

EmployeeCare News

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Larry Welin

Procrastination

By Larry Welin DMin, LPCC/Counselor

“Not now, later” sets in motion the plight of the procrastinator. There is no evidence procrastination is genetically inherited but we learn it early and quickly. Youngsters do it long before they know what the word means. What student has not faced the homework pileup on a Sunday evening? We don’t outgrow it. Every occupation has them and some feel plagued for a lifetime by it.

Our predecessors had different distractions but today we have surfing the Internet, computer games, instant messaging, e-mailing and cell phones that draw us away from a task. Being a procrastinator is neither right nor wrong but it creates an enormous amount of emotional wear and tear.

In his book, *The Now Habit*, Neil Fiore, PhD, defines procrastination as “a mechanism for coping with

the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision.” (pg. 5) Procrastination doesn’t happen because the person is lazy or necessarily disorganized; in fact, often procrastinators are hard workers who put themselves through a lot of emotional turmoil before they complete a particular assignment or project.

Dr. Fiore writes that procrastination is “an attempt to resolve a variety of underlying issues, including low self-esteem, perfectionism, fear of failure and success, indecisiveness, an imbalance between work and play, ineffective goal-setting and negative concepts about work and you.” (pgs. 4-5) The remedy for the procrastinator needs to be tailor-fit and at various times, different issues may surface that have the person falling back into the familiar rut.

The chronic procrastinator may have feelings of depression because “Oh, I’m doing it again.” But true depression is different because a person suffering from depression has no interest in getting anything done. For the procrastinator there is the avoidance, the putting off of certain tasks, filling the time with other things.

Dr. Fiore lists six warning signs of procrastination:

1. Does life feel like a long series of obligations that cannot be met? Do you:
 - Keep an impossibly long “to do” list?
 - Talk to yourself in “have to’s” and “should’s”?
 - Feel powerless with no sense of choice?
 - Feel agitated, pressured, continually fearful of being caught procrastinating?
2. Are you unrealistic about time? Do you:
 - Discuss starting projects vaguely “sometime next week” or “in the fall”?
 - Lose track of how you spend your time?
 - Chronically arrive late at meetings?





3. Are you vague about your goals and values? Do you:
 - Find it difficult to stay committed to any one person or project?
 - Have difficulty knowing what you really want for yourself, but are clear about what you should want?
 - Get easily distracted from a goal by another plan that seems to be free of problems and obstacles?
 - Lack the ability to distinguish between what's the most important use of your time and what's not?

4. Are you unfulfilled, frustrated, depressed? Do you:
 - Have life goals that you've never completed or even attempted?
 - Find that you're never satisfied with what you accomplish?
 - Feel deprived – always working or feeling guilty about not working?

5. Are you indecisive and afraid of being criticized for making a mistake? Do you:
 - Delay completing projects because you try to make them perfect?
 - Fear taking responsibility because you fear blame if something goes wrong?
 - Demand perfection even on low-priority work?

6. Are low self-esteem and lack of assertiveness holding you back from becoming productive? Do you:
 - Blame outside events for your failures because you're afraid to admit to any deficiencies?
 - Feel ineffective in controlling your life?
 - Fear being judged and found wanting?

miserable and fearing the next deadline. Their negative self-talk escalates and they become their own worst critic finding it hard to feel compassion and respect for themselves.

For many procrastinators, the family pattern was often typical. Praise was at a minimum because “it might go to your head” and the child felt their efforts were “never good enough.” Constructive criticism felt brutal, cutting and hurtful. The external “critic” suddenly became the internal critic with threats and judgment.

Procrastination temporarily relieves some stress, reduces tension for the moment and provides some degree of relief. But later we can feel anger, resentment and take on the victim role. To a person who has a balance in life of work and pleasure, a mistake or a failure is a learning experience, but to a person who is overly sensitive that “failure” can feel devastating – it's like the whole world is examining and criticizing them.

How You Talk To Yourself Is Important

“Should's” need to be replaced with choices: what you choose to do; when you choose to do it; where you choose to start it and how you choose to do it. I have the choice of when I will start, what small step I choose to take, and it does not have to be perfect. The balance of work and play for the procrastinator is often skewed so that the little time given for play is contaminated with thoughts of work, the pressure, and the deadline. It actually puts off quality living. A 30-minute start is far better than no start at all.

Guilt-free play can recharge your batteries, spark your creativity, and energize other parts of your life. The task is no longer larger than life. It becomes sizeable and proportionately manageable. That makes the periods of work shorter and the rewards more frequent rather than that work “marathon” that drains us dry.

To start does not mean we come up with a polished end-product right away. There may be revisions before things are finished but you must keep on starting. Let go of the focus on finishing and replace with thoughts on the when, where, and on what you can start.

You might not push procrastination out of your life entirely but when your next task is completed without the usual feelings of guilt, worry, and dread you have reason to celebrate. The choices are yours and that's too good to be overlooked!

Many procrastinators actually meet deadlines but feel rushed, pressured, unhappy with the results,

You Make Me So Mad – Or Do You?

By Ryan Casto/Counselor Intern

We all deal with anger in our lives; it is a normal, natural, and often healthy emotion. Anger can rouse us to action when faced with a threatening situation, allowing us to defend ourselves.

Anger can motivate us to correct an unjust situation or to help people who are hurting. It is unavoidable, given the pain and loss we are sure to experience in life. However, anger is a powerful emotion and if not handled or expressed appropriately can lead to problems.

Anger triggers the body's "fight or flight" response, which creates biological changes that prepare us to deal with a threat. If we get angry on a regular basis our body is constantly in the fight-or-flight state, which can lead to an array of health problems including headaches, digestive problems, insomnia, high blood pressure, skin problems and strokes. Anger has even been linked to increased risk of heart disease and cancer. Recurrent anger can lead to mental health issues such as depression, increased anxiety, alcoholism, drug addiction, and compulsive behavior.

Anger can lead to personality changes. People who are constantly angry may become cynical and hostile, overly critical or verbally abusive. It can also contribute to interpersonal problems with co-workers, friends, and family. Uncontrolled anger can lead to arguments, physical confrontations, physical abuse and assault. If we are experiencing chronic anger it is important we address it, for ourselves and others.

What can be particularly distressing for people dealing with anger is that they feel powerless to control their angry feelings. One professional put it this way: "anger is (sometimes) a cry of powerlessness – people get the most angry, resentful, or impatient when they feel the most powerless". It is a disturbing cycle that anger can create; we feel powerless, so we get angry. Then we feel powerless to control our anger, so we get angrier. This idea of powerlessness works its way into our speech. How often have we said to someone, "you make me so mad?" How about "you drive me crazy"? If people "make" us mad or "drive" us crazy, we are at their mercy. If we want to stop being angry – too bad, they made us. We are telling ourselves that we are helpless and cannot escape the influence of others. And that is just not true.

No one makes us angry – we choose to get angry. This ability to choose our anger holds the key to escaping the cycle of frustration and powerlessness that anger produces, as well as the other consequences of anger mentioned above. Instead of actually being powerless, we give people and situations power over us by believing they can "make" us mad. Accepting that we have a choice in the matter can restore to us the power that seems to be missing. We can be set free from the cycle of anger in which so many people feel hopelessly trapped.

How, though, do we choose to be angry? Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) offers a very simple explanation of how we choose our anger. It is as simple as A-B-C. Say, for example, a co-worker offers to help you on a certain day. When the day comes, the co-worker fails to help you, leaving you with the extra work. You find yourself becoming angry. In this example there is an (activating) event (A), the co-worker's failure to help with the task. There is also an emotional response (consequence) (C), your anger. Looking at the situation, it may seem as though A causes C – the co-worker's failure to help causes your anger. However, RET assumes that, although the event may contribute to your feelings inside, it does not cause it. What comes between A and C is your (belief) about the event (B). If the co-worker's behavior actually caused anger, then everyone who had to deal with the co-worker's behavior would throw a fit. But how many times have we seen a situation handled differently by different people? One person may let something roll off, while another person may become furious in the same situation. So an event is experienced by a person, and what that person believes about the event determines their reaction. If we start believing differently about the event, we can start affecting how we react.

In the example above, if you believe people must treat you nicely in all situations, you will become angry when the co-worker "wrongs" you. The failure to help is seen as a severe offense, which leads to anger. Plus, since you cannot force the co-worker to behave differently, you may feel all the more powerless. What if you decided that, although the co-worker failed to help you, it does not mean that he or she hates you or is necessarily out to make

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you feel badly? Perhaps the co-worker simply made a mistake. Choosing to look at it in this new way can make it easier to react in a way besides getting angry.

By changing the way you think, you can have a real effect on you choice to respond inside your mind and outside with your behavior.

Providing a detailed description of how to change all our beliefs about stressful situations is beyond the scope of this

article. It is essential to accept and understand that we are able to do something about the anger – we are not powerless. By making choices and being patient with ourselves, we can begin to take back the power we have allowed other people and situations to have over us. If you are interested in learning more about how to manage recurrent or chronic anger, EmployeeCare is a great resource. Please call at (937) 208-6626 or 800-628-9343 to schedule an appointment.

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M-EXT00062-1/10

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