

Think that you've heard it all when it comes to beating procrastination? Think again. Procrastination might be a major results killer, but it's also a common bad habit.

# The Results Eradicator

By Tony Jeary



There are lots of opinions floating around about the economy and what it will mean for us in the years ahead. We all want to know what to expect, but the only thing we can expect with confidence is the unexpected. So what are some fundamentals we can look at that will work for us in a positive way and help us succeed and grow, even in tough, rapidly changing times?

A basic attitude we all need to develop relates to how we think about results, because they are what really matter, particularly in a tough economy. Intentions are great, but results are

what count in the game of survival. I've said for years that leadership is a results contest, and the truth of that becomes even more powerful in challenging, difficult times. People who get superior results survive to face another day, and people who don't, fall by the wayside.

Superior results are created by being clear about what you want, focusing on doing what matters, and executing. Here I will discuss one of the issues that directly influences execution—procrastination.

Obviously, if you can get more work done in less time, you will see results much faster. We all are guilty of procrastination to some extent. There are two kinds of procrastination:

**Positive procrastination.** This happens when you legitimately require some “mental percolation” time to gather your thoughts and get clear on what you need to do.

**Negative procrastination.** This sort of procrastination is based on flimsy ex-

cuses to avoid doing something, which will ultimately affect your results in negative ways.

Whereas positive procrastination can be beneficial, negative procrastination is something you need to overcome so that you can be more effective and finish projects faster.

## Procrastination is just a bad habit

Procrastination may be many things, but mostly it's a bad habit. Someone once said that “repetition strengthens and confirms.” Simply put, the more you do something, the easier it gets. By practicing the habit of procrastination for many years, it becomes second nature to you. You practice the habit on a subconscious level, and it is not the result of a conscious, positive decision; it's just a knee-jerk reaction that seems to have a life of its own.

I'm not an advocate of complicating things. I believe that the best solutions

are usually simple, and by overthinking problems, we make them more complicated than they should be. Many people wallow around in their problems for long periods of time. It is almost as though they are procrastinating on improving their own well-being by overcomplicating what they need to do.

I believe that habitual problems are easy to identify and that solutions to those problems are usually fairly simple. If you are in the habit of doing something that is destructive, you have learned that behavior by repetition. If you want to break a destructive habit, you have to practice opposite behaviors long enough to allow them to replace the destructive habits.

### Production before perfection

You can't produce results until you start doing something. If you do nothing, that is exactly what you will get. My approach to managing tasks and projects is centered on the concept of "production before perfection" (PBP), which is a powerful antidote for negative procrastination, and perhaps the most significant strategy I use on a daily basis. PBP is based on a simple premise: You don't have to have all the facts and details about something before you can start working on it.

PBP is not a natural thing for people to do, and you will hear many objections about why you should "wait" to do something. Waiting and creating superior results are not compatible. When you wait, you are burning time that you will never recover. If you practice PBP, you will begin to develop habits that will choke out procrastination.

PBP means that you start doing things immediately, regardless of what you think you need to do to make the outcome perfect. It may mean that you will have to rework some details, but you will still get things done faster. If you don't think you have all the information you need, start anyway! If you don't have all the tools you need, start anyway! If you do something that turns out to be wrong, use the mistake to make your next effort better!

The idea that everything has to be perfect before you can move forward is an idea that can be used to support and justify procrastination. The main idea of PBP is this—act first, and get it perfect later! The basic justification for practicing PBP is the principle of going as far as you can, and then being able to see even farther. It is also a concept that has the power to nip procrastination in the bud before it has a chance to flower.

The basic justification for procrastination is the alleged need to wait until you can see more. If you begin to take action based on going as far as you can see, you will begin to choke procrastination because you can always see something. You don't have to understand all the details between where you are and where you want to be.

### The foundations of procrastination

**1| "I can do it tomorrow."** This may be the most popular and frequently used justification for procrastination because "tomorrow" sounds so close to today. It doesn't seem like that big of a deal. Just waiting one more day won't upset too many people, and there are surely many good reasons that can be created to justify the delay.

**2| "I don't have everything I need, so I'll wait."** This is a very popular statement used to justify inaction and waiting. It is most often an excuse that salespeople use to avoid making telephone calls to prospects. Have you ever heard any of the following statements?

- "I can't call Frank until I have our new marketing brochure."
- "I can't write the press release until the new product line is announced."
- "I can't think through the next quarter's inventory requirements until I find out about the new pricing policy."
- "I can't respond to Sam's email until I have all of the answers to his questions."

**3| "I can't do it perfectly, so I'll wait."** This excuse falls apart once you ask yourself one question: "Can we ever do anything perfectly?" I think not. If you do have this attitude, you are in serious trouble because you will NEVER be able to do anything perfectly.

**4| "I don't have time right now."** Some things require more time to complete than you think you have available—a reality that makes this excuse so popular. Why and how do we get the idea that we have to be able to finish something before we can work on it?

### 5| "Someone else can do it better."

I believe this final excuse represents a lack of confidence. This excuse is a silent one that people make to themselves privately. If you see something that needs to be done and you have the opportunity to do it, don't let someone else seize the opportunity. Be bold and step up to the task. If you are the first person to see that something needs to be done, you are probably the best person to do it.

Remember, the first Apollo moon mission was off course 90 percent of the time, but NASA was able to make continual course corrections and land at the correct spot. If NASA engineers had waited to launch the mission until they possessed the technology to keep the craft on course 100 percent of the time, they may have never achieved a successful moon landing. The same approach will help you achieve superior results. Go as far as you can see; then, you will see farther.

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*Tony Jeary is coach to CEOs worldwide. This article is based on concepts from his latest book, Strategic Acceleration: Succeed at the Speed of Life (Vanguard Press, 2009); [www.strategicacceleration.com](http://www.strategicacceleration.com).*

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