

On the Job: Learn how to avoid procrastination

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Fear, rather than laziness, can prompt a person to put off a project until it's almost too late.



(Photo: Christopher Robbins, Getty Images)

Everyone has tasks they hate and put off for as long as they can, whether it's cleaning out the garage or tackling expense reports at work.

But what happens when that procrastination builds to the point your performance suffers on the job or you start to fall behind on your career plans?

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Procrastination often results when the task we are putting off evokes sadness, anger or fear, says Jude Bijou, a psychotherapist and author of *Attitude Reconstruction*.

"Procrastination has been around forever," she says. "We avoid things no matter the age we live in."

Carson Tate, founder and principal of Working Simply, agrees with Bijou that people often procrastinate out of fear and adds that a drive for perfection can immobilize people who feel "they can't ever get something good enough."

Tate and Bijou offer a number of tips to help those dealing with procrastination and the emotions behind it. Among their suggestions:

- **Channel your dog.** When you take a dog to the veterinarian, the animal often shakes and shivers, Bijou says.

That's a much more natural response than a human being who tries to contain fear and become very still, she says.

"Don't tighten up," she says. "Makes sounds and wiggle around and let the energy out of your body. Shake hard for about 1 minute, and then you'll feel calmer and think more clearly."

- **Do a brain dump.** List all your fears, then ask yourself, "Is it true?" Tate says.

If you really don't have the resources to get a job done at work, what can you do about it "instead of just spinning your wheels?" she asks.

- **Have a good cry.** If you're sad about something and that's the reason you're procrastinating, allow yourself to cry for 5 or 10 minutes, Bijou says.

Put on a sad movie, or just hold yourself and say, "OK, let me have a good cry and while I'm crying I'm going to think, 'poor me,'" she says. "That helps you to remove that sadness energy."

- **Banish perfectionism.** Think about what the boss really wants, not what you think should happen to be perfect, Tate says.

"Decide what's good enough," she says.

- **Throw a fit.** "What does a young child do when he's angry? He throws a temper tantrum," Bijou says.

While you can't pitch a hissy fit in the middle of the office, you can go into the bathroom and shake a stall door, press your hands really hard against the wall or stomp around, which helps release the frustration from your body, she says.

Once you've handled the emotions behind procrastination, then you can rewire and begin "thinking thoughts that are more helpful," Bijou says.

For example, she suggests you begin by telling yourself: "I can do it. I'll feel better if I do it. I just take one small step."

By supporting yourself with helpful thoughts and breaking down big tasks into "little, doable tasks," Bijou says you break down your fears. Once you've started, write down what you've accomplished.

"Take one thing at a time. Just tell yourself, 'Let me do this,' " she says. "Then, when you're done, say 'Good for me!' "

The key in dealing with procrastination is finding ways to dial down the stress of the situation, Tate says. That way, you can better focus on taking action instead of becoming paralyzed by what you're not getting done.

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