

A Few Profiles in Procrastination Psychology Demonstrating Organizational Strategy

The difficulty of certain tasks often provokes a desire to delay or otherwise waste time before getting down to business. This impulse to procrastinate can affect people's lives as an occasional temptation or as a nearly irresistible habit, depending on the temperament of the individual.

In three particular areas of activity, namely college, business and home life, procrastination can have an especially detrimental effect. A closer look at the underlying factors for procrastination in each of these settings can help illuminate some of the influences in the decision to procrastinate.

For many students, procrastination emerges as a significant problem during the first years of college. The college procrastinator is frequently an individual who, for one of several possible reasons, did not learn effective time management strategies during high school. Often accustomed to high school assignments that are strictly short term or that have been broken down into a series of smaller assignments by the high school teachers, the college procrastinator is at a loss to adjust to college's long term assignments.

In some cases, the college procrastinator underestimates the difficulty of a term paper or end-of-semester project because the professor does not constantly remind the class about the upcoming deadline. For this reason, the difficulties faced by the college procrastinator can be seen as a failure to adjust from a structured, regulated learning environment into an environment where independent time management skills are necessary. Once the need for discipline and organization has been recognized, a few simple tools, such as a day planner, can help the college procrastinator organize a self-structured series of goals and deadlines for long-term assignments.

Whereas the college procrastinator might put off a difficult assignment by playing computer games or socializing, the business procrastinator is often more subtle in his or her strategy. Rather than engaging in meaningless amusements, which might be punished if discovered, the business procrastinator often wastes time on activities that are in fact part of his or her job description but that are not the most important tasks at the moment.

In some instances, a lack of confidence in the ability to successfully complete difficult assignments compels the business procrastinator to pursue easy, straightforward minor tasks. In other situations, an inability to distinguish between high- and low-priority assignments causes the business procrastinator to perceive that the simple tasks are just as important as the complicated ones, leaving the business procrastinator no reason to pursue the more difficult tasks.

To remedy this circumstance, the business procrastinator first must learn to recognize which tasks have the most potential to impact the success of the business itself and to affect the course of business in the long term. Once this has been accomplished, the business procrastinator can break down long-term, complicated tasks into a series of manageable deadlines so that they are not quite so overwhelming.

Rather than being unable to face a deadline, the home-life procrastinator is often uncomfortable with the never-ending nature of daily home-related tasks. Yard work, home repairs, cleaning and meal preparation can all assume the uninspiring role of routine inconveniences in a person's life.

As unfinished chores accumulate over time, the home-life procrastinator begins to feel the pressure of house work intruding on the joys of everyday life. To counter this situation, a specific time should be set aside each week to schedule a reasonable number of weekly chores. By naming which tasks should be accomplished on which day, the home-life procrastinator can gain control over the amount of work. And by limiting certain tasks to certain days, the procrastinator can stop feeling guilty about any unfinished chores provided that he or she has accomplished the chores set aside for the present day.

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