

STAND & DELIVER

Do you check e-mail 100 times a day, only to answer two messages? Understanding why people really **procrastinate** is the key to purging that in-box and getting on with life.

at the age of 37, Jared, a would-be professor in New York state, should be on tenure track at a university, perhaps publishing his second or third book. Instead, he's working on a dissertation in sociology that he'd planned to complete a decade ago. He's blown two "drop-dead" deadlines and is worried about missing a third. His girlfriend is losing patience. No one can understand why a guy they consider brilliant doesn't "just do it." Nor, for that matter, can Jared: "If I could change it, believe me, I would," he swears.

Jared is among the one in five people who chronically procrastinate, jeopardizing careers and jettisoning peace of mind, all the while repeating the mantra: "I should be doing something else right now."

Procrastination is not just an issue of time management or laziness. It's about feeling paralyzed and guilty as you channel surf, knowing you should be cracking the

books or reconfiguring your investment strategy. Why the gap between incentive and action? Psychologists now believe it is a combination of anxiety and false beliefs about productivity.

Tim Pynchyl, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, tracked students with procrastination problems in the final week before a project was due. Students first reported anxiety and guilt because they had not started their projects. "They were telling themselves 'I work better under pressure' or 'this isn't important,'" says Pynchyl. But once they began to work, they reported more positive emotions; they no longer

lamented wasted time, nor claimed that pressure helped. The results of this study will be presented at the Third International Conference on Counseling the Procrastinator in Academic Settings in August. Psychologists have focused on procrastination among students because the problem is rampant in academic settings; some 70 percent of college students report problems with overdue papers and delayed studying, according to Joseph Ferrari, associate professor of psychology at Chicago's DePaul University.

Pynchyl also found that procrastination is detrimental to physical health. College students who procrastinate have higher levels of drinking, smoking, insomnia, stomach problems, colds and flu.

So why can't people just buckle down and get the job done?

FALSE BELIEFS

Many procrastinators are convinced that they work better under pressure, or they'll feel better about tackling the work later. But tomorrow never comes and last-minute work is often low quality. In spite of





American Pacific University
www.ampac.edu

Argosy University
888-488-7537

Aspen Education Group
www.aspeneducation.com

At-Home Professions
800-388-8765

Beacon College
www.beaconcollege.edu

Burlington College
800-862-9616

California Institute of
Integral Studies
www.ciis.edu

Chapman University
www.chapman.edu/psych

Clayton College of Natural Health
www.ccnh.edu

Colorado Institute For Homeopathy
www.homeopathyschool.org

Columbia Southern University
www.columbiasouthern.edu/uwa

Goddard College
www.goddard.edu

Institute for
Transpersonal Psychology
www.itp.edu

JFK University
www.jfku.edu

Lacrosse University
www.lacrosseuniversity.com

Leidecker Institute
www.brightfuture.org

Lesley University
www.lesley.edu

Madison University
www.madisonu.com

Naropa University
www.naropa.com

Nova Southeastern University
www.cps.nova.edu

Optimal Performance Institute
www.opi.edu

Pacific Graduate Institute
www.pgsp.edu

Pathways of Light
www.pathwaysoflight.org

Southern California University
for Professional Studies
www.scups.edu

Trinity College of Natural Health
800-428-0408

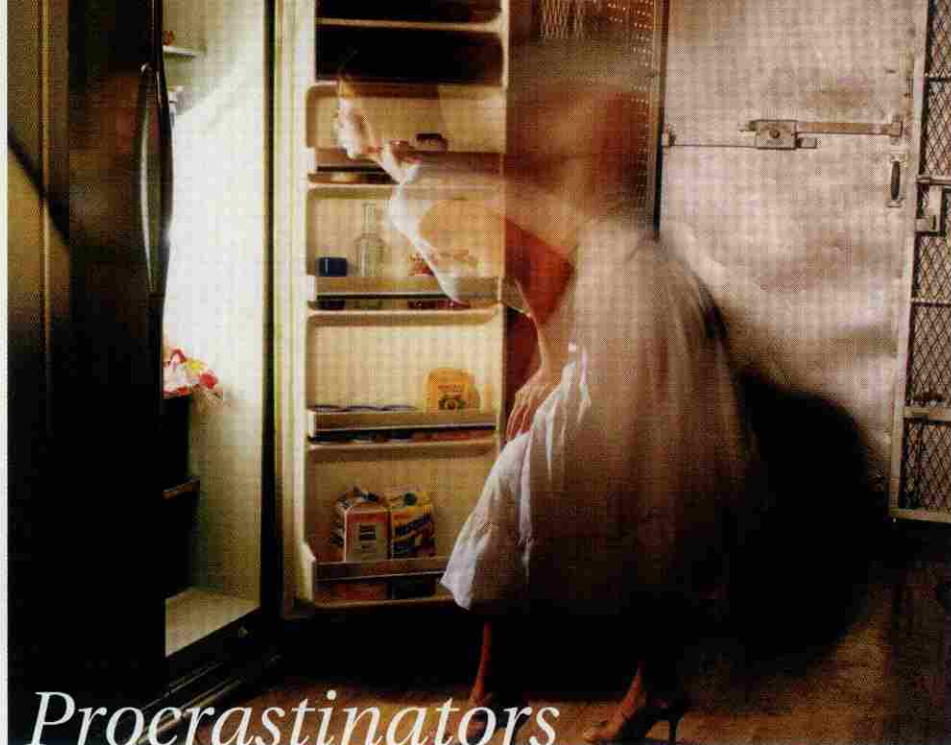
Union Institute & University
800-486-3116

University of Metaphysics
888-866-4685

University of Philosophical Research
www.uprs.edu

Walden University
www.waldenu.edu

Westbrook University
800-447-6496



Procrastinators may enjoy the adrenaline rush that comes with mailing taxes at 11:30 p.m. on April 15.

what they may believe, "Procrastinators generally don't do well under pressure," says Ferrari. The idea that time pressure improves performance is perhaps the most common myth among procrastinators.

FEAR OF FAILURE

"The main reason people procrastinate is fear," says Neil Fiore, Ph.D., author of *The Now Habit*. Procrastinators fear they'll fall short because they don't have the requisite talent or skills. "They get overwhelmed and they're afraid they'll look stupid." According to Ferrari, "Procrastinators would rather be seen as lacking in effort than lacking in ability." If you flunk a calculus exam, better to loudly blame it on the half-hour study blitz, than admit to yourself that you could have used a tutor the entire semester.

PERFECTIONISM

Procrastinators tend to be perfectionists—and they're in overdrive because they're insecure. People who do their best because they want to win don't procrastinate; but those who feel they must be perfect to please others often put things off. These people fret that "No one will love me if everything I do isn't utter genius." Such perfectionism is at the heart of many an unfinished novel.

SELF-CONTROL

Impulsivity may seem diametrically opposed to procrastination, but both can be part of a larger problem: self-control. People who are impulsive may not be able to prioritize intentions, says Pychyl. So, while writing a term paper you break for a snack and see a spill in the refrigerator, which leads to cleaning the entire kitchen.

PUNITIVE PARENTING

Children of authoritarian parents are prone to procrastinate. Pychyl speculates that children with such parents postpone choices because their decisions are so frequently criticized—or made for them. Alternatively, the child may procrastinate as a form of rebellion. Refusing to study can be an angry—if self-defeating—message to Mom and Dad.

THRILL-SEEKING

Some procrastinators enjoy the adrenaline "rush." These people find perverse satisfaction when they finish their taxes minutes before midnight on April 15 and dash to the post office just before it closes.

TASK-RELATED ANXIETIES

Procrastination can be associated with specific situations. "Humans avoid the dif-

New hope for humanity

Today, as the world grapples with ever-deepening crises on every front, a group of extraordinary Teachers stands ready to show us the sure path to peace *and* the means to realize our true spiritual nature.

Soon, the head of this group will emerge into public awareness. Look for a man of exceptional insight and compassion, presenting practical solutions to our most pressing global problems.

British author Benjamin Creme will lecture in July on
'The Emergence of the World Teacher'
New York, Los Angeles,
San Francisco



Learn more:

Share-International.org
888-242-8272 (USA only)
818-785-9311



ficult and boring," says Fiore. Even the least procrastination-prone individuals put off taxes and visits to the dentist.


UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Ambiguous directions and vague priorities increase procrastination. The boss who asserts that everything is high priority and due yesterday is more likely to be kept waiting. Supervisors who insist on "prioritizing

TAPPING POTENTIAL / STAND AND DELIVER

the Jones project and using the Smith plan as a model" see greater productivity.

DEPRESSION

The blues can lead to or exacerbate procrastination—and vice versa. Several symptoms of depression feed procrastination. Decision-making is another problem. Because depressed people can't feel much pleasure, all options seem equally bleak, which makes getting started difficult and pointless. 

Maia Szalavitz is a freelance science writer and co-author of Recovery Options: The Complete Guide: How You and Your Loved Ones Can Understand and Treat Alcohol and Other Drug Problems.

LEARN MORE ABOUT IT:

The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles Steven Pressfield (Warner Books)

The Now Habit Neil Fiore, Ph.D. (Tarcher/Putnam)

MASTER THE TASK

Never say "I must":

"People get stuck between their inner voices and use ineffective ways of motivation," says Neil Fiore. One voice says, "I should," another says, "I don't want to." Fiore recommends that instead you recognize you have a choice. Realizing that you have selected your goals helps shut down the conflict between "should" and "want." Sure, you don't have to study for the bar exam—but choosing not to could seriously crimp your plan to become an attorney.

Set realistic goals:

Resolutions like "I want to get in shape," often fail, but plans like "I will run three times a week at 7 a.m.," are more achievable. Break tasks down into small, manageable steps.

When the house looks like a garbage dump, cleaning it may seem insurmountable. But tidying the bathroom for 15 minutes isn't so bad.

Schedule time off:

Fiore found that graduate students who completed dissertations in two years or less allowed themselves time for relaxation. Those who took three or more years tried to spend every minute researching and writing. They rebelled against the self-imposed drudgery, rendering themselves less effective in the long term.

Fight misguided impulses:

Don't succumb to myths such as "pressure improves performance." Set up a schedule that includes short-, medium- and long-term

goals to avoid leaving everything until the last minute.

Be selective: If you tend toward perfectionism, only do your absolute best when it matters. Every e-mail you send needn't be exquisitely composed; a book proposal, however, should be.

Please yourself first: The more you cultivate a sense of self-worth in areas outside the procrastination-prone domain (usually work or school), the less likely you will be to postpone tasks. Remember, no judgment of your work is ever the final verdict on you.

Seek professional help: If procrastination is putting your study habits on hold, cognitive-behavioral therapy can be effective.

