

Getting Beyond Procrastination

“I can never get started on a big project at home,” lamented a retired friend at church. “I have so many boxes to go through since we moved that I can’t seem to get started,” she continued.

Many of us find ourselves in the same situation. We get so overwhelmed by the amount of work we have to do that we procrastinate the project.

Here are five simple tips to get beyond procrastination to success.

1. Set a timer. I suggested that my friend set a kitchen timer for an hour to go through boxes. When the bell rings, take a break and move on to something else. Often, we are still motivated, and realize that the one hour wasn’t enough and we actually *want* to continue. If that’s the case, set the timer for thirty minutes and continue sorting. The goal is to get through the boxes while motivated. If you lose motivation, stop for the day and continue with the timer the next day.
2. Take one box at a time. Another way to get through the boxes is to set a goal to go through a certain number of boxes a day. Again, our mind will often play a trick on us and we will be motivated to do more than the allotted boxes that day. So, allow yourself to continue as long as you are motivated.
3. Give yourself a reward. Determine something you like to do and make that a reward for going through boxes. It can be something simple as watching a favorite television show. Tell yourself that you cannot watch the TV show until you have gone through one box. Or, set a lunch date with a friend and make yourself go through one box before going to lunch.
4. Doing two things at once. Depending on the task, you may be able to multi-task. For instance, going through boxes could probably be done while watching a favorite tv show or while listening to music. Been procrastinating exercise? Many people don’t enjoy exercise but doing two things at once (listening to music or watching tv) while they on their treadmill makes the exercise more bearable. You get the idea.
5. Often just getting started is the biggest hurdle. Break a project down to simple tasks and manageable pieces. Determine the steps to get the project completed. Then get it started, take the first step and you will likely continue it through completion.

It’s not always dreaded projects that we procrastinate. People also put-off things they really want to do. For instance if you are planning a vacation and you can’t seem to get started, break it down into smaller tasks. Such as:

- Determine how long you can be gone
- What can you afford
- Determine what kind of vacation you want; such as, relaxing, sight-seeing, education, adventure, etc.
- Call the travel agent

- Determine where you/your family want to go (check out three options)
- Investigate costs of each option
- Investigate activities at each location
- Have a family meeting
- Make a decision

None of these tasks takes a long time but often, just the thought of doing everything at once can be overwhelming.

As a recovering procrastinator and scholar of time management techniques, I continue to deal with procrastination tendencies. The five tips help me stay up with my “to do” list. But, I have to continually monitor my yearning to procrastinate certain tasks.

Good luck with your fight against procrastination. What we often find is that once the project is finished, we wonder why we procrastinated because it really wasn't that bad.

I am considering offering a series of sessions on conquering procrastination. If you are interested, give me a call at 885-5556 or email me at wallacel@missouri.edu.