

Tackle Procrastination Before Delegation



There is not a manager around who would not admit to occasionally putting off until tomorrow work that should have been accomplished today. Unfortunately, when we wait until the eleventh hour to start a project we often end up delegating not only the work but also the panic that goes with it. Before focusing on how to delegate more effectively, take a moment to address procrastination. It just might eliminate your need to delegate.

What can a die-hard procrastinator do to get going?

The good news is that most procrastinators are great at finishing jobs. It's starting that presents the biggest challenge. The key is to trick yourself into beginning the project and the rest will take care of itself. There are a number of ways to do this:

Do the worst thing first. Someone once said that if you eat a live toad first thing every morning nothing worse would happen for the rest of the day. That's exactly the philosophy this principle is based on. Search each project for the part you hate doing the most, and do that task first. Once the worst part is over, the rest usually seems easier.

Try the breakdown technique. Instead of approaching jobs as large and unmanageable, break them into bite-sized pieces. Sometimes we hesitate beginning a job because it's so overwhelming we don't know where to start. If this is the case, create a list of all of the steps involved in getting the chore done and tackle them one at a time.

Advance due dates. Another trick that often works is to routinely make a commitment to complete tasks earlier than their actual due dates. If it's due on Monday, promise it for Friday and enjoy the weekend without the deadline looming over your head.

Use the leading task method. Look at each project you face on the basis of only the first step. Do only the first thing (leading task) that would have to be done in order to get going. Once that's done you'll be facing a different leading task, so do only that. Soon the leading task at hand will be the last task and the mission will be completed.

Go public. Some people would rather die than lose face in front of their peers. Make a commitment to someone you wouldn't want to let down. Give him or her the specifics of what you intend to do and when it will be completed. Then promise to deliver.

Apply the journal technique. Every time you complete a task related to a project, enter it into a journal. Before long you will have a thick book of notes detailing your progress. It's a great way to focus on what you have done, rather than what you have yet to do.

Try memory joggers. Sometimes a failing memory is the only thing that stands in your way. Use written reminders to jog your memory and get you going. Post them where you are likely to look often. You'll eventually get tired of all the notes and take action.

Who knows if any of us will ever be able to stop procrastinating completely. The good news is that if you avoided the temptation to put off reading this article, there is still hope. After all, we planned to write this piece a year ago but somehow we just never got to it.