

GETTING UNSTUCK: 3 Rules to Move Forward When You're Overwhelmed

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The clock radio clicks to life at 6:00 on Monday morning. Norah Jones croons her way from the speakers you as you force yourself into consciousness. The weekend was relaxing and warm; there was time to play, go out to eat, and take in a movie. You even did some work on the yard. However, as your thoughts crystallize in the present and you realize how much you have to do in the coming week, those fond memories of the last few days vanish in an instant. Your fist comes down on the alarm shut off switch, Norah is silenced, your mood sours, and you drag your beaten self into the bathroom, hoping to be revitalized (or at least wakened) by the beating of warm shower water on your face.

It's 6:01 on Monday morning and you are already looking forward to next Saturday. Is this any way to live a life?

We've all been there, that pit-of-your-stomach deep, heavy, dread as we stare down an endless list of chores or a major assignment that we know we have to accomplish but would rather avoid. It's not necessarily that we put it off too long; it's too difficult, unrewarding, or we feel we are not skilled in what needs to be done. Sometimes, it involves unpleasanties such as talking to someone we would rather avoid.

Because we usually opt for the path of least resistance, these tasks get relegated to the "WIGATI" stack. (Um, for those who don't know what that means, its stands for "When I Get Around To It" — which coincidentally will be the same day it snows in the Sahara.) The WIGATI stack grows, the list increases, our anxiety is amplified. So, the cycle continues.

Unpleasant, delayed, tasks do not fall into only one aspect of our lives; rather they pop up in all areas.

A sales person faced with a call list of prospects that appear to be avoiding him will do anything to avoid picking up the phone. He'll rearrange his desk countless times, make sure his filing is up to speed, and refill his coffee cup so often that he vibrates when he sits.

The thirty eight year old mother of two looks in the mirror and wonders when she turned into her mother. Sure, she loves mom; but looking like a somewhat dowdy matron when there is still so much of life ahead? That doesn't seem right. However, each time she starts her

diet, she thinks of how far she has to go, becomes overwhelmed with the journey ahead, and consoles herself with a chocolate cream cupcake and double chocolate mocha at the local coffee house.

Look at your own life and you see unfinished assignments: the "junk room" in the back of the house that needs to be arranged, the piles of files in the office that need to be sorted, clearing the garage, setting up the dentist appointment, cleaning the gutters.

It won't get done by itself — and it only get worse over time.

How do we move forward and break the lock of stagnation, moving these tasks from the WAGATI file to the DONE pile?

3 Things to Remember to Break the Stranglehold of Procrastination

- 1) *Understand every assignment is really a compilation of many smaller assignments. Pick one thing and work on that.*

For example, cleaning out the garage appears to involve sorting through several old, greasy, dirty boxes; arranging what goes where; throwing out the junk and placing away neatly the "good stuff"; renting a truck; loading everything into the truck to take to the dump or the thrift store; hauling it away, etc. The list continues.

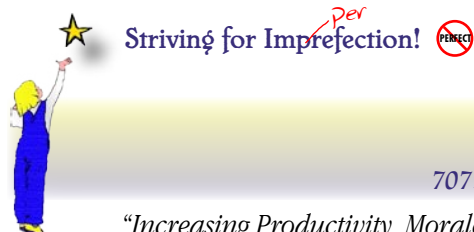
If you look at the list of assignments merely as several smaller lists, and then pick one component of it (such as sorting the boxes), you are more inclined to move forward.

- 2) *Make the task as small as you can (while still having forward momentum).*

What causes us to be overwhelmed is the misperception that we have to complete an entire assignment once we start. That is simply not true.

For example, the sales person does not have to call the entire list, he merely has to make one call. The dieter simply needs to stay with her program long enough to lose one pound. The closet can be arranged one box at a time.

continued on next page>>



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"Increasing Productivity, Morale, and Happiness by Reducing Procrastination & Perfectionism"



Tell yourself you will take one component of one job and limit your time on that assignment to no more than 30 minutes.

Many times, people discover that by limiting themselves they actually accomplish more than they expect. The stress is reduced and they are energized because they know that when the 30 minutes is up, they get to do something else.

3) *Focus on today.*

One of the more common reactions to this method of breaking through procrastination is, "At this rate of breaking it down and making it small and limiting myself to 30 minutes a day, it will take too long to get it done!"

At this point, one needs to remember that until you start, NOTHING is happening. Doing something, no matter how small, is still doing more than sitting still. In other words, slower is faster than never.

Ironically, wanting to get it done quickly usually causes procrastination. The task ahead is so unwanted and unpleasant that you want it finished as quickly as possible. But because you look at it as one big old ugly pile of "Yick," you avoid it and it festers. By accepting that it will take time, that you can break it down, and that slow is at least forward movement, you can actually accomplish your goals.

An Easy Way to Remember This

The next time you start to feel overwhelmed with an assignment, remember to "Think 1st", which is an acronym for the three steps:

- 1) Pick **1** thing
- 2) Make it **S**mall
- 3) Get through **T**oday

By breaking down seemingly insurmountable assignments into smaller, easy-to-accomplish steps, you will find that over time, things get done.

