

HEALTH

Putting off procrastination

Vacuuming the house. Filing taxes. Mowing the lawn. Returning phone calls. Starting a project at work. Writing your column for

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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the Kauai Business Report. You know it needs to be done. You know you have to do it. The fact that it has not been completed nags at you. Sometimes it's hard to enjoy the moment because

you feel guilty that you have not finished the task. A sense of incompleteness is always in the back of your mind. You may spend more energy complaining about, feeling bad about, or avoiding the task than it would take to complete it, but you still put it off. Often you wait until the last possible moment to get it done, where you either come through with a nail-biting, flurried, and dramatic finish, or you end up falling flat on your face, promising yourself you won't wait until the last moment next time.

Research shows that 20 percent of adults admit to being chronic procrastinators, most of who believe procrastination is harmful and something they want to curtail.

The word procrastination has its roots in Latin and means to put forth "in favor of tomorrow." One of the first mentions of the problem of procrastination was in a speech by Cicero, a Roman Consul, in 44 B.C. He said, "In the conduct of almost every affair slowness and procrastination are hateful." Procrastination was a human trait that Cicero found loathsome.

Today's social scientists are a bit nicer, but little more complimentary. They call procrastination a "failure of self-regulation," or an "irrational delay of behavior." Sounds pretty bad, eh? Well, it turns out it can be. Procrastination

has been linked to poorer performance, lower ratings of personal well-being, and worsening medical conditions, as patients put off seeking medical attention or putting healthy behaviors in place. Procrastination can also cost you money, both now and in the future. A recent survey by a major tax preparer estimated that the average American overpays \$400 per year to the IRS due to procrastination, through errors made by a last minute rush to complete tax forms. Many people delay saving for their retirement, significantly limiting their resources, options, and freedom later in life.

If procrastination is so bad for us, then why do we do it? One reason is that we try to avoid tasks that we find unpleasant, or at least less pleasant than other options before us: "Watch a movie or scrub the toilet? Hmm, that's a hard one." We also tend to procrastinate when we think a task is going to be too difficult for us to accomplish: "Why start feeling overwhelmed and inept today if I can put it off until tomorrow." Or maybe, "This task is too hard right now, maybe by some miracle it will get easier tomorrow." A more subtle and often less conscious reason involves the idea of "self-handicapping," or procrastinating to provide yourself with an ego-saving reason for possible failure: "I know I did not do so well, but after all, I only worked on it for a few hours."

Regardless of our reason for procrastinating, we usually end up regretting it. Here are some tips to help you put off procrastination:

- Make a "to-do" list. Lists help you organize your thoughts. They help make them concrete. They can keep things from falling between the cracks. They help you prioritize. If you don't want to make a "to-do" list, ask your spouse, partner, and/or parent to assist you with the task. I am sure they would be more than happy to write one for you.

- Break larger tasks into smaller parts. If a task feels too big it can feel overwhelming and you may be tempted to avoid starting it. Breaking larger tasks into smaller parts can make the task feel much more manageable. Successes on smaller tasks can bring you closer to your goal and inspire you to continue moving forward.

- Set deadlines for each step. The further away a deadline, the less motivated you will be to complete the task. Building in a series of deadlines for the smaller parts of the task can help keep you on track and help you avoid a last minute rush.

- Build in a reward system. All work and no play is no way to spend a day. Brainstorm a list of things you like to do that you can use to reward yourself for meeting your daily objectives.

- Use the "Premack Principle," otherwise know as grandma's rule:

"No dessert until you eat your vegetables." The Premack Principle is a psychological tenet that states that a person is more likely to complete a less desirable behavior if, as a result of doing so, he or she can then engage in a more desirable behavior. We have rewarding activities built into our daily lives such as drinking a cup of tea or coffee, watching a favorite television show, reading a good book, or eating dessert. One way to put off procrastination is to delay doing something you enjoy until you have completed a task that you have been avoiding. Grandma knew that if you fill up on cake, you will have no stomach for dinner. The same is true for your reward system. Do the less pleasant task first, and then you are free to indulge in your daily pleasures.

Take these steps today to put off your procrastination. You may find that getting things done without the last minute rush can improve your performance, reduce your stress and enhance your emotional well-being.

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Cruise ship

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operations" — losses that prompted the company's decision to withdraw its Pride of Hawai'i vessel from the islands and deploy it to foreign service.

Currently, NCL America is the only U.S. cruise operation offering trips within Hawai'i.

U.S. Sens. Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye as well as U.S. Reps. Mazie Hirono and Neil Abercrombie have sided with the rule. In their letter to Customs, the Hawai'i Democrats said the act and proposed change are vital to keeping the domestic cruise industry buoyant.

"We cannot allow foreign cruise lines ... to circumvent one of the cornerstones of the U.S. cabotage laws by offering a brief stop in Ensenada, Mexico," states the letter.

But some opponents say that protecting U.S. companies will create a monopoly in Hawai'i. And no competition for NCL America means there's "little incentive for NCL to provide increasingly improved service," Tokioka said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection accepted comments on the proposal in November and December. However, the leaders of the state Senate and House as well as the chairs of the House and Senate tourism committees voiced concern about a lack of information on the possible outcomes.

"We request our objection be recorded ... based simply on not having the necessary information to understand the effect on industry the rule change will have," states their joint letter.

A decision is expected in less than a year, according to Associated Press reports.



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