

PROCRASTINATION & PERFECTIONISM

TWIN DISASTERS FOR YOUR PRODUCTIVITY

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Procrastination and Perfectionism: Twin Disasters for Your Productivity

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It's been about two whole days since I was assigned to write this blog, and just now, at noon on day three, I've forced myself to sit down and write.

My to-do list, which is sitting next to me, is seemingly long, but this task is highlighted because it takes priority. My list isn't just for work though. It outlines my whole day. It helps me see everything I (ideally) want to do before going to bed tonight. Some of the stuff is easy, like walk my dog or pick up my prescription, but other stuff, like this blog, is going to be more time-consuming.



I can't help but laugh at the irony in my procrastination for writing about procrastination. I'm feeling overwhelmed, stressed.. and honestly, leaving my office and sitting by the pool sounds like SUCH a better idea.

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So why am I procrastinating my procrastination piece? Well... because I want it to be really good, and every time I've tried to sit down and start, nothing I wrote made me feel confident or accomplished.

I guess you could say that as well as being a procrastinator, I'm also a bit of a perfectionist, and oddly enough, those two traits are commonly partnered. For me, the idea of completing a task on my list in any fashion less-than-perfect is grounds enough for me to scream "then why do it at all!" Whether it's writing a blog, completing a workout, or folding my laundry, it needs to be done right, and to the best to my abilities, or I am anxious and unhappy.

via GIPHY

There is no "quick fix" for me, or anyone, to stop procrastinating, but the correlation between procrastination and perfectionism is one that seriously affects productivity. We live in a society that celebrates a "work hard, play hard" mentality, but that standard might be having a more negative effect than we realize.

Instead of racking our brains and losing sleep over things we can control, why don't we uncover strategies that will help us overcome our procrastination and perfectionism.

Procrastination and Perfectionism: An Infinite Loop

Together, procrastination and perfectionism are like Dr. Jeckle and Mr. Hyde. The combination itself can cause feelings of stress, anxiety, and an overwhelming fear of failure.

[via GIPHY](#)

Perfectionism is a risk factor for performance anxiety and procrastination. You expect a great performance. You have doubts about whether you can achieve perfection. You have an urge to diverge and do something less threatening. You wait until you can be perfect. This is an example of perfectionism-driven procrastination. ([Psychology Today](#))

For a better understanding of just how these two trolls play together in a loop of doom and destruction, here's a story.

Lizzy is an artist. A painter specifically, and she's painted beautiful murals all around the world to support various movements. In the light of recent events going on in the world, Lizzy was commissioned by a civil rights activist group to paint a mural to remind people about the importance of kindness.

She was asked to have a mock-up drawn and was given three months to complete it. This gave her more than enough time to research, brainstorm, play with colors,

and test different designs. When she finally sat at her drawing board to start a sketch, there was only one week left until the deadline.

The excitement and pride she was feeling days earlier was starting to fade as her anxieties had her questioning her art. "Is it good enough?" "Does it tell the right story?" "Will people like it?" "Will they understand?" For the next few days, she lost sleep thinking of changes she could make, but with each new day, she said "I'll change it tomorrow". When the final date rolled around and it was time for Lizzy to present her art to the board of directors, she was panicked they wouldn't like it. She started beating herself up for not making changes and quickly took out her paints only hours before she was supposed to have a finalized product.

Despite the negative repercussions of falling into the cycle of procrastination and perfectionism, its a popular cycle to fall into because its what a lot of people are familiar with, myself included.

Why We Need to Break the Cycle of Procrastination and Perfectionism

It's so important to understand why this [loop is damaging](#). For starters, people who are vulnerable to falling into this cycle risk wasting valuable time. Not just procrastinating getting their work done, but

individuals waste time beating themselves up for allowing themselves to fall into this cycle *again*.

[via GIPHY](#)

Another reason, stated by Denise Jacobs of [Web Standards Sherpa](#) is one that resonates well with our team. Denise mentions that perfectionism stifles creativity, productivity, and sanity.

"Because perfectionists are so concerned with the outcome being just right, they are victims of risk-averse thinking, which inhibits innovation and creativity."

Denise goes on to explain how procrastination and perfectionism have long-term effects on both mental and physical health. The delusional thinking associated with perfectionism can be toxic and often times it leads to the individual feeling discouraged, anxious, and mentally drained. The stress and pressure one feels because of this dangerous cycle can lead to physical problems, like insomnia, compromised immunity, and digestive problems.

[via GIPHY](#)

Let that sink in. You could literally be doing physical damage to yourself by allowing yourself to fall into the cycle of procrastination and perfectionism. WHAT?!

Let's take what we know now about the effects of procrastination and perfectionism, and apply it to the artist, Lizzy.

When Lizzy was first contacted for the mural, the first thing she did was call you! Being her best friend for the last 6 years, she was most excited to tell you first because of how much you support her art and hard work.

You congratulated her and offered to take her to dinner to celebrate! Over dinner, you could visibly see the excitement in her smile as she started to throw ideas around for the mural.

A few weeks went by, and you checked in on Lizzy to see how she was coming along.

"Oh, I haven't started yet. Its all part of the process"

You didn't think anything of it. But when you reached out again later, now only a few days away from the deadline, you could hear the worry and anxiety in Lizzy's voice as she again told you she hasn't started yet, and she's worried the ideas she'd come up with aren't that good.

You go over to her studio to find paint everywhere, various canvases thrown about, and a trash can filled with crumpled up papers of sub-par ideas. Lizzy looks exhausted. You notice bags under her once vibrant eyes, and you ask if she's been sleeping at all.

"No, I don't have time to sleep! This is the biggest project of my career, it has to be perfect!" She starts to cry.

Anyone in your shoes at this point would want to intervene. You'd probably tell your friend they need to relax and focus and have more confidence in themselves. You might even offer to help, or ask if there is anything she can unload onto someone else. But if we're so quick to jump to the aid of a friend, why are we letting *ourselves* fall down that same rabbit hole! It's so easy to find the fault in others, but when we are the ones who are suffering from the same cycle of procrastination and perfectionism, we close our eyes.

No more. It's time to break the cycle.

4 Tips for Breaking the Cycle of Procrastination and Perfectionism

Lower the Bar

Ok, this first piece of advice might sound a little off-color, but just hear us out. Perfectionists tend to set their standards really high. For some, it's unrealistically high, and they're setting themselves up for failure. So right away, they are overwhelmed and discouraged. Individuals who set their bars above their realistic expectations are doomed to fall into the procrastination and perfectionism cycle.

Instead of saying "I'm going to complete XYZ by the end of the day!" Try giving yourself a more

comfortable goal, like completing X today, then working on Y and Z to be done by the end of the week.

[via GIPHY](#)

Keep Tasks Small

Building off our first tip, [keep your tasks manageable](#)! If you're trying to run a marathon, it's easier to think of it in 1-mile increments.

If you're like me, your task list can be a bit overwhelming if you look at it from a higher level. Instead, break each big task into smaller chunks. For example, Lizzy needed to paint that huge mural. But if she took the end goal and broke it down into smaller, bite-sized chunks, she would have been less overwhelmed.

[via GIPHY](#)

Instead of just looking at "design and paint a mural", she could have broken it down into smaller steps like:

- Research the project the mural is for
 - Who is the audience? What will it represent?
- Brainstorm 5-10 concepts
- Workshop ideas with friends/colleagues
- Choose an appropriate color pallet
- Gather supplies
- Mockup 3 different concepts for review

If she looked at it like this, she would have been able to move down the list in a timely manner without feeling overwhelmed.

Allocate Tasks

We can't expect ourselves to do everything alone. It's impossible. That's why it's important to surround ourselves with a team that we can rely on to lend a helping hand. Allocating the tasks that can be done by others is a great way to move things off our plate, making time for things that take priority.

[via GIPHY](#)

Instead of trying to tackle everything on her own, our friend Lizzy might have been able to allocate some of her tasks to a friend or co-worker. Maybe not the brainstorming or drawing, but if Lizzy made a thorough list, she might have been able to ask a friend to go out and get her new paints and brushes, saving her time.

Practice Saying 'No'

This one might be our favorite because of the reaction we get when we recommend it. Knowing [when to say 'no'](#) is so important. Whether you're saying no to a customer because they're requesting something that is simply out of your abilities, or you're saying no to a

co-worker who is asking you to do something that you really don't have the time or capacity to do.

[via GIPHY](#)

It's ok to say no, as long as you do it respectfully and have a good reason. Let's say that after she was asked to paint the mural, Lizzy's co-worker asked her to help design some cover art for a local band. While this project might also be exciting for Lizzy, in order to focus on the mural project and give it her best effort, she'd have to say 'no' to the cover art project.

"I'm really sorry, James. I would love to help you with the cover art, and I appreciate you valuing my talent, but I need to focus my energy on this project first."

You have every right to say 'no' if it means to avoid feeling overwhelmed or falling behind on other tasks.

The cycle of procrastination and perfectionism is a vicious cycle to fall into. Following these tips and being mindful of your abilities and mental stability will help you to navigate your task list without feeling overwhelmed or falling off the rails.



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