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3-1-2007

Procrastination: The death of opportunity

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Kimbrough, Carla, "Procrastination: The death of opportunity" (2007). *Faculty Publications, College of Journalism & Mass Communications.* Paper 37.
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Procrastination: The death of opportunity

QUILL TOOLBOX

Career

Note to self:
Find others like me and learn from their mistakes!

www.procrastinus.com

www.procrastinators-anonymous.org

OK, I'll admit it: I procrastinate sometimes. My column is late.

Part of it I blame on the fact that my DSL in my home office was down for two days. But in truth I could have started on writing it a few days earlier, instead of the day before it was due and the day I discovered my DSL decided to go on vacation.

Maybe I suffered from writer's block, even though I had the perfect topic for a life coach to tackle. I knew exactly what it was when I read The Denver Post's layered headlines: Late study is in: Experts in putting it off agree chronic slacking is catching on. Research says it saps health and wealth.

Piers Steel, a University of Calgary business professor, recently released a study that took him 10 years — more time than he expected. His paper, "The Nature of Procrastination: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review of Quintessential Self-Regulatory Failure," was published in the American Psychological Association's Psychological Bulletin.

Steel, a professor of human resources and organizational dynamics, devoured previous studies, reports and 691 correlations to figure out why we procrastinate. Fifteen to 20 percent of the general population are procrastinators, and the prevalence is growing, Steel concluded.

Steel created a mathematical equation, which he calls Temporal Motivational Theory, to shed light on this growing societal problem. The elements of the equation: expectancy a person has of succeeding with a given task; the value of completing the task; the desirability of the task; its immediacy or availability; and the person's sensitivity to delay.

Procrastinators lack the self-confidence to get the job done, Steel said in the U of C media release about the study. He also cited as predictors of procrastination task aversion, impulsiveness, distractibility and achievement motivation.

I'm glad Steel admitted that he suffered from a dose of procrastination himself. He told the Globe and Mail newspaper that television, video games and even sleep stole some of his time. Steel also said productivity would increase dramatically if workers stopped checking e-mail so often.

So, what's a procrastinator to do to shake the bad habits? Gain some confidence and self-control for starters.

"The old saying is true: 'Whether you believe you can or believe you can't, you're probably right'" said Steel, whose Web site (www.procrastinus.com) offers assessments, quotes and more. "And as you get better at self-control, your expectancy about whether you can resist goes up and thus improves your ability to resist."

Here are a few other suggestions I've learned along the way:

- **Planning overcomes procrastination.** Plan to complete the task. Writing your plan on paper often helps. Determine what tools you need and gather them, decide how much time is required, schedule the time and then rid yourself of distractions so you can focus.
- **Break the big tasks into smaller tasks to make the job more manageable.** Smaller tasks seem easier to tackle because they may be less intimidating. Instead of promising yourself to complete the story or give a review of all your staff, write a few imperfect paragraphs or evaluate one staff member. The accomplishment gives you the confidence to move forward.
- **Get some accountability into your life.** If you want to jumpstart a project or a task, promise someone else that you'll get it done. There's something about facing that person and admitting that you didn't do what you said you would do.
- **Reward yourself for a job well done.** The trick is to make sure you can wait for the reward. Sometimes the reward is finishing the task; the emotional relief alone is as good for the soul as chicken soup. Your reward might be a cup of Starbucks, a movie or even a new piece of clothing.
- **Think about the penalties.** Procrastination costs you money and esteem. Financially, there are late fees or smaller retirement funds. And, sooner or later, you begin to feel bad about yourself and your inability to complete the task.

Ridding yourself of procrastination is something you might feel you can put off until tomorrow, but don't. Become vigilant about fighting against procrastination because it costs you in so many ways.

I found this quote on www.procrastinators-anonymous.org: Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried.

Remember that, and we all might be saved. ❖

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