

by Mike Hawkins
mike@alpinelink.com



Some people seem to get a lot more done than others. They spend time with their family, maintain multiple hobbies, stay close to their friends, travel often, take on various projects, and perform numerous responsibilities in their work. They seem to check as many to-do list boxes and have as many achievements in a month as others do in a year.

People who get a lot done do so through many attributes and practices. They leverage their resources. They maintain their energy level. They are efficient. But perhaps most impactful, they are action oriented. They are generally quick to make decisions and act on them. This can be in stark contrast to procrastinators who are typically slow to make decisions and take action.

Where you are on the scale of decisiveness versus procrastination? If unsure, here are ten questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you often postpone taking action or making decisions because you tend to want more information or consider more options?
2. Have you been told that you don't follow through or respond quickly enough?
3. Do you regularly put off until tomorrow that which could be done today? Do you have important responsibilities that you are putting off to do later?
4. Are your gifts to others often belated?
5. Are you often late for meetings and appointments?
6. Do you prefer to decide to go somewhere or do something at the proverbial "last minute"?
7. Do you have any backlogs such as hundreds of emails or texts that you need to do something with, photos that you've been meaning to organize, stacks of papers on your desk, stuff laying around your house, people to call, or unfinished projects that have been waiting for you to complete for several weeks or longer?
8. Do you wait until you are pressure-prompted to complete a task?
9. Do you have a number of great ideas that you don't act upon?
10. Are you tempted to stop reading this article and finish reading it later?

If you said *yes* to many of these questions, you procrastinate. You regularly postpone that which could be done sooner. You probably displace the important for that which is easy, fun, convenient, or urgent. You probably have people waiting on you. You hopefully come through at the last minute and technically meet your deadlines, but you create anxiety in those who depend on you. You possibly spend more time justifying what you didn't do than actually doing it.

Being patient, waiting for circumstances to change, or taking in more information before deciding or acting can be appropriate, but when done to the extreme prevents progress. Procrastination therefore can be a thief of achievement. It is a thief that robs you of reaching your goals and pursuing your dreams. To be candid, it keeps you stuck in frustrating circumstances and unhealthy relationships. It lowers your productivity, prevents you from seizing opportunities, keeps you from improving yourself, creates stress, and produces guilt. It inhibits self-esteem and self-fulfillment. Procrastination not addressed stops you from moving ahead at work and in life.

There are many causes of procrastination. For some it is fear of making a mistake. For others it is a lack of concentration. Or a desire to leave all options open for as long as possible. It can also be due to a dearth of organization skills or unawareness of the practices of efficient time management. Or a lack of sense of responsibility. In some people's defense, they simply don't know how to perform a given task or where to get started. Perhaps the least healthy cause, however, some have a subconscious need for attention or to be needed which gets satisfied by being late.

Whatever the cause, procrastination is a self-limiting habit that can be overridden. It is a learned behavior that can be unlearned. Here are a few principles to follow in combating procrastination:

Overcoming the Thief of Achievement - 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 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 no self-limitations including time and energy.
- 3. Get organized.** Set up a filing system, put things in 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 documents to find something. Record your to-dos when you think of them. Take notes. Don't overly depend on your short-term memory. It will disappoint you.
- 4. Eliminate distractions.** Deal with the unimportant tasks competing for your time and energy. Learn to say "no" or "not now" to that which is less important. Turn off messaging, email, phone, television, or whatever it is that hinders your attention.
- 5. Build your confidence.** Have confidence in your ability to execute your work. Do online 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 without second guessing yourself.
- 6. Maintain your energy level.** Get in shape, exercise, follow good nutritional habits, and improve your sleeping habits. Avoid sugar laden foods and simple carbs. Take time to relax, reflect, and recharge. Spend at least 30 minutes three times a week exercising at your target cardio heart rate.
- 7. Develop your motivation.** Appreciate the value of reaching your goals. Consider the satisfaction you will have when you check something off your to-do list. Picture yourself when you have accomplished your objective. Consider any regrets you'll have if you don't take action.
- 8. Make it enjoyable.** Make your tasks as enjoyable as possible. Find ways to incorporate elements that would make them more fun and exciting. For example, 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. For example, put money in a cookie jar to give to a charity each time you are late for an appointment.
- 10. Consider your standards.** Not everything has to be perfect. Where appropriate, know that getting something done now at an acceptable level of quality can be better than completing something later at a near-perfect level of quality.
- 11. Create a plan of action.** Craft a plan. Breakdown your projects into milestones and incremental tasks. Include a definitive start date and due date. Put the tasks on your calendar. "Someday" is not a day on your calendar.
- 12. Make the decision.** Don't wait for complete confidence in a decision to make it. Once you have reasonable assurance in what to do, decide to do it. If circumstances change, change your decision, but if you wait until all the risks and uncertainties are gone, you will be late. You will have deferred if not missed the benefits.
- 13. Don't try to do it all at once.** Don't put off starting something 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.
- 14. 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.
- 15. 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 enjoy achieving that which is truly important to you.

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), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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