



Solutions for Life

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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Never Put Off Until Tomorrow ... (Part I)

Are you a procrastinator? I think everyone is to some degree. I'm sure you've heard of the quote referenced in the title of this article. It's changed a little from its original form when Benjamin Franklin said it: "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." Of course, Mark Twain came behind him with, "Never put off till tomorrow what may be done day after tomorrow just as well." I love Mark Twain!

While we all procrastinate sometimes, chronic procrastination is an issue that needs to be addressed. If you are constantly late, missing deadlines, or pulling all-nighters, I'm talking about you. If you feel like you are always disappointing others or apologizing for not taking care of things, I'm talking about you.

Something called Delay Discounting is really to blame here. Delay discounting is our tendency to view something as less important when the deadline is further away. We begin to attach importance to it only when the deadline gets to a certain point of closeness to us. Chronic procrastinators tend to wait until the deadline is looming and breathing down their necks before they begin to take action. This leads to what I call "putting out fires." The problem is, if you take action only when something is an emergency (a fire), not only are you teaching everyone around you they have to be in a state of emergency to get your attention, but also you keep yourself in a constant state of panic.

People procrastinate for a variety of reasons:

- **Fear of Failure.** If you fear you will not do something well, procrastinating is your insurance. "Of course I didn't do well on that test – I didn't even study for it."
- **Fear of Success.** "I don't want to be too successful; I don't want that kind of stress."
- **Fear of Losing Control.** Turning things

in late can often be a statement of "I'm not on your schedule." I've worked with many kids who actually did the assignment, but just didn't turn it in on time for this very reason.

- **Fear of Separation.** I have also seen children who didn't want to do too well or appear too smart because they feared they would not fit in with their friend group and would be ostracized.
- **Fear of Attachment.** "I don't want to be too successful because I don't want to become the 'go to' person and have to interact with others that much." People with social anxiety often procrastinate for this reason.

So, what's the big deal here anyway? How much does being known as a procrastinator really affect your life? Actually, a lot. I promise it is standing in your way. Consider these consequences:

- **Loss of time.** Putting off doing things wastes a lot of time. And, what most people don't realize is the anticipation of (the thinking about, the feelings connected to) the project is so much worse than just doing it and getting it over with.
- **Loss of opportunities.** I wonder how many things you have had to pass on over the years because you were not ready for them. You weren't in a financial situation or a stable position to take on that new opportunity – because you had been procrastinating and not taking care of business.
- **Being developmentally stuck.** Procrastinators generally don't develop and become healthy nearly as much as they could. How can they – you can't develop goals and think about the future when all you are ever doing is putting out fires!

- **Damage to your reputation.** Both at work and in your personal life, if you are known as a person who can't be counted on to get things taken care of in a timely fashion, people will stop depending on you. At work, this means you become dispensable. At home, it basically means the same thing – "why would I stay in a relationship with you when I can't count on you?"
- **Poor decisions.** When you wait until everything is an emergency, you are always having to make decisions under pressure. Because you didn't take care of the washing machine when it first started making that odd sound, now it must be replaced and there are no sales going on right now. You possibly could have repaired it if you had addressed it earlier. Or maybe you would have realized it was going to need to be replaced soon and started looking for good deals. If only you hadn't procrastinated.
- **Lower self-esteem.** This procrastination thing probably started because of low self-esteem. You lacked confidence in yourself, so you put off taking care of things. But now it's become a vicious cycle. Now, you're always needing to apologize for being late or missing deadlines. And other people in your life are always angry and frustrated with you. Plus, you're looking around at all the things you need to do. So, the very action you took to protect yourself (procrastinating) is actually causing you to feel worse about yourself.

If you've made it all the way to the end of this article, congratulate yourself. For some people, this was too much to take in, and it was too close to home. For others, they saw the title, groaned, and turned the page, refusing to deal with it at all. For you, there is hope. Next month, we will discuss moving from being a procrastinator to a champion of time management!