

Procrastination exposed

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ten and when your final copy is due."

Procrastination U

Asides from addition to pressure, one of the most important causes of procrastination among students is the university environment, which Walker terms "a procrastina-

tion system." Many professors try to be responsive to student needs by being flexible with deadlines, but this often rewards procrastination, thus allowing the student to count on soft deadlines. Moreover, Walker says that the lack of structure caters to those who want to put things off instead of learning unfamiliar -- but ultimately valuable -- time-management skills.

Kolbus agrees that his procrastination thrives when there is no structure.

"If I've got a plane to catch at 8:30 I know that it leaves at 8:30 so I'm there on time to catch it -- there's no flexibility in those sorts of things. But if you give me flexibility on something then I'm going to take advantage of it."

For many students university marks the first time

they have not had any formal structure to work under, essentially meaning that this is the first time when they have the chance to take charge of their own future. For some, this can mean that they learn to take control over their time and gain a sense of empowerment from that control. Other students, however, learn how to work within the procrastination system, and while many of them can get away with it for quite some time, Walker says that is ultimately catches up to them one way or another.

"The only reason we change anything is when we meet a crisis," she explains. "It could be a small crisis or a big one, but it is always something. As long as procrastination is costing less than the benefits, then procrastinators will keep putting off their responsibilities."

Jeanna Struntinsky, the coordinator of the Peer Advisors centre at U of M agrees, saying that many students make the mistake of dismissing minor crises instead of dealing with them before major problems hit.

"Around exams and mid-terms a lot more people come to the Peer Advisors offices [with procrastination problems]," she said. "A lot the time all we need to do is take people back to the basics and tell them that they really need to schedule their time better instead of cramming it in at the last minute -- common sense stuff that people need gentle reminders about."

For Kolbus, the crisis came last year when he nearly failed a several courses because he let his work pile up too much. It got so bad that at one point Kolbus wrote a draft 6,000 word essay two nights before his final, picked up the corrected version of the essay the next day, stayed up all night rewriting the essay and then handed in the final draft the day of the exam.

"In university you don't

get nailed right away because the first years can be so easy," he explained. "Then all of a sudden you get to a point where you realize you can't get away with it anymore. I think the assignments and essays get to a certain point where you can't do it all in one night, you have to learn to spread it out."

Conquering Procrastination

When procrastination stops working for someone, as it usually will at some point, Walker says it is crucial to deal with the procrastination the right way. Instead of feeling guilty about missed opportunities or feeling completely out of control, students must realize that they have simply developed a bad habit that can usually be dealt with relatively easily.

"You have to face yourself," Walker said. "Admit you are a procrastinator and realize what areas are causing your problems. Then, consult with either a counsellor or a book to understand the particular roots of your procrastination and what you can do to correct it."

Most student procrastinators simply have never learned proper time management skills and once they develop even basic abilities they recover quite quickly from their procrastination.

"Start small," Walker advises. "Make a list of three things you are avoiding doing and then do them for at least 10 minutes first thing in the morning. If you get in the habit of getting them out of the way first thing in the morning, you'll find the remainder of your day will be much more enjoyable."

Another useful exercise is to establish what Walker calls a baseline -- a list of exactly what you spend your time doing on any given week.

"A baseline is one of the most significant exercises anyone can do because most students never realize how they

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What kind of Procrastinator are you?

There are no quick fixes for the practiced procrastinator. Conquering procrastination begins with understanding what type of procrastinator you are. Dr. Lilly Walker of the University of Manitoba Counseling service has developed a list of the four procrastinator patterns. Which one fits you best?

PERFECTIONIST: Perfectionists set high goals for themselves. Their dreams and lofty aspirations excite and stimulate them. They have great expectations of what they can be. They are good visualizers so when the reality of their day-to-day behaviour does not meet their expectations, they retreat into their fantasy world. Perfectionists are demanding, insightful, and astute. They are well-aware of their inadequacies.

They frequently attempt to motivate themselves with a series of I should admonitions. However, they have difficulty translating their good intentions into concrete actions. Perfectionists utilize their fantasies as a way to avoid their fears. They fear not measuring up, being mediocre and never being successful. They fear failure. Their challenge is to translate their dreams into action, and to change their demanding expectations into more realistic alternatives.

POSTPONER: Postponers live for the moment. They are motivated by savouring pleasure and avoiding pain. Postponers have a low tolerance for frustration and boredom. For the postponer, life is intended to be fun. They find routine and self-discipline monotonous, thus they yearn for stimulation and excitement. The postponer views tomorrow as an extension of today, consequently there is no need to plan or prioritize.

Postponers thrive on the stimulation of surprise and the creative tension of difficult deadlines. Handling the pressure, working feverishly at the last minute and squeezing in under the wire add to the excitement that energizes them. Postponers put off responsibilities as long as they can, then complain when they feel pressured by deadlines and incapable of performing as well as they could if they had more time. The postponer's procrastination type protects them from feeling responsible for their own destiny and facing the reality of creating their own future.

POLITICIAN: Politician's invest energy and effort into pleasing others. They are attracted to provocative ideas and fascinating people. They often choose activities because their friends, parents, co-workers, or significant others want them to be involved in that activity. Easily swayed by the opinions or requests of others, they have difficulty setting limits and making decisions. Easily distracted, they have trouble staying with a task and are confused about their personal goals.

Because they need other's approval as the basis of their feelings of self-confidence they allow others to direct their lives. They fear others will not like them and will go to any effort to ensure that others value and appreciate them. Politicians may be unaware of their procrastination pattern, feeling instead overwhelmed and overextended.

Because they are overly invested in other's expectations, they easily over commit themselves and have difficulty defining their own preferences or determining their own priorities. Politicians worry about disappointing others, thus procrastination is a way to handle the demands and expectations they feel. Procrastination is the politician's means of gaining acceptance and approval.

PUNISHER: Punishers perceives themselves as inefficient, irresponsible, undisciplined and lazy. They feel trapped in their procrastination patterns perceiving their deficiencies as their destiny. Self critical, fatalistic and hypersensitive to mistakes and inadequacies, they feel defeated and unable to see any possibility for personal change.

Their tendency to over-generalize or perceive situations in extremes traps them into feelings of powerlessness and self-doubt. They overestimate other's abilities and underestimate their own thus producing feelings of worthlessness and fears of never succeeding. Their judgmental attitude and irrational thinking blocks them from discovering alternatives for productively managing their life.