



# Overcoming the Thief of Achievement: Procrastination

by Mike Hawkins  
[mike@alpinelink.com](mailto:mike@alpinelink.com)



Do you defer taking action or making decisions? Have you been told that you don't follow through or respond quickly enough? Do you put off until tomorrow that which could be done today? If so, consider yourself a procrastinator. Procrastinators regularly postpone that which is important for that which is easy, fun, convenient, or urgent.

If there is any doubt, take this simple test to see if you suffer from the malady of procrastination:

1. Do you have important responsibilities that you are putting off to do later?
2. Do you have stacks of papers on your desk, stuff laying around your house, or unfinished projects that have been waiting for you to complete for several weeks or longer?
3. Do you wait until you are pressure-prompted to complete a task?
4. Are you often late for meetings and appointments?
5. Do you have many great ideas that you don't act upon?
6. Are you tempted to stop reading this article and finish reading it later?

If you said yes to these questions, you procrastinate. You probably have a backlog of tasks to do and people to talk to. You have people waiting on you. You might come through at the last minute and technically meet your deadlines, but you create anxiety in those who depend on you. You likely spend more time making excuses for what you didn't get to than the time you would have spent making decisions and completing your tasks.

Procrastination is a showstopper of progress. It is an affliction that inhibits self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and accomplishment. It is a thief that robs you of reaching your goals and pursuing your dreams. It keeps you stuck in frustrating circumstances and stops you from moving ahead. It lowers your productivity, prevents you from seizing opportunities, keeps you from improving yourself, causes delays for other people who are dependent upon you, creates stress, and produces guilt.

There are many causes of procrastination. For some it is fear of looking foolish. For others it is a lack of concentration. It can be due to a dearth of organization skills or unawareness of the practices of efficient time management. It can be due to a lack of sense of responsibility. It can be physiological or phobia related. Some people simply don't know how to perform a given task or where to get started. For others, their procrastination is driven by a subconscious need to be needed.

Whatever the cause, procrastination is a self-limiting habit that can be changed. It is a learned behavior that can be unlearned. Here are 14 tips to combat procrastination:

1. **Find the source.** The first step to overcoming procrastination is to understand its source. What is causing your procrastination? Is it fear, perfectionism, low energy, inability to focus, limited sense of responsibility, poor time management, or a desire to have people constantly dependent upon you? Pinpoint the appropriate root cause(s).
2. **Set goals.** Make a list of your top opportunities and priorities for the short-term, medium-term, and long-term. Consider what you would like to accomplish if you had the time and energy.
3. **Get organized.** Set up a filing system, install storage bins, or do whatever you need to do to get organized. Quit spending time re-reading emails in your in-box or sorting through things looking for something. Write down your to-dos when you think of them. Take notes. Don't overly depend on your short-term memory. It will disappoint you.



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4. **Eliminate distractions.** Deal with any unimportant tasks competing for your time and energy. Learn to say “no” or “not now” to that which is less important. Turn off the TV, email, phone, social media messaging, or whatever it is that is hindering your attention.
5. **Build your confidence.** Have confidence in your ability to execute your work. Do research, seek wise counsel, read non-fiction books, attend seminars, or do whatever you can to develop the knowledge, skill, and competence needed to feel confident in executing your responsibilities.
6. **Keep your energy level up.** Get in shape, exercise, follow good nutritional habits, and improve your sleeping habits. Avoid sugar laden foods and simple carbs. Spend at least 30 minutes three times a week exercising at your target cardio heart rate. Take time to relax, reflect, and recharge.
7. **Build your motivation.** Appreciate the value of reaching your goals. Consider the satisfaction you will have when you check something off of your to-do list. Picture yourself when you have accomplished your objective. Consider the regrets you’ll have if you don’t take action.
8. **Make it enjoyable.** Make your task as enjoyable as possible. Find ways to incorporate elements that would make it more fun and exciting. Do your work in a place with a great view or soothing background music.
9. **Create incentives.** Reward yourself for good behavior. Lessen any motivations for instant gratification. Put in place incentives that discourage procrastination, e.g. put five dollars in a cookie jar to give to a charity for each time you are late for an appointment.
10. **Consider your standards.** Not everything has to be perfect. Getting something done now at an acceptable level of quality can be better than completing something later at a perfect level of quality. If you wait until all the risks, uncertainties, and style issues are removed, you will be late. The benefits from being on schedule will be lost.
11. **Create a plan of action.** Craft a plan. Breakdown your projects into milestones and incremental tasks. Include a definitive start date and time as well as a due date. “Someday” is not a day on your calendar.
12. **Don’t try to do it all at once.** Don’t put off starting until you have enough time to do the whole task at once. That time may never come. Stop thinking and start acting. Make progress in small increments. The best way to complete a task is to start doing it. Slow and steady beats fast and inconsistent.
13. **Finish what you start.** Don’t start a new project until you have finished your old project. If you only start projects, before you know it you will have a house, office, or garage full of unfinished projects. Finish what you start, even if it isn’t perfect, before turning your attention to something else.
14. **Solicit the help of others.** Share your plans to overcome your procrastination with someone else. Ask for help in being accountable to the “new you”. Set up milestones that when reached can be celebrated with others.

Follow these principles and you will spend less of your time disappointing yourself and others. Instead, you’ll spend more time achieving that which is truly important to you.

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Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* ([www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com](http://www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com)), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches ([www.ScopeOfLeadership.com](http://www.ScopeOfLeadership.com)) and president of Alpine Link Corp ([www.AlpineLink.com](http://www.AlpineLink.com)), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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