



PROCRASTINATION

I would be a procrastinator but I keep putting it off.

I just started my second personal project. It's an idea that I thought about doing years ago, of course, and I am just now getting around to it. While I've been working on it for the past 2 weeks and feel very passionate about it, I've also come across many mental roadblocks. I start it, I pause, then I pause some more until eventually I realized I am just now procrastinating. In my heady way, I've been trying to understand why I keep putting this project off. I started to read blogs about why other writers do this. In doing so I have finally come to a point in seeing how procrastination can hurt me, yet help me at the same time.

All procrastinators put off things they have to do. And it's not so much that procrastinators do nothing, in actuality,

procrastinators do a lot – a lot of things that may not be the intended target, but marginally useful things such as reorganizing file systems, doing laundry, reading the last chapter of *The War of Art*, watching a movie for research, even strolling around the neighborhood trying to gather inspiration. Why do we do these things? Because they are a way of not doing what's really important. If for me doing the laundry was the most important thing in my life, I'm sure I would find a reason not to do it.

Procrastination is a complex psychological behavior that affects everyone, some in a minor way, others with a high degree of stress and anxiety. Procrastination is only remotely related to time management, which is why having a very detailed schedule will be of no help. There are many other characteristics related to this topic – low self-confidence, stubbornness, lack of knowledge/skills, or just being the frustrated victim. Procrastination is reinforcing the negative attitude toward the task. If we continue to do this, we will strengthen the habit of not doing; practice avoidance instead of participation; avoid acquiring new skills; and indoctrinate ourselves with fears.

Top 10 Common Rationalizations from Patricia Stewart:

1. I'm more productive when I work under pressure, so I'm postponing all my work until the pressure builds up then I'll get it done easily.
2. I don't know how to do this problem, so I'm waiting until I know how before I do it.
3. This task isn't getting done because I really don't want to do it. And that's the honest truth.
4. Relax. The world isn't going to come to an end if this doesn't get done.
5. This job is easier to do when I'm in the mood, and I'm simply not in the mood right now.
6. I waited until the last moment before and it worked out okay, so why not this time?
7. If I wait until the last minute I won't spend so much time on it.
8. If I do this work right now, I'll miss out on a once-in-a-lifetime social event.

9. Circumstances beyond my control prevented me from doing so.

10. I've worked on this for so long I have no interest or energy for it.

I needed to share those rationalizations because as I read each one, I couldn't help but laugh at how many times I've said those exact words on numerous occasions concurrently with other excuses. And really once they're laid out, it makes us wonder what type of person uses such ludicrous excuses not to succeed? I didn't realize what I had been preventing from my life because I wanted to choose the easy way out. Hard work pays off in the long run, laziness pays off instantly.

One of my biggest problems in finishing a project comes from the 'perfectionist' mentality – I get caught up in the inconsequential details of my project and lose sight of the end result. As I move along in a project I begin questioning myself. Am I going in the right direction? Does this make sense? Would others want or even care to read what I've written? Why am I even doing this? And as I try to create a character or scene, all these questions arise in me and I begin changing everything. I go back and rewrite the opening scene. I change the characters' names. I'll even clear everything off my screen and start over. We've all done it and it becomes frustrating, to the point of believing that the end result isn't attainable. I'm under this horrible notion of believing things have got to be perfect the first time around. What I have eventually succumbed to was the idea of just getting it all down, imperfect and all, and worry about the little nuances the second time around.

Probably the biggest reason I procrastinate is my fear of failure. If I start a project, I know I won't be fulfilled unless I finish it. But having started something means I really have to throw myself into the depths of it and sit with it for a while. Being the ADD person I am, I love starting great ideas, I just don't know how to work myself through the mess of it. I know I have it in me, I've actually completed projects before, it's just that I feel I will get judged so harshly for it, that I can talk my way out of needing to put myself through that criticism. This fear has paralyzed me and has kept me from succeeding, be it on any level.

In addition, if I start a project, I now have to be accountable for it all the way through completion. What if my idea started off great, but in longer consideration, there will be many obstacles? And now that I've started a project I have set up some arbitrary timeline to finish something. This pressure of boundaries terrifies me. Then what if I do finish my 'great idea' and nobody likes it? What if it sucks and people think I've wasted my time and should never write again? Why do I care what others think? It's all these useless thoughts that prevent me from moving forward. So I am trying to implement positive thinking in my life where I attempt to erase those unproductive thoughts with the mere goal of enjoying the process and my journey. I've also started reverting back to my motivation in writing or taking on a project and that is simply because writing feels good.

It's the belief of the procrastinator that if they do all those little things on their 'To Do' list that they will eventually free up time to get to the higher priority ones. Once I get my desk cleared, I'll really be able to focus on my writing. Once I get that last book from the library for research, I will have all the information I need to start. Unfortunately, that list never ends. I can create things for myself to do that will keep me busy well into 2010. There's nothing more important than our own personal self-fulfilling commitments. We must remember to do things that make us feel good about ourselves and as writers, be it finishing a blog, a short story, an article, even a script, whatever it takes to makes us feel bold and magical.

And though I've spent a whole morning obsessing about procrastination, I hope I inspired a view that can remove us from our guilt and know there are others who understand. I also want to include, if we are going to choose to procrastinate, then I say do it 100%. Don't teeter back and forth with it. Go full force and without guilt. Get it out of the system and then reconvene with prior commitments. Hey, I'm procrastinating on my project, but don't feel as bad knowing that at least I'm writing something – anything.