

COLLEGIATE TIMES

Column: Exploring solutions to procrastination

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Ever procrastinated? Ever had it compromise your schoolwork, personal productivity, or otherwise? Me too. That's why I took some time this summer to address it - so it doesn't get me again next year.

After taking a class on motivation theory last semester and exploring the issue of procrastination, I picked up a book called "The Now Habit," by Dr. Neil Fiore, which applies a lot of motivation theory to address the problem.

First off, procrastination is not simply a character trait - that is, you aren't "a procrastinator," but rather you experience procrastination at times just like you experience frustration sometimes. That should make sense, because surely you can think of some things that you do with no hesitation.

So, why do you procrastinate? When I tell you, you're going to doubt it. Here it is: you use procrastination as a defense mechanism to protect yourself from various threats to your self-worth. That is, delaying things is your mind's way of dealing with thoughts of being overwhelmed, of possible failure, or of not finishing something.

I had a hard time swallowing that at first, but tested it out over a week and found it to be true. The strongest evidence came when I told myself that I "must get this task done," yet hesitated. When I looked at it further, I realized that what I needed to do was poorly defined and, therefore, I wasn't confident I could do it. I took a few minutes to break down the steps and set a goal for each, and found it easier to tackle.

The next thing is to look at how we procrastinate. Everyone has their theory as to why Facebook, for example, eats away our time, but most of them are far-fetched and inaccurate; worse, many of the attempts to remedy Facebook addictions are very off-base.

Also, using Facebook is not always procrastination, because social networking is certainly valuable, interesting and fun. However, when there are other higher-priority tasks to be done, spending time on Facebook qualifies as procrastinating. The problem is not Facebook, though - it is the escape from the problem. The problem is that the tasks carry too much weight in determining your self-worth and you aren't confident you can do them; the resulting pressure averts you away from them - and toward Facebook.

If it's homework you're putting off, maybe you could meet up with a classmate or the instructor to discuss the assignment so you can get a better feel for it. Further, Dr. Fiore's book says you should put the assignment in perspective: It is only one of hundreds of opportunities in your academic career to show what you've got.

Another part of the solution involves changing your language; that is, move away from "I have to" in favor of "I choose to" when it comes to accomplishing tasks.

Further, plan your calendar in reverse, working from your goal (e.g. finishing the assignment) to smaller tasks to

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achieve the goal (read materials, discuss with classmates, break down hard parts).

The end is productivity, certainly, but also guilt-free playtime, just like being a kid again. So, move on this now - pick up the book (or another like it) and beat procrastination this summer.

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