

The Art of Procrastination

By Judi Jerome, LICSW, LADC



For many years, now, I have witnessed so many people with and without ADHD struggling with procrastination. Most people procrastinate on a task or job when they:

1. **They just don't want to do it;**
2. Are **disorganized** in both the preparation, and the actual items needed to put the job together;
3. Develop **paralysis**: can't start, even when the necessary 'ingredients' for the project are available;
4. Have **time management** difficulties;
5. **Sabotage** their own success; And last but not least,
6. Seek **perfectionism**.

Recently, I have come to realize just how delicately all six of these reasons, or as I like to call them, "sub-levels", of procrastination are tied together. When we **don't want to do something**^{#1}, such as a household chore or a business project that we have committed to, the reason is often because we are overwhelmed by the idea of the **preparation and organization**^{#2} that is needed in order to complete the task. In order to do the organizing and prep work we have to have sufficient **time management**^{#4} skills. I'll lump numbers **5** and **6** together because you just can't have one without the other. **Sabotaging success**^{#5} and **perfectionism**^{#6} are partners in the procrastination process. Actually, the sum total of the two sub-levels **#5+#6=#3, paralysis!** Ah, the intricacy of it all!

Let's take a deeper look at these sub-levels.

#1. There are times when we just do not want to do the "have to" or "should" that is hanging over our heads. We breathe a sigh of frustration and our inner child starts pouting. When you don't want to do something, no matter how critical, it often tends to be put on the back burner. Definition of "the back burner": a pile of papers, a sink full of dishes, or an unfinished project. That is usually when I pretend that I want to do it, lie to myself, put an often "fake" smile on my face, and start my "I really want to do this and get it over with because..." mantra. Sometimes, I explore the reason I have committed myself to do it and look for other solutions, or in the case of the dishes, just say yuck and dive in. I never want to do the dishes. I want elves to come in the middle of the night and do them for me. As the rolling stones once sagely sang, "you can't always get what you want..." Speaking of music, if I put on some lively tunes and sing out loud when I do the dishes or cleaning, that fake smile usually becomes real.

#2. When we have a project due, whether it is housecleaning, a written report, homework, a presentation, or something fun, if we don't immediately break it down into sections, each with its own reasonable tasks, timetable and when necessary, carefully labeled file folders, that deadline wall looms large and fast. Why does time go by so fast when you need it the most? Gathering materials for a project, work or play, and piling them up helter skelter, creates this illusion that we have not done any work towards our goal. "Oh wow, that web site is just what I need for my resource list." Do you just click "save" in the Favorites Folder and never find or use it again, or do you first add a new subfolder with the name of the project on it and save it in there, OR copy and paste it into the ongoing list you are keeping in the

project folder on your computer desktop? I am a list freak. I make lists down to the smallest detail and then plug the to-do's into my schedule. When I don't, oh geez, it's too painful to think about it. Of course, when it comes time to shop, it is helpful to *remember* to bring the list with you!

#3. You sit and stare at the neatly organized pile of research, pictures, garden tools, or whatever today's "gonna do this or bust" project happens to be and just keep staring. Sometimes you even walk away and play solitaire on the computer, take a healthy walk around the block, or find something very important to do, hence you aren't *really* procrastinating. There are so many things going through your mind, but the problem is you aren't really paying attention to those messages that are causing the paralysis, yup, the messages. That little voice inside that gives you all the reasons why you just can't get started. It's time to change the tape and rewrite the script! When we practice mindfulness and stay present, we can increase our awareness of what we are saying to ourselves, change the negatives to positives, and then our emotions lighten up and we are able to change the behavior attached to the "self-message". This takes a lot of time and patience so please allow yourself to experience and even enjoy the process.

#4. Lets face it, time management is a whole article (or entire shelf of books) all by itself. How does the whole weekend get by you without having done the laundry? I'm having *déjà vu*, seems like I've written about that before.

#5. and #6. Handing in an assignment past deadline, that has really been completed on time, and being late with paying bills, even though you have the money in the bank, are common sabotages of success. And, I am here to tell you that perfectionism is a big barrier and impossible to achieve. People that give their serenity and personal empowerment away to perfectionism have ironically achieved it, they are ***perfect at procrastinating***. *A tiny confession...* When I was in graduate school and had to write a very difficult 25 page paper, I froze. A wise woman, who I am eternally grateful to "gave me permission to get a C on this paper, as you are allowed to get just one in grad school and this is it". With the pressure (and burden) of perfection lifted, I was able to create a terrific paper that received a B+. (It really *did* deserve an A+)

Procrastination has many sub levels and painful side effects. You saddle yourself with these symptoms every time it rears its ugly head, hill, mountain of morose interference in your path of success and serenity. "JJ's" thesaurus states that another term for procrastination is "self-torture".

Some people with AD/HD have formed patterns, habits that have ingrained their procrastination to such a state that they would benefit from working on this issue with a therapist. Others will succeed by taking action with their coach. Many will benefit by taking advantage of both of these growth opportunities, therapy and coaching.

And finally, as always, remember that mindfulness matters. Being mindful means keeping the project up front in your thoughts to turn it into action instead of filing it away in the deep recesses of your "I'll do it later brain". Practicing mindfulness will keep you living and working in the moment on what you need to do to take care of yourself and continue to take action instead of procrastinating. Please try the following exercise and sample a taste of how mindfulness can help to create action.

TIP #1

As soon as you schedule a project due date on your planner, try the following technique. Sit, close your eyes, and breathe deeply to relax your mind and your muscles. Remember to slowly breathe in and out throughout this visualization. Create a vision of what the project will look like when it is complete. See it; what, if any, colors do you see? Breathe. What is the size, weight, shape? Breathe. What

does it physically feel like to hold it in your hands? Breathe. What sounds accompany this picture? Breathe. What taste is on your tongue? Breathe. What is the scent that accompanies this success? Breathe. Feel the positive emotions that come with this completed project. Is there a smile of satisfaction on your face? Breathe in that smile. When you are finished, open your eyes and remember those emotions that you felt in that moment when you realized that the project was complete; whether it was pleasure, excitement, joy, pride, or sheer relief. Feel it, hug it, enjoy it.

Each time a new project comes up that is a "have to", remember the pleasant emotions from this completed project, and if need be, repeat the visualization exercise.

And a original confession... or two...

July 29th: I originally wrote this article back in April, 2006. Making changes from both mine and my editor's red pens became too overwhelming, so I procrastinated and just kept staring at the folder on my desktop with all of the many drafts. I certainly hope that you have enjoyed the articles that I wrote in the interim, rather than tackle this one. Yesterday, I got a reminder from Emily Quinn, the amazing woman who puts this newsletter together, reminding me that they needed an article for the August edition (as if I could stop forgetting about it even if I wanted to!). Thank goodness for those "up against it" walls.

April 23rd: I am presenting a professional training on Coaching the first week in May that I have known about for 6 months. Although I have gathered many of the materials and made notes (and done some organizing using the MS ONE NOTE Program), I did not sit down to do the bulk of the writing and put it all together until two weeks before the event. I held the proverbial gun to my head in order to hit my "up against it" wall that got my motivation juices flowing. I have accepted this and am being kind to myself about it. But today is Sunday, and I would rather be having fun than working. Procrastination always has a price.



Judi has been in private practice since 1990 working with a variety of issues, and specializing in teens and adults with AD/HD and co-morbid disorders, life cycle transitions, and substance abuse. Judi enjoys coaching teens and adults with AD/HD in all genres of life. She believes that each individual has potential within to achieve success beyond the current limits that problems such as time management, disorganization, morning madness and late night hyper-focusing may be imposing on their lives. Judi coaches people toward accomplishing their dreams as well as their goals. Her motto - Empowerment, growth and maintenance for positive life changes.

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