



Keeping one step ahead of procrastination

Let's just get started!



Timothy A. Pychyl
Department of Psychology

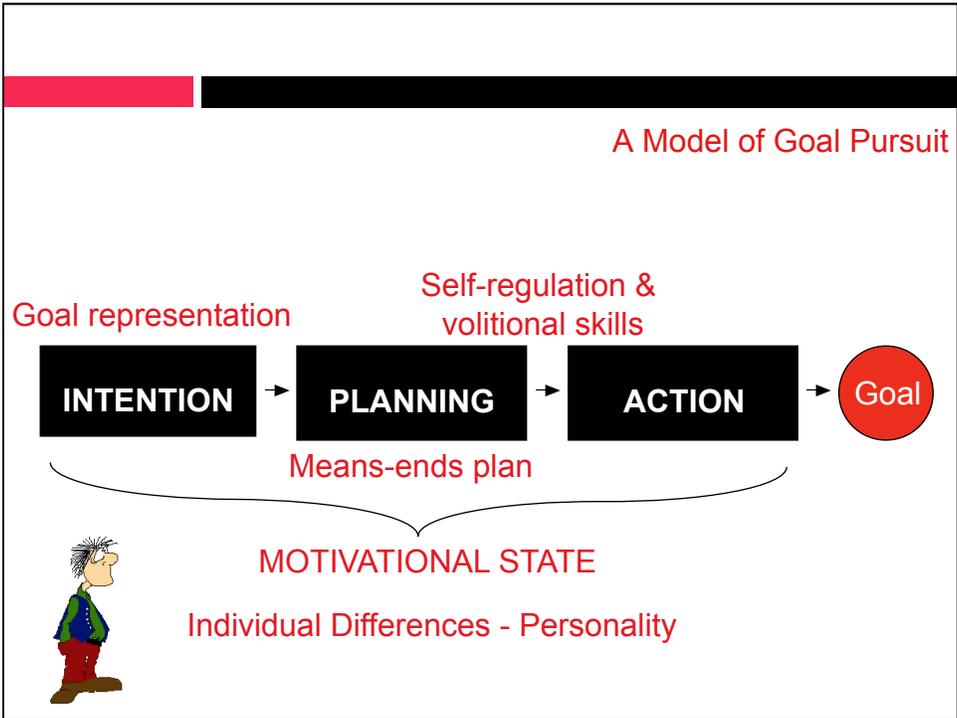
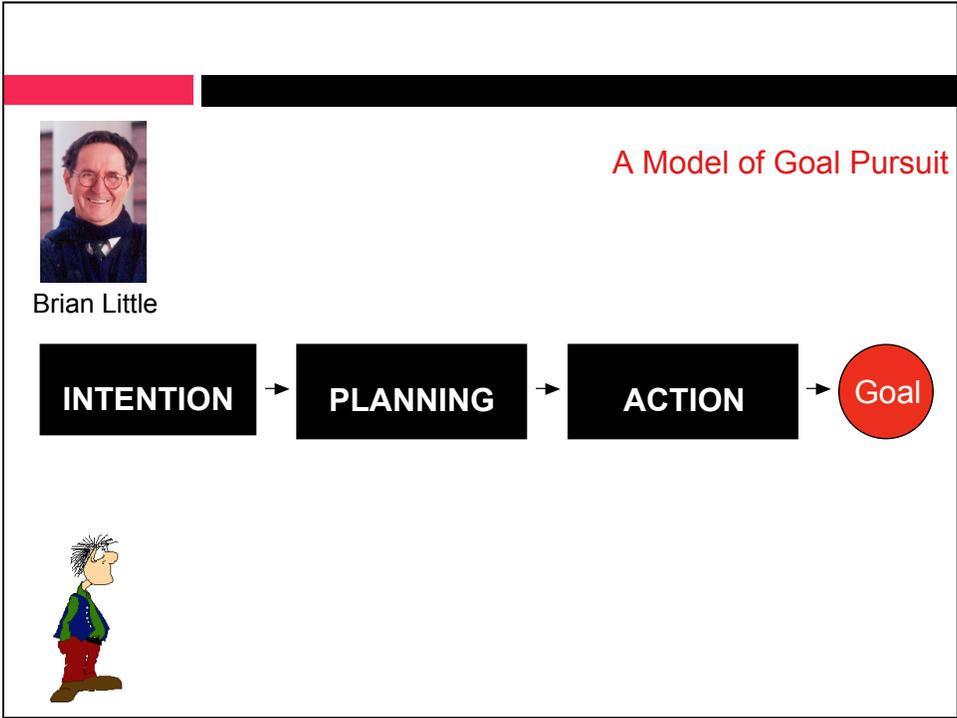
What you can expect – my plan

- Begin with a little bit of theory
- Focus on how our goal pursuit can break down
- Strategies for change – very practical
- Casting a wide net conceptually
- Multi-media (listening and reading)
- My pace (and purpose) – a caveat
- Your questions . . .



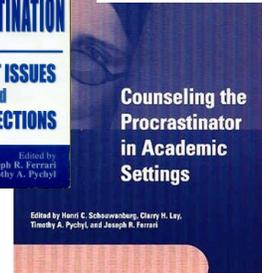
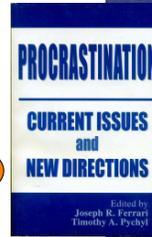
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- Why?
- Goal pursuit

Procrastination



Latin roots

Latin verb *procrastinare*

pro - forward motion

crastinus - belonging to tomorrow

“put off or postpone until another day”





Mohsen Haghbin



How do psychologists define procrastination?

- Delay
- Gap between intention and action
- Voluntary, irrational, expecting poorer performance, feeling badly about the delay



The costs of procrastination

- Performance
- Relationships
- Well-being
- Health
- The regrets of the dying



Pychyl, T.A., Lee, J., Thibodeau, R., & Blunt, A. (2000). Five Days of Emotion: An experience-sampling study of undergraduate student procrastination. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15(5), 239-254.

Sirois, F. M., Melia-Gordon, M.L., & Pychyl, T. A. (2003). "I'll look after my health, later": An investigation of procrastination and health. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 35 (5),1167-1184.

What we can do about it – it's not about time



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	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I - Crises - Pressing Problems - Deadline Driven Projects, meetings, preparations	II - Preparations - Presentations - Values Clarification - Planning - Relationship Building - True Recreation - Empowerment
Not Important	III - Interruptions, some phone calls - Some mail, some reports some meetings - Many proximate pressing matters - Many popular activities	IV - Trivia, busywork - Junk Mail - Some phone calls - Time wasters - "Escape" activities

Carpe Diem

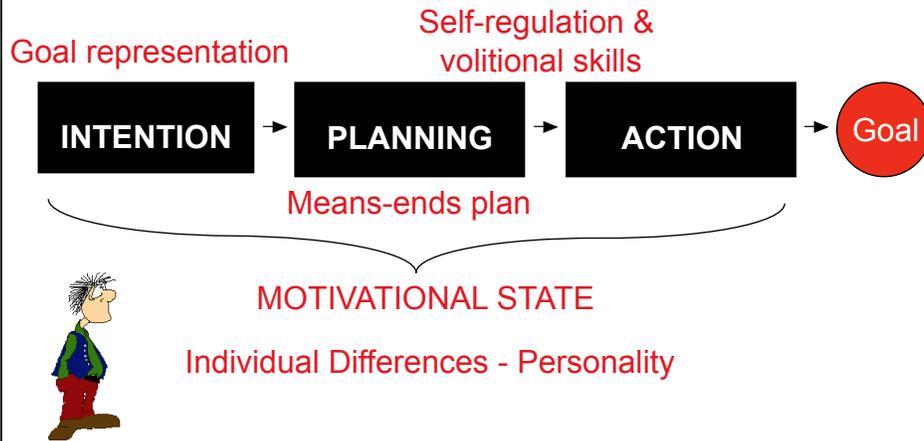
by Tim Pynchyl and Paul Mason



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A Model of Goal Pursuit



Enhancing goal pursuit - strategies

- Make it concrete
- Phrased as an approach goal (not avoidance)
- Increase meaning & interest in the task
- Time traveling (affective forecasting, planning fallacy, TMT)
- Reduce uncertainty
- Implementation intentions
- Just get started
- Reduce distractions (shut off Facebook, email, Twitter)
- Creative commitment devices
- "Workplace Internet Leisure Browsing" (WILB)
- Self-affirmation – meaning/values
- Recognizing intention updates (other forms of delay)
- Self forgiveness
- Strengthen will power
- Meditate
- Change your personality (Conscientiousness, Impulsivity)
- Emotional intelligence – "giving in to feel good"
- Stop the self-deception
- Harness your liabilities – structured procrastination
- Use upward counterfactuals
- Examine & challenge your irrational beliefs (perfectionism)
- Work from your ideal not ought self
- Self-consciousness and flow

Goal representation
Means-ends plan

Self-regulation & volitional skills
Motivation

PERSONALITY?



Goal representation & Planning

- Make it concrete
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- Implementation intentions



Make it concrete



- "Construal-level theory holds that greater psychological distance is associated with more abstract, higher-level construals [of objects or tasks], such that more distal objects are represented on a higher level, and also that objects represented on a higher level seem more distant" (p. 1308)
- ". . . the way the task is represented influences when individuals complete it. Across a variety of manipulations of construal level, we observed that procrastination was reduced when participants were induced to construe the task more concretely. . . we think that the effect of construal level on completion times reflected an association between concrete construal and sooner time" (p. 1313).
- OTHER RESEARCH - **chronic procrastinators** actually construe their tasks less abstractly than non-procrastinators



McCrea, S.M., Liberman, N., Trope, Y., & Sherman, S.J. (2008). Construal level and procrastination. *Psychological Science*, 19, 1308-1314.

Approach vs Avoidance goals

- Approach-oriented goals involve reaching or maintaining desired outcomes.
- Avoidance goals focus on avoiding or eliminating undesired outcomes.
- Pursuit of a greater number of avoidance goals is related to:
 - less satisfaction with progress and more negative feelings about progress with personal goals,
 - decreased self-esteem, personal control and vitality,
 - less satisfaction with life, and
 - feeling less competent
- Two-hundred toe nails



Elliot, A. J. & Friedman, R. (2007). *Approach-avoidance: A central characteristic of personal goals*. In B. R. Little, K. Salmela-Aro, & S. D. Phillips (Eds.), *Personal project pursuit: Goals, actions, and human flourishing* (pp. 97-118). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Meaning & Interest



- Task aversiveness
- Interest – an emotion
- "If an activity is boring, I can usually find a way to make it fun again"



Grope, P., & Steel, P. (2008). A mega-trial investigation of goal setting, interest enhancement, and energy on procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 45, 406-411.

Time travel



- Affective forecasting
 - Tenure, lottery, shopping, drugs
 - Focalism, presentism
- The planning fallacy
 - Singular events vs distributional information
- Temporal Motivation Theory
 - Discounting future rewards (behavioural economics)



Kruger, J., & Evans, M. (2004). If you don't want to be late, enumerate: Unpacking reduces the planning Fallacy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 40, 586-598.

Pychyl, T. A., Morin, R.W., & Salmon, B. R. (2000) Procrastination and planning fallacy: An examination of the study habits of university students. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15, 135-150.

The Planning Fallacy



Brian Salmon

- Used study prediction calendars and study “logs” to explore the potential discrepancy between intention (“I’ll study early for the exam and lots!”) vs. action (“maybe next time!”).
- Expected a greater “planning fallacy” for procrastinators



Pychyl, T.A., Morin, R.W., & Salmon, B.R. (2000). Procrastination and the Planning Fallacy: An examination of the study habits of university students. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15(5), 135-150.



Jonathan Lee



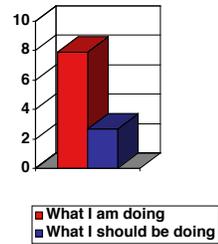
Piers Steel



Specious rewards and the attraction of pleasant activities

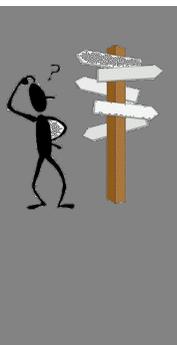
- Experience-sampling technique
- Compared aspects of tasks in which they were engaged with what they should be doing on how pleasant the activities were (see figure to right)

Pleasantness Ratings

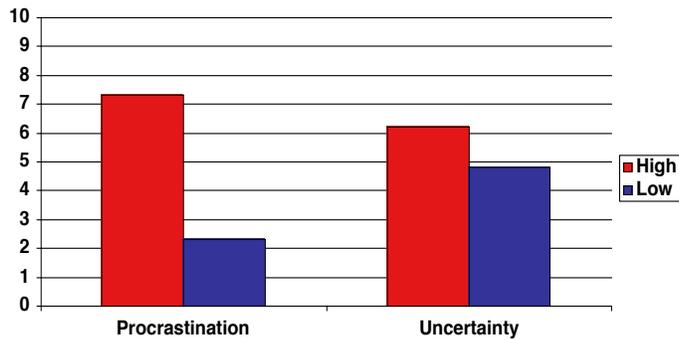


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I may have fear, but I need not be my fear (Palmer, 1999).



Reduce Uncertainty



Results in negative emotions and threats to self.

Pychyl, T.A., & Little, B.R. (1998). Dimensional specificity in the prediction of subjective well-being: Personal Projects in pursuit of the Ph.D. *Social Indicators Research*, 45, 423-473.



Peter Gollwitzer

Implementation Intentions

- In situation X, I will do behaviour Y to achieve subgoal Z.
- External cue for behaviour
- 40% increase in attendance on second experiment



Owens, S., Bowman, C., & Dill, C. (2008). Overcoming Procrastination: The Effect of Implementation Intentions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 38, 366-384

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Motivation



Self-regulation, volitional skills, motivation

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- Creative commitment devices
- “Workplace Internet Leisure Browsing” (WILB)
- Self-affirmation – meaning/values
- Recognizing intention updates (other forms of delay)
- Self-forgiveness
- Strengthen will power
- Meditate



Just get started!

- Experience sampling
- Doing & “should be doing”
- Appraisals, emotions, thoughts
- Follow-up interviews



“I’ll feel more like it tomorrow”

“I work better under pressure”

Pychyl, T.A., Lee, J., Thibodeau, R., & Blunt, A. (2000). Five Days of Emotion: An experience-sampling study of undergraduate student procrastination. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 15(5), 239-254.

Reduce distractions

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AREN'T YOU STARTING YOUR PSYC ASSIGNMENT?

I'M BUSY DOIN' THIS PHOTO FOR FACEBOOK.

Carpe Diem

I THOUGHT YOU HAD STARTED YOUR ASSIGNMENT.

I'M JUST CHECKING MY EMAIL FIRST...

LATER

I'M GOOD TO GO, NOW WHERE'S A PEN? MAYBE I BETTER CLEAN OUT THIS DRAWER.

EAT LAZERS ALIEN SCUM!

WHOA! MIDNIGHT ALREADY!

By Tim Pynchyl and Paul Mason

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Lavoie, J., & Pynchyl, T.A. (2001). Cyber-slacking and the Procrastination Super Highway: A Web-based Survey of On-line Procrastination, Attitudes and Emotion. *Social Science Computer Review*, 19, 431-444.

Resisting temptations

- Autonomy vs. external control (SDT)
- State- vs. action-orientations in the condition of external control vs. autonomy
- Over-reliance on external control to maintain self-control actually alienates us from our sense of self, our emotional preferences and self-generated goals.

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Baumann, N., & Kuhl, J. (2005). How to resist temptation: The effects of external control versus autonomy support on self-regulatory dynamics. *Journal of Personality*, 73, 443-470.

Blunt, A., & Pynchyl, T. A. (2005). Project systems of procrastinators: a personal project-analytic and action control perspective. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 1771-1780.

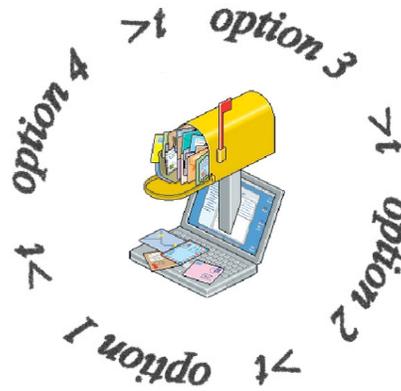
Blunt, A., & Pynchyl, T.A. (1998). Volitional action and inaction in the lives of undergraduate students: State orientation, boredom and procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 24,837-846.



Chrisoula Andreou
(University of Utah)



Creative Commitment Devices



Intransitive Preference Structure



WILB – take a break

- Taking breaks
 - Brent Coker (Department of Management and Marketing, University of Mebourne) “Workplace Internet Leisure Browsing”
- Moderation is key
- Internet Addiction 14% of Australian Internet users

Lavoie, J., & Pychyl, T.A. (2001). Cyber-slacking and the Procrastination Super Highway: A Web-based Survey of On-line Procrastination, Attitudes and Emotion. *Social Science Computer Review*, 19, 431-444.

Strengthen Will-power



- Will power is like a muscle
- Self-regulatory depletion
- Implications?
 - Strategic investment of a limited resource
 - Strengthening will power



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Ferrari, J. R., & Pychyl, T. A. (2007). Regulating speed, accuracy and judgments by Indecisives: Effects of frequent choices on self-regulation depletion. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 42, 777-787.

Baumeister, R.F., & Heatherton, T.F. (1996). Self-regulation failure: An overview. *Psychological Inquiry*, 7, 1-15.

Baumeister, R.F., & Heatherton, T.F., & Tice, D.M. (1994). *Losing control: How and why people fail at self-regulation*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Self-affirmation – meaning and values



Courage to be

- Expressing one's core values
- Puts focus on volition as opposed to habit
- Bolster's self-regulation



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Schmeichel, Brandon J.; Vohs, Kathleen (2009). Self-affirmation and self-control: Affirming core values counteracts ego depletion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96(4), 770-782.

Meditate

Carpe Diem — Created by Tim Pynchyl, Illustrated by Paul Mason



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Baumeister, R.F., & Heatherton, T.F. (1996). Self-regulation failure: An overview. *Psychological Inquiry*, 7, 1-15.

Shapiro, S.L., Carlson, L.E., Astin, J.A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62, 373-386.

Self-forgiveness

FORGIVENESS
is not something
we do for OTHER PEOPLE.
We do it for OURSELVES
-to GET WELL and
MOVE ON.

- If we self-forgive after we procrastinate, do we procrastinate less the next time we face a similar task?

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Bennett, S., Pynchyl, T.A., & Wohl, M. (2009). The role of self-forgiveness for procrastinating in the prediction of future procrastination. Manuscript under review.



Intention updates and other forms of “sagacious delay”

- I set the alarm for a 5 a.m. run. What happened?
- Why did I make the intention?
- When is it procrastination vs. an intention update and a sagacious delay?



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- **Change your personality (Conscientiousness, Impulsivity)**
- **Emotional intelligence – “giving in to feel good”**
- **Stop the self-deception**
- **Harness your liabilities – structured procrastination**
- **Use upward counterfactuals**
- **Examine & challenge your irrational beliefs (perfectionism)**
- **Work from your ideal not ought self**
- **Self-consciousness and flow**


Goal representation
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Motivation



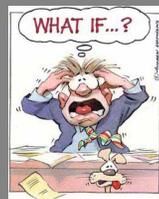
Personality

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Change your personality?

- Conscientiousness
- Neuroticism
- Extraversion
- Optimism
- Perfectionism



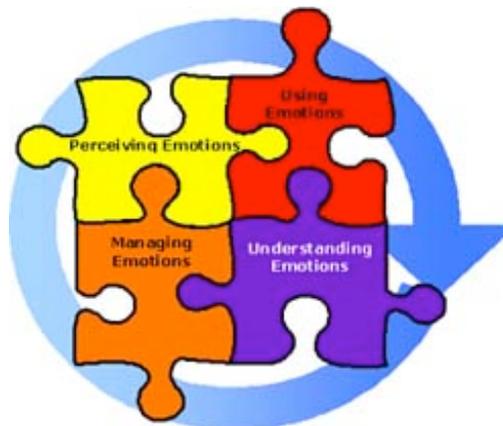
Arousal procrastination?



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Emotional intelligence – “giving in to feel good”



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Tice, D.M., & Bratslavsky, E. (2000). Giving to feel good: The place of emotion regulation in the context of general self-control. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 149-159.

Nelis, D., Quoidbach, J., Mikolajczak, M., & Hansenne, M. (2009). Increasing emotional intelligence: (How) is it possible? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47, 36-41.

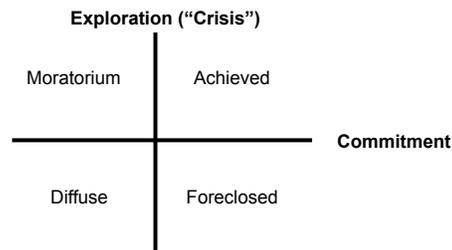
Self Identity and Procrastination



Matthew Shanahan



- Do you know who you are? Does it matter?
- Four Identity Statures:



- AGENCY = Ego executive (action-directing) + Ego synthetic (meaning-processing) functions

Shanahan, M., & Pychyl, T.A. (2007). An ego identity perspective on volitional action: Identity status, agency, and procrastination. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43, 901-911.

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Our research reveals identity achievement is related to lower procrastination. Knowing who you are and where you're going helps keep you focused on your goals. i procrastinate podcasts to learn more.



Self-deception & self-handicapping



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- "I'll feel more like doing it tomorrow." Self-deception.
- "There's plenty of time yet, it can wait." Self-deception.
- Sartre identified how very weird these lies to self are writing ". . . the one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person." Why do we tell these lies? Who believes them?



Ferrari, J.R., & Tice, D.M. (2000). Procrastination as a self-handicap for men and women: A task-avoidance strategy in a laboratory setting. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 34, 73-83.

Lay, C.H., Knish, S., & Zanatta, R. (1992). Self-handicappers and procrastinators: A comparison of their practice behavior prior to an evaluation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 26, 242-257.



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Structured procrastination – Harness your liabilities for motivation



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Upward Counterfactuals (learn from your past)

- Upward counterfactuals are mental simulations of better possible outcomes.
- Downward counterfactuals have the focus on how things might have been much worse. Both forms have emotional and behavioral consequences.

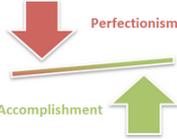


Fuschia Sirois

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Sirois, F.M. (2004). Procrastination and counterfactual thinking: Avoiding what might have been. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 269-286.



Irrational beliefs – face them

Perfectionism Dimensions

Procrastination Measures	Self-Oriented Perfectionism	Socially-Prescribed Perfectionism
	GP Scale	-.02
PASS-Frequency	.07	.21*
PASS-Problem	.09	.28**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
 •Adapted from Flett, Hewitt and Martin (1995)



Neenan, M. (2008). Tackling procrastination: A REBT perspective for coaches. *Journal of Rational-Emotive Behavioural Therapy*, 26, 53-62.

Spada, M.M., Hiou, K., & Nikcevic, A.V. (2006). Metacognitions, emotions and procrastination. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 20, 319-326.

Kilbert, J.J., Langhinrichsen-Rohling, J., & Saito, M. (2005). Adaptive and maladaptive aspects of self-oriented versus socially prescribed perfectionism. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 141-156.

Ideal vs ought self



Lay, C.H. (1995). *Trait procrastination, agitation, dejection, and self-discrepancy*. In J.R. Ferrari, J.A. Johnson & W.C. McCown, Procrastination and task avoidance: Theory, research and treatment. New York: Plenum Press.

Ferrari, J.R., Driscoll, M., & Diaz-Morales J. F. (2007). Examining the self of chronic procrastinators: Actual, ought and undesired attributes. *Individual Differences Research*, 5, 115-123.

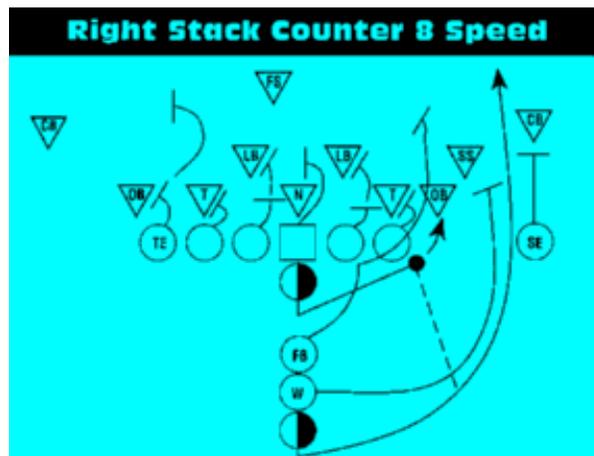


Self-consciousness & flow

- "Being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost."
- Lack of clear goals and self-consciousness



A plan of attack





Randy Pausch



“The last lecture”

- Time must be explicitly managed, like money.
- You can always change your plan, but only if you have one (Make manageable, concrete task lists and take one step after another.)
- Ask yourself: Are you spending your time on the right things? (Make sure your to-do-list tasks, your goals, are really worth pursuing.)
- Develop a good filing system. (Organization saves time in the long run.)
- Rethink the telephone (Don't waste time on "hold" - be prepared to do other things as you wait.)
- Delegate (Many hands make light work, and everyone needs autonomy.)
- Take time out (Everyone needs a break, and not all delay is procrastination.)
- Randy concludes his advice by writing

"Time is all you have. And you may find one day that you have less than you think."

We will all use up all the time that is allotted to us. It is up to us how we decide to use it (Stephen Pynchl).



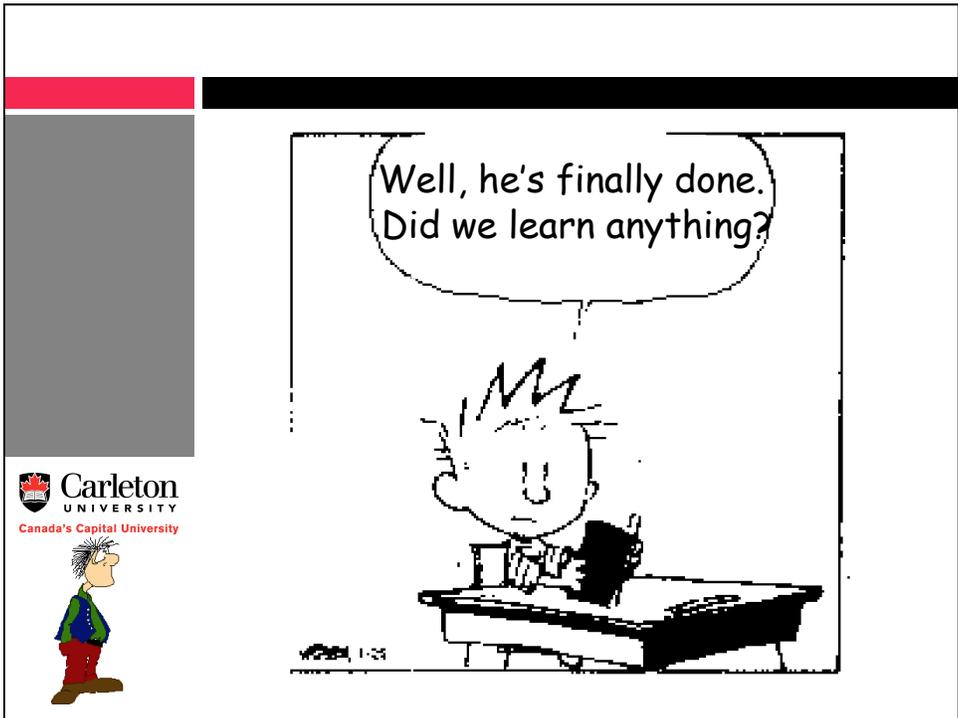
Viktor Frankl



Viktor Frankl on Procrastination

- Since my years in the concentration camps, this pattern has changed. . . I have learned to spend my time more wisely, indeed to make every minute count. **I do this so that I have time for the things that are really important**" (Frankl, 2000; p. 34, emphasis added).
- "Another thing: I try to do everything as soon as possible, and not at the last moment. This ensures that, when I am overburdened with work, I will not face the added pressure of knowing that something is still to be done. There is yet a third principle that has guided my work and it is this: I do the unpleasant tasks before I do the pleasant ones.

Frankl, V. (2000). Victor Frankl recollections: An autobiography. Cambridge, MA: Basic Books.



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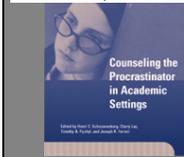
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- Self-help
- Podcasts & Carpe Diem



Carpe Diem

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