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A personal message from Tim & Sue

We hope you all had a fantastic Christmas and are looking forward to a great year ahead of you.

Featured Article

Getting Round to Dealing with Procrastination

Two months ago, I knew I had to write the November NLP Bulletin but kept putting it off. Other distractions seemed to come along and take my mind of the job. As regular readers may remember, I sent it off several days late. This reminds me of a story that a friend of mine told me ...

There was once a young man hiking through the forest on a bright spring day. With a stick in his hand and a small pack on his back, he enjoyed the fresh air and the majesty of the scenery. Entering a wide clearing, he saw a log cabin on the far side, emblazoned with sunlight.

He strode across the clearing and noticed an old man sitting in a rocking chair on the veranda. Next to him lay an Alsatian dog. The old man called, beckoning. As the young man approached the cabin, the old man smiled and said, "Come; sit down and talk a while. I don't see many strangers nowadays."

They sat together, talking and laughing and enjoying each others company. After a while, the young man noticed that the Alsatian dog did not appear to be very relaxed. It kept shifting its body a bit and made a grizzling sound.

"Why is your dog unhappy?" Asked the young man.

"Well," the old man replied, "there's an old rusty nail that's half sticking out of the veranda right there." He pointed to where the dog was lying, still grizzling to herself.

"Well", laughed the young man, "is she so stupid that she doesn't think to move?"

“Ah”, said the old man, looking at the dog, “the thing is that the nail doesn’t stick out much, and it doesn’t hurt her enough to move yet.”

How to Procrastinate

Almost everyone is able to procrastinate and does so regularly. We put off doing things we don’t enjoy doing, even when it hurts us. Scientific research shows that students who cram for their exams in the last few days perform significantly worse than those who steadily revise over a longer time. In the United States, and research shows that people who left it to the last minute to fill in their tax forms lost an average of \$400 each year due to errors [see reference 1].

Factors that increase the chances of you deciding to procrastinate are:

- How confident you are that you will succeed
- How pleasant or unpleasant the task is to you
- How easily distracted you are
- How much time will elapse before you are rewarded for finishing the job

Of course, all these factors are to some extent under your control.

Reference 1: “The thief of time”, New Scientist, 15 December 2007

Tip of the month Getting on with it

Start by picking one of the things that you procrastinate over. Choose one that you find a little irritating – one that makes you grizzle a little!

1. How confident are you that you will succeed when you tackle the job? Some jobs, like getting round to cleaning the oven, you can be sure that you will manage. For others, such as passing your driving test, you may find it harder to know that you will succeed – so plan out what you need to do to make sure you will succeed – book enough driving lessons to make sure you’re going to pass!
2. How unpleasant is the task in hand? If you’re putting it off because you don’t enjoy doing it, then imagine how good you will feel when it’s finally done. See yourself sitting in a chair, confident that the job is complete and it’s not hanging over you any more. Compare that with the irritation of not having done it – multiply that irritation for the number of days you have put it off already – and that is only the irritation that you have had already!
3. What is it that distracts you from getting on and finishing it? Get rid of all those distractions, no matter how pleasant they are, at least for a while. Turn off your email – no email interruptions. Tell the people around you that you do not want to be disturbed. Put your mobile on “silent” – you can deal with any messages later.

4. How long will it be until you get any reward for completing the job? If it is a long time, then create another reward. Promise yourself one of your favourite chocolates when you are finished. Tell yourself that you will be able to have a good chat to whoever left a message on your mobile.

We are all natural procrastinators. It's just that some people are better able to deal with it than others.

Quotations to reflect on

"You may delay, but time will not."

Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790)

"I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."

Douglas Adams (1952 - 2001)

"Procrastination is the grave in which opportunity is buried."

Author Unknown

"Never put off until tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow."

Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)

Until next time,

A handwritten signature of the name 'Tim' in black ink.A handwritten signature of the name 'Sue' in black ink.

Tim Maude & Sue Beckett

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