Solutions for Life!

from **Solutions Counseling & EAP**
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On The Eating Of Elephants

Q: How do you eat an elephant?

A: One bite at a time.

Lately I've been working with a lot of people who have elephants to eat. They're overwhelmed with big projects or busy schedules. They have so many irons in the fire that they feel like they are unraveling. Often, things are chaotic in more than one area of their life. We can usually manage if work or home is crazy. We don't do so well if work AND home have too much going on.

Many times when we feel overwhelmed, we resort to our old friends: avoidance and procrastination. If only those methods truly worked. Sadly, putting off dealing with issues or projects only means they hang over our heads. We never completely put the elephant out of our minds; it's just hanging out in the corner, slowly rotting and waiting to be eaten.

The best thing to do when you're feeling overwhelmed is to consider doing one or more of the following.

Schedule it. If you have a project that you've been avoiding, it's time to put it on your calendar. I am a big believer in putting things in writing, even little things. Once it is on my schedule, I don't have to keep worrying about it because I know I have dedicated time to deal with it. And, when I see it on my schedule every time I look at that particular day, I'm reminded of the commitment I made. Writing this article every month is blocked out on my calendar. Cleaning out my closet gets put on the calendar as well. Those of you who don't maintain calendars are missing an opportunity to let your mind relax a little and not have to remember everything!

Time or Task. Everyone is either a "time" or a "task" person. You need to figure out which you are. Either you work better with an "I'll do this for 30 minutes, then take a break" mentality, or "I'll stop when I get this task done" philosophy. Both can be successful. And both can result in epic failures. If you're a "time" person, you have to truly work for those 30 minutes. No daydreaming or stopping to check emails/texts/social media. Often "time" people report back that at the end of the agreed upon time, they had some momentum going so they kept working.

"Task" people tend to have a more difficult time with project management because they consider the task to be the completion of the entire project. Just like eating the elephant, you need to take one bite at a time: figure out the first step and think only about that step. And don't plan out all the steps, just the next few steps. Then you won't be so overwhelmed with the knowledge that you still have 3,000 steps to go.

Reward. If you are dreading/avoiding/procrastinating about something, obviously it is not appealing to you. It is helpful if you reward yourself along the way. At the end of the 30 minutes or the step you are working on, get up and stretch or listen to your favorite song or play with your dog. When you reach the half-way mark, read another chapter of that book you are loving or go tinker in the garage for a bit. When you finish the last bite of that elephant, it's time to really celebrate!

These methods are tried and true. I use them with kids and their homework, couples and getting their financial life together, business people and their huge projects, etc. Trust me, they can work for you too! Elephants, beware!