

unknown and doubts about one's ability to successfully negotiate the change process don't have to be confronted.

In other words, procrastination is a failure-avoidant, self-protective strategy employed by people who are not essentially "lazy" or "stupid," but who are motivated to maintain their sense of worth and self-esteem.

What makes procrastinators especially sensitive to failure experiences is their belief in the notion that performance and self-worth are equated. Situations subjectively determined by the procrastinator to be important and evaluative tend to be particularly threatening because they represent opportunities for having their self-worth tested. The possibility of not performing well (which usually means perfectly), and having to live

with a negative self-image is a real unattractive option. Procrastination, on the other hand, is an effective face saving alternative. When there is a choice between failure and saving face, the latter is understandably preferred.

The process of changing one's procrastination behavior is complex and it takes time. Letting go of the performance equals self-worth notion, learning to value oneself unconditionally, and developing additional, more self-enhancing ways of self-protection are the kinds of challenges one must face if overcoming procrastination is truly a desired goal.

Despite these complexities, however, a person can arrive at a point where their procrastination behavior is less problematic. Some people can even stop procrastinating altogether. Reformed procrastinators do exist and many are leading happier and more productive lives.

We gratefully acknowledge the work and effort dedicated by the staff at UCLA's Student Psychological services in providing this information.

Procrastination

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Many of us decide frequently to put off until tomorrow that which we could do today. At times, postponing or deferring some action until a later time may be quite legitimate, especially if additional skills and/or knowledge are necessary for the completion of a given task. In most cases, however, putting off some action until some future time is a habit that many people find aggravating and quite difficult to break.

People, for whom procrastination is a problem usually, but not always, decide to take on a particular project with the honest intent of completing it as expeditiously as possible, but soon find themselves delaying needlessly that which they decided to do. They remind themselves of the rewards and advantages of completion (and of the disadvantages of continued delay); yet still find themselves not following through with their stated plans. They berate themselves for

their seemingly apparent inability to act and search for, and usually find reasons for why they can't seem to get moving. "I'm not in the right frame of mind," "I need to become more organized," "I need to get motivated," are examples of the more common excuses. Finally, in the face of an imminent deadline, some procrastinators completed their project by making a last minute rush. Others never do finish. In either case, procrastinators tend to berate themselves even more for having waited until the last minute. They become exceedingly upset with their task-management behavior, and they swear to themselves and to the whole world that they will never, ever put themselves through such pain and torture. Unfortunately, not long afterward, many procrastinators find themselves back in the situation they vowed to avoid forever.

The tension and anxiety that procrastinators experience can feel especially intense and pervasive, so understandably, getting rid of those "bad" feelings becomes a desired goal. Getting rid of the procrastination habit, however, is not easy. The complication stems

from the fact that procrastination serves several useful functions, and it is not always easy, nor wise, to disregard that which is useful.

Procrastination, for example, allows a person, particularly one who is uncomfortable in a competitive environment, to place the onus of responsibility for the outcome of a given project or task onto something other than oneself. As such, procrastination represents a way to protect oneself from a failure experience by providing a ready excuse. It is an easy way to justify not being at the head of the class. This strategy, which is useful 100% of the time, also has a secondary benefit: it prevents a person from ever finding out how good they really are.

For others, particularly those who find it difficult to change and to move on to new challenges and opportunities, procrastination represents a way of buying time. When used in this way, fears of the