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4 Science-Backed Methods to Stop Procrastinating

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You have a huge deadline hanging over your head, and you know you should just get started but you can't quite seem to stop procrastinating. Instead you answer a few emails, clean through your files, call your grandma, and organize your sock drawer anything you can find to delay that daunting project just a little bit longer.

Obviously, this isn't the greatest productivity method, particularly when you really just need to grab the bull by the horns and conquer that dreaded assignment that's been hanging out on your to-do list for weeks.

But what can you do to actually inspire yourself to start making progress on those projects that seem completely overwhelming ? Turns out, science has some pretty solid answers.

What causes you to push those big projects off ?

There are a couple of psychological reasons you could be your own worst enemy when it comes to making progress on those large projects. Often it comes down to plain old http://blog.trello.com/self-sabotag... self sabotaging of your productivity, as researchers have discovered this can often be a subconscious effort in self preservation.

If you do something that's the polar opposite of what you *should* be doing (think cleaning out your inbox instead of outlining that major report), you're giving yourself an out an external element you can blame for the fact that you haven't made any progress.

Other scientific research illustrates another way that your own brain might be doing you in. A http://psycnet.apa.org/?&fa=mai... study conducted by Yale University discovered that your brain attempts to simulate productive work by filling your time with those small, easy to handle tasks on your to-do lists. You aren't actually making any progress on that big project, but you still *feel* like you're being productive.

Your brain can be a devilish little trickster, can't it ?

How To Stop Procrastinating And Actually Get Started

While "just do it" makes for a catchy Nike slogan, it's not exactly the most helpful or motivating productivity advice. After all, if you had the inner wherewithal to just get going you likely would have done it already.

So here are four science-backed tips to help you finally stop procrastinating :

1. Set Mini Milestones By Following The Progress Principle

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You know that accomplishing a huge task or a daunting project feels amazing but it's not always that simple. Unless you're some sort of red-caped productivity superhero, productive strokes of genius can't happen every single day.

It's for this very reason that breaking a large assignment into http://blog.trello.com/the-psycholo... smaller milestones is a great productivity trick. For starters, it creates a roadmap of clear action items you can follow to the finish line. Instead of feeling like you have no idea where or how to make your start, you'll have a detailed outline telling you exactly what should happen, and when.

https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-power-o... Recent research outlines a phenomenon called the progress principle, which explains that of all the things that can boost emotions and perceptions during a workday, the most important is making progress in meaningful work. Learning to recognize and celebrate these smaller accomplishments within a larger project will significantly boost your mood and motivation.

In short, happiness and productivity are more closely related than you might think. So, go ahead and take a pause for your happy dance with each step you take. It's good for you.

2. Make Mean Deadlines
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Which of these statements instills in you a greater sense of urgency : That big project is due in two months, or that big project is due in 60 days ?

If you're like most people, the deadline that's outlined in days instills a much greater sense of urgency. It's a little counterintuitive, as you'd think that the larger number would actually be somewhat comforting. But, breaking tasks down into days (rather than weeks or months) can really help to give you the kick in the pants you desperately need.

During http://pss.sagepub.com/content/earl... a study conducted by researchers at the University of Michigan and USC, participants were split into two groups. The first group was asked if they were to retire in 40 years, when should they start saving for retirement ? The second group was asked if they were to retire in 14,600 days (equivalent of 40 years), when should they start saving for retirement ?

As expected, the group given the measurement of time in days felt a stronger sense of urgency to start saving sooner as compared to the group given the measurement in years.

But why ? According to the researchers of the study, stating deadlines in days better connects your future self to your present self, therefore increasing the feeling that time is quickly slipping away.

3. You're Not Running A Marathon
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When you have a deadline hanging over your head like a dark, threatening rain cloud, it's all too easy to think that you should buckle down and park yourself at your computer until you're exhausted and blurry-eyed in the wee hours of the morning.

But, as http://www.theatlantic.com/business... scientific findings tell us, you're better off working in chunks rather than marathon sessions. In fact, cranking out work for a period of 52 minutes with a 17-minute break could be the absolute ideal sprint to kick your productivity up a notch.

If you aren't into those awkward time frames, the http://blog.trello.com/how-to-pomod... Pomodoro Technique is a 25 minute time management method that will help you ensure you're taking adequate breaks and giving your brain some space to breathe.

It can seem counterproductive to http://blog.trello.com/taking-break... take breaks when you're really trying to hustle. But, they can actually be a great thing for both your sanity and your productivity. Plus, the https://open.buffer.com/science-tak... science is there to support it. Researchers analyzed the brain activity of people who were daydreaming, and found that regions associated with complex problem solving were highly active during that time :
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Image credit : Buffer

Counterintuitive ? Maybe. Productive ? Definitely.

4. Your Stress Is Sabotaging You
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While the advice to step back and take a deep breath might sound cliché, it actually holds some water.

High levels of stress can destroy your productivity. As this https://www.liveplan.com/blog/2015/... Towers Watson study demonstrates, 57% of employees who experience high stress at work were found to be far less productive and even felt disengaged from their own work.

According to surveys conducted by Towers Watson, there are some startling correlations between stress and productivity (or lack thereof) : 57% of workers who have high stress at work felt less productive and disengaged 68% of workers felt that the hours required to complete their work each day outnumbered the hours in their workday. High stress at work is linked to absenteeism.

So if your stomach is in knots and you're breaking into a cold sweat, go ahead and give yourself a breather for a few minutes. You'll be able to come back to that overwhelming project with clear focus, a level head, and a much lower sense of panic.

Stop Procrastinating, For Real This Time

Those large projects that you've been pushing back on your to-do list are undoubtedly enough to send your stomach into your shoes and inspire a sense of impending dread. But, you don't need to dive under your desk and hide until that huge assignment disappears that won't get you anything but rugburn.

Instead, leverage these four scientifically researched methods, and tackle that overwhelming assignment once and for all or, at least until the next one lands on your plate.