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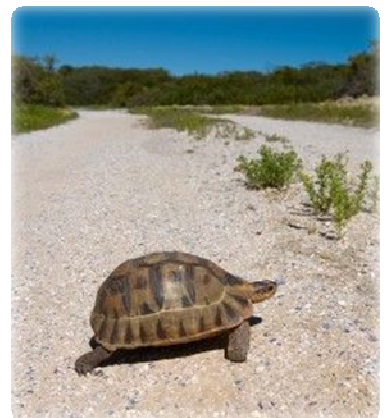
Eliminate *procrastination*

When the clinical director called last night to cancel my scheduled shift at the hospital for today, I thought “Great! I have a million things to do and that’ll give me an extra day to catch up.” But somehow I managed to waste the day away without getting anything done. I loaded the dishwasher, surfed the internet, and watched about five re-runs of Project Runway but didn’t do a lick of business or academic work. It got me thinking. Why do we procrastinate? What is that about anyway? It feels almost like the kid in us is telling the parent is us “just leave me alone”.

Do we in fact have a rebellious child and a directional parent inside our head – or as many of my patients like to say, a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other? Some days, I’m all angel. I meditate first thing in the morning, exercise, eat healthy all day, and get so much work done I amaze myself. Other days, I’m possessed by the devil. I eat junk, sit on the couch and watch re-runs of reality shows. Then I feel guilty, which of course de-motivates me even more.

I once read some research about dieting that demonstrated that when people deprive themselves of food, they eventually eat more than they initially would have. This psychological phenomenon explains the pattern of yo-yo dieting. You eat salad and rice cakes for 5 weeks, and after that, once you’ve lost some weight and come off your diet, you gobble up all the pizzas and fried chicken that cross your path. Maybe procrastination is just like that. We cram our days with stuff we have to do (because we know it’s good for us, or will help us achieve our goals) without taking DAILY time for relaxing and having fun. We diet on to-do lists, and then eventually binge on procrastination.

My father told me the fable about the turtle and hare at least a hundred times when I was a kid. And then through my life, at various moments he’d say: “remember the turtle, slow and steady wins the race”. Could it be then that too much intensity, too much speed in our lives is actually counter productive? In his workshops, T. Harv Eker, author of Secrets of the Millionaire mind teaches that the idea “you have to work hard to get rich” is actually an erroneous belief that actually prevents accumulation of wealth. Perhaps this idea extends to all of life. The yo-yo productivity/procrastination cycle might actually prevent us from achieving the results we desire. Yo-yo-ness is fluctuation between extremes, the complete opposite of balance. Thus, the opposite of nature. Working in opposition to, instead of in synchrony with nature can’t possibly be the best solution.



What then, is the best solution? How can we be more productive by working less, and eliminate our need to procrastinate?

Simplify and chunk.

The first thing you need to do to eliminate procrastination is create more down time in your daily routine. Down time is important. It re-charges your brain and enables you to be more efficient at everything you do. You can create more time in your days by doing two things: simplifying and chunking. First, simplify. What I mean by that is eliminate tasks from your life altogether. For example, if you cook dinner at home seven nights a week, is there a way you can pick up something healthy for the same price as cooking for two of those nights? Lots of places have “family meal” specials for less than the price it would cost you to buy the ingredients at the grocery store. At work I used to spend hours making travel arrangements for myself, then I got smart and gave that job to an assistant. Not only did it free up some of my time, but she was faster at it than I. Make a list of all the stuff you do. Keep a small notepad with you this week and keep track of activities and amount of time they take. Then look at your list and eliminate 25% of the time (with a focus on eliminating stuff you don’t like to do). Sit there with your list until you actually figure out a reasonable way to cut 25%. Watch your thoughts during this exercise. If you find yourself thinking “there’s no way I can eliminate 25% of my workload” stop it and keep repeating to yourself “where can I cut?” “what can I eliminate?”, “what can I delegate/outsource”. Be creative. Find solutions.

When is comes to managing time, do you have a an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other?

Another way to simplify is to get in the habit of evaluating cost/benefit time ratios whenever something new comes into your life. For instance, your friend solicits your help to plan an office party. Offer to handle buying the gift or the cake, rather than the invitations. You can buy the gift online and stop at a bakery and order a cake in about five minutes. Or better yet, suggest you all go out for lunch. Now you’ve helped eliminate tasks for everyone involved and the birthday co-worker will still have a great birthday.

Once you’ve simplified your life and eliminated 25% of the things you were doing, the next step is to chunk. By chunking you can get more done. Chunking is simply grouping similar items and doing them all at once. Block out time to return all your phone calls. Instead of letting subordinates pop in your office with questions all day, have a daily “questions and guidance” block of time for them. Find a block of about 4 hours in your week, put on some music and get all your housework done at once. If you need to visit clients, pick certain days of the week to be your “outside sales” days and just go from appointment to appointment. Chunking works. You’ll get a lot more done and feel less stressed.

In nature, nothing is rushed...yet, everything gets accomplished”- Lao Tze

In short, do less to accomplish more. Then you’ll have more time to enjoy and relax, and won’t have such a need to procrastinate and avoid. Instead of sprinting, walk more leisurely on your path. Remember, slow and steady wins the race.

Chantal Gagnon is a speaker, coach, and author. She inspires women to create lives that are both fun and fulfilling. For more on Chantal’s programs or private counseling practice, please visit www.LifeCounselor.net