



Master the Clock

Take the Time to Find More Time

Created by: Helen Kosinski

Thank you for your interest in Master the Clock! Helen has a special gift for you...

3 Procrastination Busters

By Helen F. Kosinski, PCC, CECE, MBA

“I’m taking care of my procrastination issues; just you wait and see.”

“Procrastinator? No. I just wait until the last second to do my work because I’ll be older, therefore wiser.”

I love these two quotes!

Procrastination is something most of us deal with at least once in a while and quite possibly this is something you handle frequently or all the time. Procrastination usually hits us at the worst possible time, right when we have a DEADLINE looming. There are all kinds of reasons why we procrastinate. We’re too busy, we’re too overwhelmed or we don’t having enough time are common reasons why we wait until the last minute to finish certain tasks.

Have you ever looked at the type of tasks you put off? Are they tasks requiring you to learn something new? According to David Rock in his book [Your Brain at Work](http://amzn.to/2amS48T) (<http://amzn.to/2amS48T>), when we learn something new, it takes a lot of brain power. Just like the rest of your physical body, if you attempt to work on something new when you’ve just finished a brain-taxing process, you will most likely get frustrated and distracted, thus derailing your progress. This is a common cause of procrastination!

What if you tend to procrastinate when you’ve got a BIG deadline that is complicated or has many components? When we try to tackle this project as one big task, we’re setting ourselves up for failure. There have been scientific studies showing our brain is incapable of holding large quantities of items in our mind. One of the most recent research was done in 2001 by Nelson Cowan, at the University of Missouri – Columbia (page 21 – [Your Brain at Work](#)). The study found the maximum number of items you can hold in your mind is FOUR. And, that number is less if it’s something that is a new concept or unfamiliar to you. Wow! You can only hold four or less items in your mind at one time. No wonder we procrastinate when we’re working on a LARGE project, our brains get too full!

So, what can you do to minimize the procrastination?



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1. PRIORITIZE

Taking the time to define and **WRITE DOWN** your top three priorities for the day is a good tool to use to keep focused and minimize procrastination. Here's a terrific question you can ask yourself when you find yourself getting distracted -- "Does this task contribute to one or more of my top priorities?" For example, let's say you have a complicated proposal due and today your top priority is to define the steps involved. When you find yourself starting to get distracted by email, surfing the web, social media, or another project, you can ask yourself, "Does this <fill in the distraction> contribute to the completion of my proposal?" If not, stop doing that and go back to your priority item. Keep your top three priority list where you can see it (I like to use small Post-It Notes). Refer to this list often to keep your priorities top of mind and to keep you on track.

2. TACKLE YOUR PROJECT AT THE RIGHT TIME OF DAY

Are you a morning person? Do you start to drag at about 3pm? Pay attention to when you do your best work. Then use your schedule to block this peak performance time for complicated or new initiative projects. This approach will yield much better results, with less procrastinating. If you're going to continue working on one project for an extended period of time, be sure to give yourself a break. One key to successfully using a break is to set a time limit. You can use a timer and then go back to your project when it chimes. Here are some other things you may want to consider doing during your break:

- physically move (e.g., walk around, step outside)
- get some water or some other fluids to stay hydrated
- eat something (e.g., an apple, nuts).

3. BREAK YOUR PROJECT DOWN INTO CHUNKS

A big project can be overwhelming. Often we really do want to make some headway on it; however, sometimes we don't even know where to begin. A great tool to help you with this is called "Chunking". Chunking is taking a huge project and breaking it down into smaller more manageable pieces or chunks. By focusing your efforts on completing one chunk at a time, you minimize or stop the overwhelming feeling often associated with trying to tackle the entire project all at once. Another benefit of chunking a large project is you can use the chunks to easily determine your priorities (see number one above).

The kryptonite for procrastination is focus. However, it isn't just generic focus; it has to be the focus associated with one of your top priority projects or deadlines. Learning how to be focused on the right things at the right time will make procrastination a thing of the past for you!