

AdVents

M A R K E T I N G

Monthly Publication of The Direct Marketing Association

Vol. XXXIII No. 7

NEXT
LUNCHEON:
JULY 8



by Jeffrey P. Davidson, CMC
Professional Speaker/Author

Creative procrastination can work wonders

It would be nice if you could always tackle the most important project first thing in the morning. Unfortunately, you don't (and sometimes can't) work that way. No matter that you know you shouldn't procrastinate. Some days you just can't make yourself get started on the task at hand. Let's face it—we all procrastinate more than we'd like. But instead of bemoaning this unpleasant fact, let's take a quick look at how to harness procrastination for all it's worth.

My own approach to procrastination is that if I'm handling other priority and goal-related tasks or activities, nothing is lost. Afterwards, the task or activity that I've put off still has to be done. The difference is that once I'm ready to begin the task I'd put off, I've gotten other things out of the way.

In a sense, creative procrastination is a form of time shifting—something like using a VCR to tape a show for later viewing. Remember: I'm not recommending that you procrastinate. But when you can't get started on the task at hand,

take care of something else that's important.

Here are a few pointers that can help you break through the headaches of procrastination:

Face procrastination head-on. Ask yourself what's blocking you—what's the real reason you don't want to get started. Write it down or tape-record it. This exercise may dislodge something and help you begin.

Choose to begin easily. Make a positive affirmation to yourself: "I choose to begin easily on this task." Making a formal choice like this often gives you the power to get you started.

Employ the "Three to Five" method. Ask yourself, "What are three to five things I could do—not to finish the project but just to dabble a bit?" Often initiating these "entry level" activities gives you enough motivation to get you started headlong on the project.

Jump starting. This method often enables you to capture your first—and sometimes best—thoughts. Suppose it's Friday afternoon. You have a project to start on Monday. You don't want to initiate the project now, but you'd like to be ready on Monday. Using jump starting, you might pre-review any supporting items, jot down some notes, begin a rough outline, or undertake related activities "while it doesn't count." During the pre-initiation stage, your thoughts and ideas can flow freely. You've put your subconscious to work on the project—and by Monday you're raring to go.

What about larger, long-term projects? When you work on a long-term goal—sometimes stretching several years or more in length—it's easy to lose momentum and feel as though you'll never finish. You can use the day unit as a convenient measure for charting progress.

How does the day unit work? First consider that:

- John Kennedy was President for 1037 days.
- Columbus crossed the Atlantic in 71 days.
- Operation Desert Storm took 45 days.

For large goals, begin thinking in day units. Think of a day unit as six hours of concentrated, focused work in a calendar day. It may seem like not that much time, but if you're focused it's plenty of time. Leave yourself two hours for conditioning your environment, managing details, and filing. You can calculate how many of these day units you'll need to complete a long-term task. If you factor in weekends, holidays, and other down-time, you'll come up with a manageable, meaningful unit that gives an accurate measure of how long your goal will take.

Approached with the proper perspective, procrastination can lead to creativity and new approaches to big tasks.

Jeff Davidson is a professional speaker and author of several books, including "Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-up Society" (MasterMedia, 1992). For more info, call Jeff directly at 1-919/932-1996