

## No it Can't Wait!

Superman grappled with Lex Luther, Batman with the Joker, and Sherlock Holmes constantly had to contend with the relentless Moriarty. If we consider effective time management a goal of heroic proportions, then procrastination is our hero's arch nemesis. Much like these fictional opponents, time management and procrastination are engaged in an epic struggle. The good news is that like any good imaginary hero, with perseverance, practice, honesty and integrity, we can and will prevail.

Procrastination is a common problem, probably engaged in by everyone to some degree. Who hasn't put off an unpleasant meeting, tedious task or cumbersome personal responsibility at one time or another? If only practiced infrequently and in relation to matters of small significance, its harm will probably be minimal. However, any form of procrastination should be guarded against. Like most bad habits, it can grow over time and spiral out of control if not kept in check, even to the point where it threatens our livelihood as well as our mental and physical health.

Suppose that as Sales Administrator, you are burdened with the task of informing all current clients of an increase in cost to existing services, to take effect the following week. You anticipate that this news will be met with some annoyance, so you decide to put it off until the last minute on the Friday in order to avoid dealing with the likely onslaught of email and phone complaints. That Friday, an emergency comes up that requires your attention and you forget to notify the clients. It hits you with a pang of guilt over the weekend and you resolve to do it first thing on the Monday. Now that you are late in informing your clients, you dread delivering this news even more and once again put it off. This process continues until your clients start receiving their increased bills without any prior notice. At this point, not only are your clients annoyed, they are angry that they received no notice and are demanding refunds and threatening to take their business elsewhere. Here we see how by procrastinating, an unpleasant though manageable task has become a serious problem for you and your employer.

For companies seeking to maximize time management of employees at all levels, procrastination is also a common foil. At the management level this is often particularly true when it comes to establishing and enforcing rules and making changes to or developing new company policies.

Suppose your company has decided to implement a new policy regarding employee internet use wherein only certain positions that require it will be allowed to surf the internet in future. The majority of positions will only be permitted to use the company's intranet. While the company is aware that the majority of employees do not abuse their internet privileges, a certain percentage consistently do. Because of the size of the company and the amount of employee turnover, management has decided it is unfeasible to monitor and enforce internet use on a case-by-case basis and determined the most cost-effective solution is to simply remove access unless the position requires

it. As manager of one of the larger departments, it is your task to inform the employees. The prospect is not one that you relish since you know it will not go over smoothly – many employees will be disappointed, some will be downright offended. Not wishing to face the situation you continually put it off until one day, presto, no more internet! One by one, your staff comes to see you, incensed. Turns out they had heard rumors of the new policy but since you had not bothered to inform them they presumed it was just that...a rumor. Your staff tells you that while they would not have been pleased with the policy regardless, they are doubly insulted that they were not extended the courtesy of being informed prior to its being implemented. Once again, procrastinating has exacerbated an otherwise amendable, albeit unpleasant situation.

In both of the above scenarios we see how avoidance is a key component of the problem. Often, we foolishly try to avoid the unavoidable much like we postpone a trip to the dentist, so that in the short-term we'll be happier (or at least less miserable). Such is our nature. For some of us, the causes are deep-rooted in feelings of inadequacy or fear of failure or perhaps even the result of childhood trauma. Regardless of the cause, it's important not to confuse a tendency to procrastinate with laziness or an irresponsible attitude. Procrastination is, in many ways, simply a bad habit we've learned that, with a little effort and guidance, we can unlearn. Like most bad habits, the key to correcting it lies in acknowledging it exists. Here is an area where online assessments (such as Psychtest's Procrastination Test) can prove valuable, by identifying the degree to which the problem may exist, offering insight into the potential causes and suggesting strategies to help counter the problem.

Procrastination is only one of many mortal enemies to effective time management. Poor planning, lack of communication, and weak organization skills are just a few of its frequent co-conspirators robbing you of valuable time and threatening your company's bottom line. Yet even combined, these formidable opponents can be defeated. Organizational techniques, effective communication, and strategic planning with foresight are not mythic powers accessible only to superheroes. They are simply learned skills and behaviors, accessible to everyone. Once we endeavor to work smart as opposed to merely working hard, the battle is half over. Remember that above all else, the key to time management is self-management. With proper planning, setting of realistic time frames, resolving to increase our organizational skills, and of course, by slaying the procrastination dragon, we can come to regard time management as friend rather than foe.

Below are a just a few tips on how to avoid procrastination and effectively manage one's time ... they work wonders for both for employees and employers.

**Establish Priorities.** Prioritize tasks according to importance and deadlines, not degree of difficulty or desire/lack of desire to work on. When given the choice, try doing those

jobs you enjoy least first. You'll be amazed at the weight that is lifted from your shoulders.

**Break it Down.** Divide larger tasks into manageable parts, and schedule time to work on these parts into your day. Set target dates to complete various elements of the project ... even 15 minutes uninterrupted a day on a task can add up over time. Whenever possible, arrange for periods when you can work uninterrupted so you can fully focus on a specific task.

**Be Prepared.** Remember the maxim that whatever can go wrong probably will. While this may appear pessimistic to some, how many times can you realistically say a project or task went exactly according to plan without any stumbling blocks along the way? This is particularly true of any new task or project, or even a slight variation of an old one. Even with the best planning, unforeseen problems commonly occur. Not incorporating a realistic appraisal of time allowed for troubleshooting can have negative consequences for time management, particularly where clients are involved and the schedule is tight. Adequately accounting for troubleshooting will, in most cases, prevent you from scrambling at the last minute to meet deadlines, avoid potential embarrassment with clients, and lessen stress on those involved.

**Communicate clearly.** Poor communication is one of the biggest time-eaters (and profit-eaters). Left unaddressed, it can be the cause of countless false starts and unnecessary mistakes. It can also result in needless disputes and friction and even impact your company's turnover rates. Remember that communication is an ongoing process, more like a revolving door than one that opens and shuts (and locks from the inside). When doubts arise, it is the responsibility of all parties involved to offer and request clarification.

**Get organized.** Some estimates state that the average office worker spends up to half an hour each day looking for missing information ... papers, files, emails, electronic documents, passwords. Having your resources such as customer data, company procedure notes, common task instructions, repeatedly accessed files, etc. at your fingertips can save countless hours. Day calendars and electronic reminders can also prove invaluable in this area.

**Nobody's Perfect (Not Even You!).** Perfection may be a noble goal but it is not a very realistic one. Even the world's great artists will likely tell you that they often fall short of their goals and aspirations. No one is suggesting that you adopt sub-par or shoddy standards of work or that you aim no higher than adequate. Simply make sure that your goals and standards are realistic, especially when time constraints apply. Beware of your desire for perfection, as it may be a procrastinating tactic in disguise.