

Figure 1: BUILDING BLOCKS OF DEPRESSION

Now that we are learning to “make a moment better” and have been reintroducing some pleasurable activities into our lives, it is time to tackle procrastination. Many people procrastinate about taxes, so let’s use it as an example. We know that we have to file our taxes as otherwise we might face consequences in the form of audits, fines or even more if we have neglected this chores for way too long. We understand the consequences of not doing the task and yet we have extremely hard time getting started. We are going to try to tackle procrastination by:

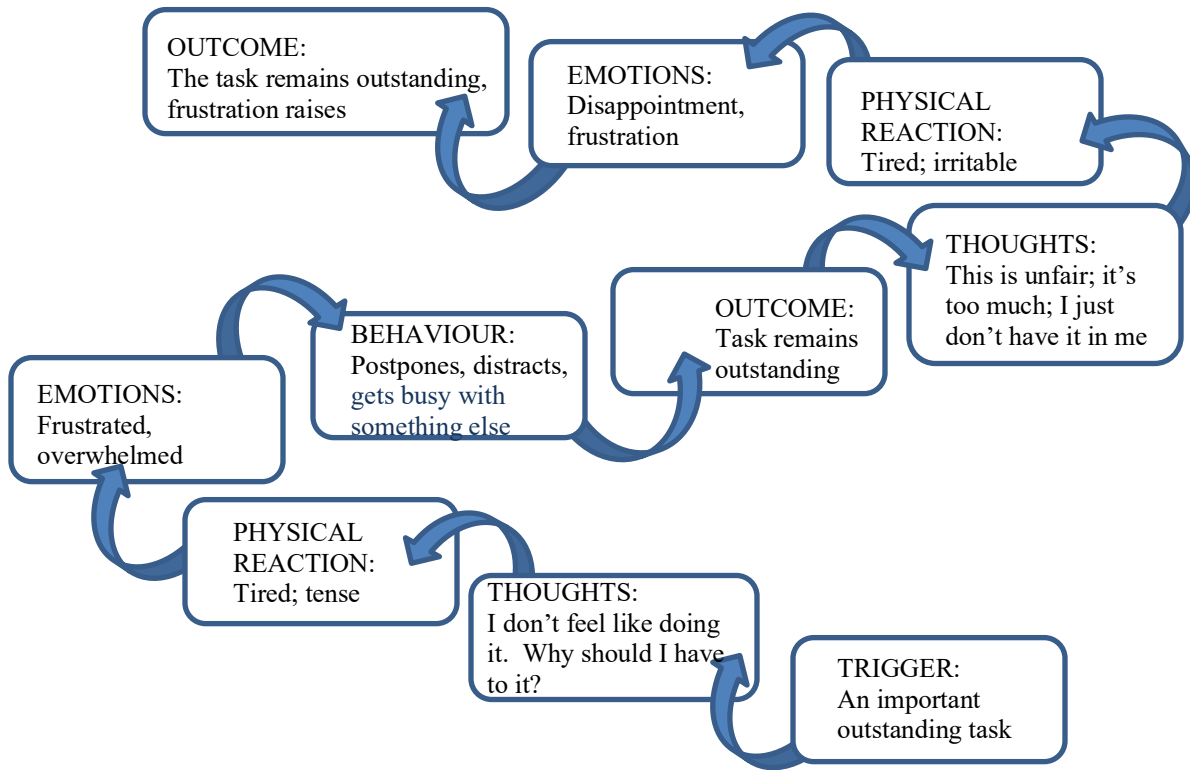
1. Building an understanding of what happens inside of our minds when we procrastinate – after all we know we should be doing all these things but just don’t
2. Recognizing how a nature of the task that we procrastinate about impacts our ability to do what is needed
Differentiating between deadline-based procrastination and general disengagement
4. Committing to making small incremental maintainable changes, and
5. Keeping track and keeping honest

First of all, procrastination is not laziness. A lazy person is not preoccupied with all those things that remain on their to-do list. A lazy person does not have a to-do list and is pretty much content with not doing much. Sometimes we experience periods of very low motivation when depressed. These are marked by very low energy, inability to respond emotionally to rewarding events and lot of negative thoughts about uselessness of our efforts. Again, this is different from being lazy.

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE OF OUR MINDS WHEN WE PROCRASTINATE?

When procrastinating, our minds end up by doing three things. Some people end up by feeling overwhelmed by the task at hand. For them, procrastination is a result of doubting their capabilities, anxiety or general sense of being overwhelmed by a task at hand. Procrastination spiral on the next page shows how such reactions can build upon each other and create a profound sense of stuckness.

Figure 2: PROCRASTINATION SPIRAL



Other people generate procrastination excuses. These explanations allow them to postpone the task at hand without an immediate emotional distress. In fact, not doing the dreaded task and having what appears to be a perfectly rational reason for postponing feels like a temporary reprieve. This is a very hard habit to break as there is always a kernel of truth in our procrastination excuses.

PERCEIVED OBSTACLE (KERNEL OF TRUTH)	PROCRASTINATION EXCUSE (UNHELPFUL CONCLUSION)
<i>I am tired.</i>	<i>I should just rest and do that stuff later.</i>
<i>I just not feel like it.</i>	<i>I'll wait until I am in a better frame for mind.</i>
<i>I'd rather do this...</i>	<i>At least I am busy.</i>
<i>I don't have everything I need</i>	<i>I will wait until I have everything I need</i>
<i>I have plenty of time</i>	<i>So, I don't have to start it now</i>
<i>I don't feel inspired</i>	<i>I will wait till I do</i>
<i>I won't be able to finish it all anyways.</i>	<i>Might be later I will have enough time.</i>
<i>I work better under pressure</i>	<i>So, there is no reason for me to bother now.</i>
<i>It feels like too much pressure.</i>	<i>I need to destress first.</i>
<i>This is difficult.</i>	<i>It should be much easier. I should not have to deal with it.</i>

Whether we end up by feeling overwhelmed by important tasks or skip right away to generating reasons as to why we should not start working on these tasks at this moment, our mind will always produce frustration with the fact that the task remains outstanding and make us annoyed and highly critical of ourselves. So in the long run, we always regret our procrastination.

THINGS WE PROCRASTINATE ABOUT

We often associated procrastination with not doing chores (as in “I will do the dishes, later”). However we procrastinate about many things: chores, one-off important tasks, life impacting decisions, pleasurable activities, self-care (including medical appointments). Most people attending this group initially procrastinate and don’t do the assigned exercises between our meetings.

Make a list of tasks that need to be completed but you ended up by postponing for quite some time. Note whether your failing to complete the task will bring upon negative consequences and whether the task is time sensitive.

Tasks I procrastinate about:	Will there be negative consequences if I do not follow through? If so, what will it be?	Is the task time sensitive? If so, what is the time-frame?

In his [TED Talk](#), [Tim Urban](#) makes a distinction between deadline-based procrastination and procrastination when deadlines are not present. If you only get motivated by fear of punishment that comes from not meeting deadlines, you might never do things that are important to you like finally working on that book you wanted to write since your childhood, travelling to Asia, making decisions about your relationships or career. There are typically two explanations that people offer for their failure to launch: “*I still have time*” and “*It’s too late*”. It is not clear at what point the “*I still have time*” becomes “*It’s too late*” but we would like to argue that it is never too late to organize our lives and that in fact you do not have as much time as you think. If you factor in the time it takes to sleep, eat, commute and take care of our basic needs and necessary pre-set routines like work or child care, you do not have 24 hours in day for personal growth. You might have 4 hours in a week....

Another typical explanation for “failure to launch” is ... fear of failure. Ultimately we fail at everything that we don’t try. Trying and not succeeding does not feel well. Yet whatever disappointment we might feel, objectively we are not worse off than we were before trying.

COMMITTING TO SMALL INCREMENTAL CHANGES

Many workshops on procrastination use a picture of a stick person walking up the stairs as contrasted with someone standing next to a big mountain that they cannot scale. It is very easy to get overwhelmed in anticipation of the future effort. Instead of a stick figure climbing stairs, we would like you to consider the picture to the right. You can take a break during your climb and chances are that you will not slide back down. We might not value our past accomplishments but if you studied and graduated, your diploma will not be taken away.



Granted, you might have worked hard in the past and feel like you have lost a lot because of an illness, accident or downsizing at your company. You might not necessarily reap obvious benefits of your past efforts at the moment but at least you have life experiences that you can be proud of. And even those of us whose life is on hold due to being forced into incredibly difficult circumstances, need to start somewhere: with small, incremental, maintainable changes.

Small, because if you take too much too soon you are not likely to achieve it. In fact you might be creating a task aversion – a student who does not study until the night before the exam equates studying with overnight cramming sessions while someone who cleans their room only when absolutely necessary starts associating cleaning up with high level of effort.

Incremental because although small changes are easier and might be difficult to note, these changes can build to greater gains. All those small behaviour changes are meant to add up and get you closer to the goals that you want to accomplish and create a sense of direction.

Maintainable because we want to have a lasting impact and for the new way of doing things to become as routine as possible. Eventually these changes should not only add up but also feel natural.

GETTING RE-ENGAGED WORKSHEET

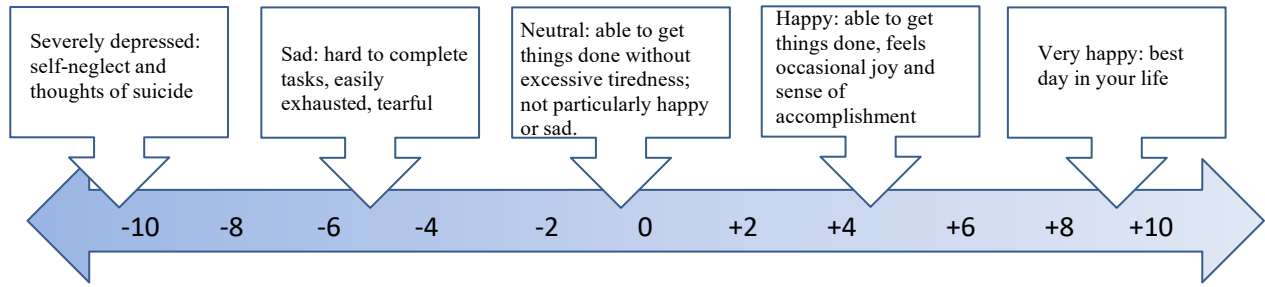
Write down what you are planning to do, when, where and with whom.				
PART 1: INITIAL REACTION	Write down any thoughts that come to your mind as you are thinking about doing what you plan to do.	Do you think that what you're planning to do will be difficult (0-10)?	Do you think that what you're planning to do will be bothersome (0-10)?	Do you think that what you're planning to do will be pleasurable (0-10)?
	What physical reactions are you feeling when you are planning your activity?	What emotions do you feel when you're planning your activity?	What do you feel like doing when you're planning your activity?	
PART 2: OUTCOME	What actually happened? Where did you go? What did you do?			
	Write down what you think about your experience.	How difficult was it (0-10)?	How bothersome (0-10)?	How pleasurable (0-10)?
	What are your physical reactions after having completed your activity?	What are your emotions after having completed your activity?	<u>What do you feel like doing now?</u> <u>What do you feel like doing next?</u>	

SELF-MONITORING LOG

Planned Actual

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 am							
8 am							
9 am							
10 am							
11 am							
12 noon							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7 pm							
8 pm							
9 pm							
10 pm							
11 pm							
12 midnight							
1 am							
2 am							
3 am							
4 am							
5 am							
6 am							
Mood rating (-10 to +10)							

KEEPING TRACK AND KEEPING HONEST



DATE:							
Rate your overall mood for the day using the scale above and mark it on the graph.	+10						
	+8						
	+6						
	+4						
	+2						
	0						
	-2						
	-4						
	-6						
	-8						
-10							
What challenges / stresses were you faced with today?							
Did you engage in any meaningful activity? If so, what was it?							
What skill have you practiced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity
What other things were you able to accomplish?							

BEING HONEST AS A WAY OF CURBING PROCRASTINATION

After committing to a plan, prioritizing our tasks and placing reminders everywhere many of us will still press a snooze button on our lives. We have no choice but to practice honesty with ourselves in order to remain on track. The table below offers examples of “honest talk”

WHAT WE SAY TO OURSELVES	WHAT IT REALLY MEANS	HOW TO COUNTER IT
I will do the dishes tomorrow	I tend to leave dishes in the sink for days at a time, so this means that I will do the dishes when I have no clean plates available or shortly before my parents come for a visit.	I better do it now – 10 minutes now vs. much longer later.
I take care of it on the week end.	I spend my week ends in “active resentment”. There is so many things that I want to catch up on but I am just too tired. I end up by sitting and doing nothing: neither resting nor catching up.	I want to both rest and do some work so I will schedule couple guilt free hours for rest and leisure and try to do chores for 2 hours on Saturday and 2 hours on Sunday
Your Example:		

THE 15-MIN RULE

Sometimes we simply find it extremely hard to do anything and are not sure it relates to exhaustion or symptoms that might be managed. The best way around it is to try to do something meaningful for about 15 minutes. If you notice that your energy increased and you got engaged in the task, let’s continue and see what you can do. If you feel exhausted and the task is not progressing, we just call it quit.