

Let's Put It Off For One More Day

'SOMETIMES PROBLEMS WORK THEMSELVES OUT,' OUR MOTHERS WOULD TELL US WHEN WE WERE DWELLING OVER OUR TROUBLES. AND THEY WERE RIGHT: SOMETIMES IF YOU WAIT A BIT, SITUATIONS CHANGE. HERE ARE SOME REASONS WHY WE SHOULD OCCASIONALLY JUST PROCRASTINATE ON THINGS.

YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS DOES THE WORK

Why is it that when you are daydreaming—on the bus, while doing the dishes, during a walk around the block—you get the best ideas? Or all of a sudden while in the shower you find the perfect solution to a problem. The key lies in our subconscious. According to Paul Loomans, Dutch author of *Time Surfing: The Zen Approach to Keeping Time on Your Side*, our subconscious gets to work solving problems in its own time. Just 'sleeping on it' works because your subconscious has the time during the night to make associations and look for similar situations.

INSPIRING PROCRASTINATORS

Newton was actually supposed to be picking apples when he sat under the tree thinking about gravity. Shakespeare thought up *Henry VI* at the same time he was supposed to be translating another play. And there are countless examples of artists and inventors who were all-stars at procrastination, including Jane Austen, Thomas Jefferson, Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci. They saw that taking action is not always equivalent to progress but that a thought, idea or a response sometimes needs time to sink in.

TURN IT AROUND

Procrastination is often mistaken for laziness, but many procrastinators are busy, hardworking people—they just

don't always do what they are supposed to, according to John Perry, American philosopher and author of *The Art of Procrastination: A Guide to Effective Dawdling, Lollygagging and Postponing*. Instead, he believes, they do other less urgent but useful things, like sorting the mail, or tidying up. Perry says this is good: It gets you to stop avoiding these tasks that you would otherwise avoid.

SIT AND THINK

In our modern society, there is a lot of appreciation for people who act quickly. But in Greek and Roman times, procrastination and waiting was properly honored. Wise leaders were able to sit and think the whole day. They waited and collected as much information as possible. Only when it was absolutely necessary did they spring into action.

UNNECESSARY ACTION

Sometimes it feels like your mind only feels at peace when you've crossed out everything on your to-do list. But you can also ask yourself why you should have to take care of everything *right now*. Sometimes procrastination gives you a new perspective that changes your task, for instance, or even makes it unnecessary. It is not uncommon for a practical problem to just fix itself. >



‘You must postpone problems; then they mostly go away on their own’

Simon Carmiggelt (1913-1987), Dutch author

EXAMPLE OF SELF-DECEPTION

Structured procrastination doesn’t mean that you have to add fewer tasks to your list. On the contrary, you may overload your to-do list with tasks. Then the trick is to choose the right projects to place at the top of your list, those that are the most important. And then these are the ones to happily avoid while you do everything else on your list.

BETTER WELL THAN FAST

Eloquent speakers and stand-up comedians have known for quite some time that success depends on when and how long you pause. It is not important to do something fast-fast-fast, but to do it well. And sometimes that takes just a bit more time.

LET IT SINK IN

Procrastination has a lot in common with mindfulness. Everything doesn’t need to be solved immediately: look at it first, let your feelings sink in and experience the problem without immediately thinking of solutions. It might feel like dawdling, but sometimes there is nothing wrong with that and the problem solves itself.

SWITCH YOUR FOCUS

Our first instinct is often to hang in there, show initiative and up the pressure. But actually in moments such as these, taking a break is a better idea, says Loomans, who is also a Zen master and trainer. He recommends doing something else and revisiting the issue a day later.

REWARD YOURSELF

A Procrastination Research Conference held in 2017 at DePaul University in Chicago, US, revealed that one out of every five people fall into a category they call ‘chronic procrastinators’. Start with small steps. “Split up big tasks into smaller tasks—this is how you get an overview,” says psychologist Greetje Stomp from the Netherlands. “You often put too much pressure on yourself. If you adjust this, you experience success sooner and that is another motivator to keep you moving forward. Reward yourself and be your own best friend.”

DO AWAY WITH GUILT

Procrastination and guilt: unfortunately, they are a golden combination, yet completely unnecessary because during those moments of procrastination, you often do all kinds of other useful things: the washing, cleaning your house, paying bills, research for another project, answering emails that were hanging around. And by the end of the day you have achieved more perhaps than when you were hemming and hawing over starting that one important task. Therefore: just write down all of the tasks that you actually did do. ●