamp.

Eventually, she hit on a solution for this trouble area. Every time management and "getting organized" article she had ever read stressed the need for a desk. She didn't have an office—let alone a desk—and had always considered herself to be an exception to that rule. But as she concentrated on her trouble area, she realized that anything having to do with mailing out something would put her in a frenzied, frustrated state. Helen had previously thought her hatred of paying bills had something to do with spending money. Now she understood that the logistics of assembling the checkbook, bills, a pen, and stamps was the real culprit. So she decided to invest in a desk.



QUICK TIP

Buy what you need for those trouble areas. Sometimes happiness is having an extra pair of scissors or an extra \$1.49 roll of tape.



"What a difference that little desk made!" she reports. "It became the control center for running our house. The desk contained large and small envelopes, stationery, addresses, pens, pencils, a pencil sharpener, stamps, scissors, tape—so many comforts of life."

Since using a desk made such a difference in her life, she plunged forward and bought a small, two-drawer filing cabinet. All the papers that used to accumulate in stacks around the house were now neatly filed. Helen says that her trouble area simply disappeared, and now she no longer dreads or puts off mailing letters or paying bills.



In a Conquer Procrastination seminar, Larry explained that as a newspaper editor, he is a very organized, efficient person, but his trouble area is keeping up with birthday cards and gifts for family and close friends. Larry just can't motivate himself to buy the gifts and cards, and when he finally does, they get lost somewhere in the house and never make it to the intended receiver. Eight other participants said they were in the same boat and were amazed to discover that they were not the only ones.

Once they started talking, the solution seemed simple: Designate one area for the gifts (perhaps a closet or, if they have children, a high closet shelf out of the reach of little ones) and one area for cards (maybe a drawer or shoebox). That way, cards and gifts won't end up all over the house and be forgotten, and when someone's birthday rolls around, they can go to one spot for the card, one spot for the gift, and their trouble area will be organized.

When my neighbor Leon decided to pinpoint his trouble area, he determined that he always procrastinated about repairing things around the house. After further thought, he identified the real problem: He could never find his tools when he needed them. So one summer, he put in some time and money building a workshop in his garage. He lined the walls with Peg-Board to hang his tools and even drew outlines around the tools so the whole family would know where they belonged when returning tools to the workshop. Admittedly, the tools don't always get hung up in their own special spots, but usually when Leon needs a tool, he'll find it in the workshop and he doesn't procrastinate about repair jobs nearly as much as he used to.

Greg, another seminar participant, found a simple solution to his trouble area at work. During discussions at business meetings, Greg would be asked to follow up on several projects. He'd leave the meeting with the best of intentions, but because he often did not take notes, or if he did, he'd jot something down on a scrap of paper then misplace it, he never did what he said he would do. At the next meeting, when asked if he'd followed up, Greg would make an excuse, and he would look and feel like the world's biggest procrastinator.

Finally, after being embarrassed numerous times, he took action: He set up a folder for each type of meeting, put a pad of paper in every folder so he could jot down all his assignments, developed a schedule for reviewing his notes, and made it a habit to bring his folder to every meeting he attended.

The written assignment was his reminder, and follow-up became a simple habit.

Your trouble areas might be very different from these examples, but you get the idea. Once you identify your trouble area, do some brainstorming, and you'll think of ways to organize yourself or set up systems to help you conquer these procrastination pitfalls.

THE POWER OF REWARDS

Another tip: Give yourself a reward—one that you'll really love—and let that reward motivate you to hurry up and finish the dreaded job. Make a list of rewards you enjoy and match them up to jobs you've been putting off. Use small rewards for small jobs, bigger rewards for bigger jobs. Examples of small rewards include a snack or a phone call to a friend. A big reward could be a trip to the zoo, a special purchase, or a night on the town.

Some people find it easy to reward themselves at the end of a project, and, as a result, they add enjoyment to their work by looking forward to the reward. Others are stumped. They can't think of a reward that would motivate them. They can't think of anything that they would enjoy. They don't know what relaxes them. This is partly because they have a work ethic that ties self-worth with the dictum "I am worthwhile only when I am being productive and working hard."

If you're having trouble coming up with rewards, I encourage you to start small. We're not talking about vacations to Hawaii. We're talking about simple, easy small rewards such as taking some time off to loaf or to do something with the family or a friend.

To keep from procrastinating and as a variation on a reward system, many people "deprive" themselves of a simple reward until a job is complete. If there's a new movie you're dying to see or a video you want to rent, push yourself to finish something, then relax and enjoy your reward—guilt-free.

Kym, a college student, used to sit and stare at an assignment for three days before she would get started. (Once she started the project, however, she had no trouble finishing it.) Now she motivates herself through rewards. She will write or study for twenty minutes in absolute silence (which she hates) before turning on her favorite music.

Similarly, Bob had trouble beginning one of his daily tasks at the counseling center where he worked: Each morning he had to make a summary graph of the number and type of phone calls received during the previous night and then send it to the human resource director. It was a twenty-minute job. Unfortunately, Bob was a great procrastinator who'd take breaks when he wanted to put off something, and most days that graph was still incomplete and hanging over his head late into the afternoon. Thinking about it and dreading it all day long made Bob miserable.

When he finally conquered his procrastination, the weapon he used was coffee. Bob loved coffee with a passion, so his new routine became:

1. At home before work, he could drink all the coffee he wanted.
2. At work, no coffee till the graph was completed and sent to HR.

Within a month, Bob was in the habit of completing that graph during the first half hour at work. Once the graph was processed, he made a big deal of going for his wonderful, delicious cup of coffee. Certainly, after a few months, doing the report first was a solid habit and he no longer needed to play the "reward game," but now—two years later—he still continues to postpone that first glorious cup

coffee until the dreaded graph is complete.

SOME REWARDS THAT MIGHT MOTIVATE YOU TO GET THE JOB DONE



- enjoy a hobby
- attend a movie, play, or concert
- get a massage
- go shopping
- take an afternoon or full day off during your busy weekend
- attend a conference, seminar, or class
- get out of the office and go for a walk
- chat with friends or colleagues
- spend time outdoors in nature
- pamper yourself with extra sleep
- take time off to do nothing—without guilt
- spend time in the company of a loved one
- play a favorite sport or engage in some other type of physical exercise
- read a great book or magazine
- luxuriate in a bubble bath
- go fishing or hunting (alone or with friends)
- devote a whole evening to reading trashy magazines
- dine out
- do something absolutely useless just because you love doing it
- daydream
- go for a one-day or weekend retreat or other getaway

In one of my seminars, Jennifer told the following story: She had always wanted a spare room. But when her dream finally came true and she had a spare room, within no time at all, that room became the resting place and storage space for every stray item in her house.

One of her kids would ask, "Mom, where should I put this?"

Jennifer would reply, "Oh . . . I don't know . . . how about the spare room?"

Cleaning that room was one of her least favorite chores in the world. Stacks and stacks of clutter were everywhere because she didn't know where else to put all her stuff. She procrastinated about cleaning it because of what she called "The Spare Room Paradox: If I didn't know where to put things before, how am I supposed to figure out where to put everything now when I clean it?"

The solution: First, she started working on her attitude *before* she tackled the cleanup. Jennifer decided the payoff would be that every single time she passed it, she'd enjoy a neat, clean spare room and not be bombarded with guilt by all the mess cluttering up the place. Another payoff would be that when she needed something from that area, she wouldn't have to rummage through everything to find it.

Last but not least, she selected a wonderful reward. Jennifer told an understanding friend about how

long she'd been putting off this job and how she needed to use every trick in the book (this book!) to motivate herself to clean that spare room. She and her friend decided to set aside a Sunday afternoon to go to their favorite art museum, but they solemnly agreed to cancel if Jennifer's goal of cleaning the spare room wasn't accomplished.

She borrowed a great set of audiotapes to play while she cleaned, sorted, stacked, packed, tossed out, recycled, and filed. Listening to the tapes made the time fly. And because she had set up a place to file the papers, and had found a charity that would accept most of her unwanted items, she wasn't stuck at the end of the job with stacks of things that didn't have a home.

The job was finished in a very short time. Jennifer enjoyed her reward. And most important, she could say that cleaning her spare room never overwhelmed her again because she had a strategy to help minimize the misery of doing the dreaded project.

Once you consciously start a reward system, it becomes habitual to push through a project so you can celebrate its completion with some kind of treat. For many of us, one of the very best rewards of all is time off. So work hard on your project; set a deadline; cut down on breaks; push yourself to complete the job. But when you finish, don't plunge right into another big job or a lot of little ones. Take some time off—to play, to relax, to have fun.

Within the word *recreation* is the idea that you can recreate yourself. Do something to refresh your spirit, to nurture the little kid in you, to re-create yourself physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Add some fun and some joy to your life. If you have nothing to look forward to at the end of the job except more work, why would you ever want to finish it?

What you're looking for are ways to make the dreaded job less horrendous, less overwhelming, and maybe even a bit pleasant, and to begin achieving whatever you need to move your life along in the right direction—the direction that *you* choose.



THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER

Whatever you do, don't let your progress go unnoticed—even if you are the only one who's noticing.

—Unknown

Lord help me to do with a smile those things I have to do anyway.

—Hal Roach

We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

—Unknown

You will never *find* time for anything. If you want time, you must *make* it.

—Charles Buxton

What gets rewarded gets done.

—Unknown

Unless each day can be looked back upon by an individual as one in which he has had some fun, some joy, some real satisfaction, that day is a loss.

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

Rest is not idleness, and to lie sometimes on the grass under the trees on a summer's day, listening to the murmur of water, or watching the clouds float across the sky, is by no means a waste of time.

—Sir J. Lubbock

In creating, the hardest part is To begin.

—Anonymous

Tomorrow's fate, though thou be wise,
Thou canst not tell nor yet surmise;
Pass, therefore, not today in vain,
For it will never come again.

—Omar Khayyam



EXTRA CREDIT

Make a list of little and big rewards (which you can provide) to motivate yourself to do a task or job that you tend to put off:

- Little Rewards (for completing little jobs) _____
- Big Rewards (for completing big jobs) _____
- Great Fabulous Rewards (for completing life-changing accomplishment) _____

Don't kid yourself by saying, "Completing the job is reward enough." If that were true, why would you put it off in the first place?

EXTRA, EXTRA CREDIT

(Not to worry. It's easy stuff.)

1. Buy a timer.
2. Select one task to do that you've been putting off.
3. Set the timer for one hour.
4. Work at that task. No breaks.
5. Pat yourself on the back.

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