

Conquer Procrastination Now: 10 Essential Steps.

© Lynn Kennedy-Baxter, RN, M.A.

Do you want more confidence? Then you have to conquer this sabotaging bad habit right now. It makes no difference how long or how much you have procrastinated in the past. There are specific actions to take and practice daily.

Here is a brief guide, using exercise as the example of procrastination, since it is such a common area of procrastination.

1. What in the world are you saying to yourself?

Do you say, "I just don't have time today?" Do you say, "I should do this, but..." and fill in the blank with your excuse? Do you say, "It's not that important?" One woman kept saying over and over to herself and anybody else who would listen that she hated to exercise. Guess what? She never exercised.

Listen to yourself. Some self-talk occurs below the level of awareness, so you may have to turn up the volume to actually hear the specific message you are giving yourself. Just keep listening - gently - and the information will come.

Without the specific information in your self-talk, it is difficult to devise an effective strategy to conquer your procrastination, so pay close attention. Then write down all the many things you say before you procrastinate. It may be an eye opener. It will be negative, I guarantee.

Once you have the negative, turn it around and make it a positive statement. For example, if you constantly say, "I just don't have the time to exercise," you can turn that around to say, "Just for today, I can find 15 minutes to exercise."

2. Stop letting yourself off the hook right now!

Stop giving yourself permission to procrastinate. Yes, you have a choice and yes, you can stop. Only you can change your mind. Admit that there are consequences for your procrastination, whether it is being weak, feeling sluggish and having low energy or simple weight gain. The more you let yourself off the hook, the worse you feel about yourself.

Be Confident Today

Your self-esteem slips. It is time to say, "ENOUGH ALREADY!"

3. Be positive! Change your self-talk now.

What do you need to hear to energize you to action? Perhaps it is as simple as the child's story about the Little Engine That Could. "I can do it. I can exercise. I can go for a walk. I feel so good about myself when I exercise."

Leave the word "should" out of your self-talk. You have been told you "should" exercise a thousand times, and it does not make your exercise. It just makes you feel guilty and procrastinate more, so stop saying it.

4. You are bigger and more powerful than your procrastination!

Take a few quiet minutes and imagine how your procrastination looks, feels and sounds. It probably looms large in your mind. Dark. Ugly. Menacing. Or perhaps gooey and gray and oozing around your feet. Heavy. Silent or maybe with sad, slow funeral music.

If you think you can resolve your problem of procrastination by will power and force, you have thought of a surefire way to sabotage yourself. You will abandon what you are forcing yourself to do very quickly! Do just a little bit of the new action each day!

Shrink it down or mop it up. Change the tune. Change the image directly. Tell yourself that you are bigger and you are stronger than that bad habit. Your procrastination will only have power over you, if you continue to feed it by saying the things that keep it going and growing.

You need to take a one-day-at-a-time approach to getting out of this habit and create new, healthier actions that make you feel confident. Do just a little bit of the action today; 15 or 20 minutes to get you started. Walk, don't run. The days will add up faster than you think.

5. Give it up!

What would it mean to you if you gave up your negative self-talk and your procrastination? Do you use your identity as a procrastinator to control someone else in your life? Is it a protection against being dominated? Do you use your procrastination as a way to rebel against somebody in authority? Is your procrastination your way of defeating yourself? Are you saying that you are a helpless victim?

Figure out another, more effective way to handle those problems, so you can give up your identity as a procrastinator and have some fun. Stop being a victim and take action. You need the confidence of action to be healthy, strong and energetic to have fun in life.

Be Confident Today

6. Start saying that you have the intention and initiative that you need to take new action every day.

Think of yourself as having initiative ONLY TODAY and fulfilling your intention to take action ONLY TODAY. You can change that old identity as a procrastinator one day at a time. It's almost like an affirmation: Today I have the initiative and the intention to take action promptly.

7. What is do-able? What is a do-able amount and kind new action?

Be realistic. Keep it do-able. Don't start with the ideal. If you are tackling exercise as your project to overcome procrastination, answer the questions about when you actually exercise and how much and what kind of exercise.

Write down when and how you will exercise. Write it in your day planner or enter it in your phone calendar. Give yourself permission to start with just a little bit and work up to more as you gain strength and endurance.

Take time to identify what specifically you are avoiding when you procrastinate. You probably need to create a strategy to deal with those feelings, so you can move ahead. Plan your new action in advance and create support for doing that.

Put your inspiration on your screen saver. Tape your inspirational command to your TV screen, so you have to see it when you turn on the TV.

Think about it and get creative with inspiration that works for you.

8. Some part of you loves to take action!

Inspirational reminders can be as simple as something written on brightly colored paper. ACTION = CONFIDENCE! Put it by your bed so you will step on it in the morning when you get out of bed.

Put your inspiration on your screen saver. Tape your inspirational command to your TV screen, so you have to see it when you turn on the TV.

Think about it and get creative with inspiration that works for you. Get in touch with the excitement of taking action and feeling confident when you do.

9. Do it!

Nike made a brilliant move when they adopted the motto, "Just do it." Sometimes that is what it takes to propel you out of your procrastination and into the action that gives you confidence.

Calculate your risks of taking action and not taking action. Don't be reckless or impulsive. Sometimes your procrastination is a signal that you are not considering something important about this action, so you need to examine your hesitation.

Be Confident Today

10. Pat yourself on the back!

This is a MUST to keep you moving in the right direction toward more confidence. You must give yourself credit for even a little bit of new action. You are going in the right direction, so you deserve a "Good job!" word of praise for yourself.

Avoid all or nothing expectations for yourself as you change your behavior. Avoid the pitfall of judging that the amount or kind of action you have taken is "not enough". This is very demoralizing and very de-motivating.

Do enough to keep you going in the right direction toward more self-confidence. The pat on the back keeps you coming back for more and strengthens the positive changes you are making. You now realize that you have the power to reward yourself.



Follow these steps, implement the suggested actions and you have conquered your procrastination. You have become a confident person of action.



P.S. If your efforts to conquer your procrastination do not work with these strategies, consider being evaluated for depression by your physician or mental health professional.

Mild to moderate chronic depression is often characterized - not by feeling depressed - but a pervasive sense of being tired and overwhelmed, which then leads to procrastination.

Research shows that exercise is still one of the most important ways of treating depression, along with cognitive-behavioral therapy and possibly antidepressant medication.