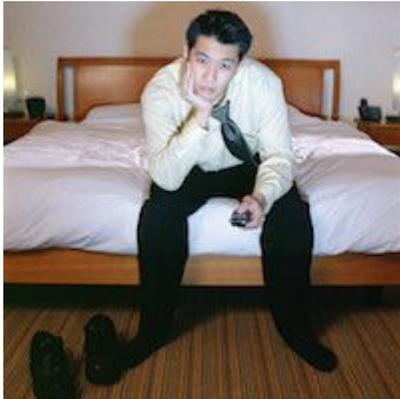




5 Ways to Stop the Procrastination Cycle for Leaders



The vicious cycle of delay, avoidance, then panic reminds many of us of writing the high school or college papers the night before. We only buckle down when we cannot avoid it anymore. How do we stop the procrastination cycle?

When we do sit down to focus, we often adopt the "Eat the Dessert First" option, meaning that we do the simplest, easiest, and most entertaining jobs first. We tend to delay tackling the big, looming elephant-sized, and more important projects.

Why do we avoid the important work for the small and non-urgent tasks? Turns out, our brain, specifically, the older, self-preserving limbic system of our brain, is hardwired to avoid things that could be difficult or painful, according to Timothy A. Pychyl, PhD, and author of *The Procrastinator's Digest: A Concise Guide to Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*. Our limbic system is very powerful, and it likes easy jobs.

The prefrontal cortex is the weaker part of the part of the brain which controls decisions and information, and this is the part of the brain that needs to be jolted into taking action that is more challenging. When we have a choice whether to work on something difficult or procrastinate, our limbic system overrides our prefrontal cortex, and we yield to the task of least resistance.

So with our brains working against us, how do we attack those bigger jobs so we can

Mary's Updates

Thanks to my amazing meeting planners and fantastic audiences, I was awarded the **Certified Speaking Professional** certification in June. This is the highest speaking designation from the National Speakers Association. Thank you, everyone!



Yes, [I did do the ice water challenge for military charities](#), specifically, the [Wounded Warrior Project](#) and the [Warrior Wellness Equine Program in Colorado Springs](#). I was able to do the challenge with 2009 Kentucky Derby winner, Mine That Bird, star of the movie, 50-1. Watch it here!



Mary's Book of the Month



[Execution is the Strategy: How Leaders Achieve Maximum Results in Minimum](#)

cross them off our To-Do List and stop agonizing over what we need to do?

1. **Attack the worst job first.** According to Piers Steel, PhD in *The Procrastination Equation: How to Stop Putting Things Off and Start Getting Things Done*, we have a depletable amount of willpower, as anyone who has been on a diet knows, so if we don't start with the worst job first, it is unlikely we will do it at the end of the day when we are tired. That is when leaders hear, "I'll do it tomorrow."

I advise students to do the homework they struggle with first, and leave the homework in the classes they enjoy for later in the evening for exactly this reason. Yes, it is *easier* to do the homework for classes that are easy for you first, but that means that at 11:22 PM you are not likely to choose solving Organic Chemistry problems over sleeping.

2. **Start with just five minutes.** Shrinking the problem helps the job seem less onerous, so we are able to start the project.

Have you ever mowed the lawn? If you look at the whole project and try to allocate two hours of sweating in 93-degree weather, you might decide to stay inside and watch football instead. If you think about it, the limbic system wins. But if you start mowing for five minutes, chances are, once you see the first few rows of freshly cut grass, you finish the job.

3. **Create public accountability.** When other people are counting on us, or when we commit to other people that we are going to do something, we tend to do it. We have a desire to avoid letting other people down.

This is why fitness classes and workout partners are such a good idea. We can always find an excuse not to go to the gym, but if someone else is counting on us, we show up.

When I taught yoga, I never missed a class. When I *attend* yoga classes, I routinely miss 80% of the classes I pencil in on my calendar. Why? Well, no one really misses one person in the class unless that one person is the instructor.

4. **Remove the obstacles to focus.** Find a way to temporarily get rid of the distractions so you don't have any other options except the work you need to do. One technique is to change the work environment.

When I absolutely have to edit a book chapter or create a new economics or leadership program, I need to be completely focused, and this is difficult when there are other people around, dishwashers to empty, or dogs who want

Time

by Laura Stack

Laura Stack, the Productivity Pro, gives us another book on productivity tactics to elevate our effectiveness and leadership performance.

I always enjoy Laura's writing because she infuses her books with real-world, current examples from her own work as a productivity speaker.

One of my favorite chapters, "Ensure Engaged, Empowered Employees" includes a 12-question assessment used by a Gallup poll to measure employee engagement. This gives managers a great list of questions to engage their teams.

In another chapter, Laura explains how to show employees that what they do is important to the organization's overall mission with the 3-T Method: Tell, Teach, and Train. Laura knows that employees need to know why they do what they do, and not just the how.

One of my favorite sections in the book is titled "Slay the Dragon of Complacency" on creating contingency plans and improvising creative solutions.

Execution is the Strategy reminds us that today's leaders need to implement strategy, not just dictate it. A rapidly changing business environment needs leaders who can adapt and motivate others. Awesome!

Twitter and Social Media

Remember that Twitter is a two-way conversation. Tweet questions to encourage interaction with you.

Pet Tip

The Amazing Purple Stuff

Ear infections in dogs can be dangerous if ignored. This solution is what I use to prevent problems and I give it as Christmas gifts to my dog friends. This was given to me by my breeder. It is good for ear issues, scratches, and itchy toes.

- 16 oz. bottle isopropyl alcohol or witch hazel (pour out about an oz to make it easier to mix)
- 4 tablespoons Boric Acid Powder
- 16 drops Gentian Violet 1% Solution

Shake all ingredients in the bottle.

Drop into ear with eye dropper and massage gently for 30 seconds. The dog will shake the excess out. I do it outside because the Gentian Violet stains, but it is safe and works.

to play. I need a place where I don't have the option of doing anything else.

I head to a coffee shop or an empty conference room and I only bring with me the work I have to do. Given no other option, I am wildly productive.

5. **Know that there is no perfect time.** If we wait until all of the elements are perfect before we start a project, it will never happen. We will always find an excuse to procrastinate.

I used to tell myself that I would write a book chapter when I got "in the mood." That didn't work. Given a choice, my emotional limbic system overrides my prefrontal cortex every time. Now I set a time on the calendar and devote that time to writing.

Sit. Focus. Produce. Have a great month!

Please share your feedback on this article on [my blog](#).

How Can We Help?

We don't assume, so here is a brief list of what we at Productive Leaders do:

1. Motivational business keynote and breakout speaking for conferences, convention, banquets and events
2. Emcee corporate events and fundraisers
3. One-on-one business consulting
4. Strategic business planning

Call Mary at 719-357-7360 for a free initial consultation.



Thank You for Reading this Newsletter

Know anyone planning a conference who needs a motivational leadership speaker, or a business that needs a push forward? Please [contact me](#). I greatly appreciate your referrals!



Mary C. Kelly

Connect with Mary



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