



Procrastination in the Workplace

“Lack of planning on your part doesn’t constitute an emergency on mine!” This phrase has been the professional mantra for the type A’s and the highly organized in the workplace for years. And, although very true, there is another side to procrastination that I want you to analyze with me. I want us to consider a few reasons why putting off starting and even waiting until the last minute can create a better outcome!

Really, research now states that avoiding certain tasks can allow us to process the final task with more creativity and clarity.

Professor Adam Grant, author of the “Originals,” told BBC Radio 4 that delaying finishing a task allows the mind to wander and helps us come up with more creative ideas than our first more conventional ones.

Grant cited Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech and Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address as some famous examples of his theory in action.

“The greatest speeches in world history were rewritten at the last minute so that you had a lot of flexibility to

improvise when you were still on stage, as opposed to getting the script set in stone months in advance,” he told BBC Radio 4.

“And Da Vinci spent 16 years working on and off on the Mona Lisa and he felt like a failure because he was constantly getting diverted, he wrote in his journal: ‘Tell me if anything ever was done.’”

Yet as time passed, there were different lighting and optic changes that helped him create a better end product.



Procrastination in the Workplace

Planned Procrastination

Professor Grant revealed that a student researched the theory after telling him she had most of her best ideas after procrastinating.

Jihae Shin, now a professor at the University of Wisconsin, found in her study that staff members who liked to procrastinate were usually “the most creative.”

As a matter of fact, I was just talking with a neighbor friend whose planter box is between our homes. I asked him what he was planting and he said, “I’m just pulling weeds and thinking about when and what I will plant.”



You see, he wanted to get it right, so he wasn’t rushing into a decision. Thus his procrastination was with a purpose!

I know for myself and other distracted workers that we do our finest work at the last minute. To which I explain to the ones waiting on our project (and pacing the floor), “As long as we meet our deadlines with a finely tuned and creative outcome, what’s the problem?”

For some of those that procrastinate, I also find that if we plan too far in advance, we actually forget the details of what we planned and the final product is not as crisp as it could have been if we gave it more thought.

Of course, I also warn the procrastinators that if you are frustrated that other peers and supervisors look over your shoulder or send you endless reminders, just make sure you haven’t earned their skepticism by failing to meet your deadlines in the past. If that is the case, you have fallen on your own sword.

Four Types of Procrastinators

There seem to be four types of procrastinators.

1. The first type is the more obvious. Waiting until the last minute to finish a project. When asked why that is, many say they are either addicted to adrenaline or they are more creative when under pressure.
2. The second are actually the highly organized perfectionists. Their procrastination is motivated by not wanting to begin a project until they feel it can be done to perfection, which entails gathering all the necessary data to proceed as well as never wanting to complete a project that doesn’t hit their personal bar!
3. Thirdly, there are those who are so easily distracted that is difficult to stay on task because they are so easily pulled away with the bling of another project or task.
4. Lastly, there are those who struggle with using the word “no.” These are the people-pleasers of life who are pulled in several directions at the same time, which take them away from their own priorities and projects.

A Caution for the Procrastinator

Whether you procrastinate because you have a high personal standard, are most creative at the last minute, are easily distracted, or struggle to say no, it is essential that you communicate with your supervisor or co-workers about the reasons that the deadline might not be met. Even the most demanding supervisors extend more patience if they are simply informed about a delayed project.

And if you work with or supervise a procrastinator, please give them a deadline at all cost or proceed at your own risk!

Procrastination in the Workplace

Takeaways for the Procrastinator

1. We do our finest work at the last minute with greater creativity.
2. Moving too quickly can produce sub-standard work.
3. Sometimes ideas flow best the more time we have to process.

Conclusion

As Professor Grant wrote in the New York Times, “If you’re a procrastinator, next time you’re wallowing in the dark playground of guilt and self-hatred over your failure to start a task, remember that the right kind of procrastination might make you more creative!”

Recommended Reading

“Procrastinating at work makes you more creative, research suggests”



Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.