



The Procrastination Equation: How to Stop Putting Things Off and Start Getting Stuff Done

Piers Steel

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DON'T WAIT TO READ THIS BOOK: The world's leading expert on procrastination uses his groundbreaking research to offer understanding on a matter that bedevils us all. Writing with humour, humanity and solid scientific information reminiscent of **Stumbling on Happiness** and **Freakonomics**, Piers Steel explains why we knowingly and willingly put off a course of action despite recognizing we'll be worse off for it.

For those who surf the Web instead of finishing overdue assignments, who always say diets start tomorrow, who stay up late watching TV to put off going to sleep, **The Procrastination Equation** explains why we do what we do — or in this case don't — and why in Western societies we're in the midst of an escalating procrastination epidemic.

Dr. Piers Steel takes on the myths and misunderstandings behind procrastination and motivation — showing us how procrastination affects our lives, health, careers and happiness and what we can do about it. With accessible prose and the benefits of new scientific research, he provides insight into why we procrastinate even though the result is that we are less happy, healthy, even wealthy. Who procrastinates and why? How many ways, big and small, do we procrastinate? How can we stop doing it? The reasons are part cultural, part psychological, part biological. And, with a million new ways to distract ourselves in the digitized world — all of which feed on our built-in impulsiveness — more of us are potentially damaging ourselves by putting things off. But Steel not only analyzes the factors that weigh us down but the things that motivate us — including understanding the value of procrastination.

The Procrastination Equation: How to Stop Putting Things Off and Start Getting Stuff Done Details

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Wanda says

I was interested to learn that even pigeons and chimpanzees procrastinate. Somehow that makes me feel better, that I share this tendency with the entire animal kingdom.

The author also points out that nobody procrastinates in every facet of their life. There is always something that we do promptly and regularly without agonizing about it.

For me there are two factors: value and impulsiveness. I procrastinate about the things that I don't really value (e.g. housework). And I did learn a technique to help with that--visualization of the condition that I would like to achieve. It really does motivate me to go make the necessary changes (I've done dishes 3 nights in a row at this point).

Re: impulsiveness, I know that I'm impulsive. I went into a store to buy chocolates for Christmas presents last December and emerged with chocolates AND a laptop. I am the mistress of quick decisions. Unfortunately, this means that I can be distracted from a less-than-riveting task quicker than you can say Squirrel.

On the plus side, at work I have concentration skills and motivation galore. I just need to take life outside work as seriously as life at work.

Was the book helpful? For me, yes. But as the author acknowledges, procrastinators may put off reading it or trying the techniques. Somehow, I think procrastination is with us for the long haul.

Marshall says

Fabulous book on the psychology of procrastination, and tips for how to overcome it. This book explores how we're hard-wired to procrastinate, ways modern society exacerbates the problem, and the economic costs of it.

I was worried the "equation" part of it would prove to be a pseudoscientific attempt to make it sound like he's quantified procrastination. I was pleasantly surprised that it is merely a helpful tool for understanding motivation:

Expectancy x Value

Impulsiveness x Delay

Those four components together determine how likely we will be to act on something. Understanding this means that you can increase motivation for desired behaviors and decrease motivation for undesired behaviors by tweaking each of the variables. The rest of the book explores each of them in detail, with ideas for how each can be tweaked.

The only thing I don't like about this book is that the writing is incredibly cheesy. It often reads like those lame training videos employees are forced to watch: "Meet Tom. Tom has trouble with procrastination. Time-sensitive Tom can avoid procrastinating by ..." That's silly. Drop the lifeless characters with generic names and just say what you want to say. This was forgivable until the end, when he rewards the reader with a sequel to these characters' stories, complete with their sexual escapades. Please.

Seriously though, read this book if you struggle with procrastination. There's no better book for it.

Kate says

Oh my God do I need this book. I actually put off buying this book for a couple of weeks after seeing it in our local indie bookstore, and finally bit the bullet and bought it yesterday. Finished it today, proving one of the authors points--that we tend to dive into things that are relevant and of value to us. Once I got the book, I found it relevant and of value. The first six chapters of the book are all about the science behind the study of procrastination. It ISN'T about perfectionism--it has a lot more to do with impulsiveness. Makes sense to me. Dr. Steel takes a lot of heady psychological stuff and makes it downright funny. Great writer, and I'm sure, if I had been fortunate enough to take a class from him at University of Calgary, where he teaches, he would be a terrific lecturer. He writes the book as if he were talking to you. Wonderful.

And it definitely has its "self improvement" points. But they're backed up by his years of research, so he's not just pulling his suggestions out of his butt. I loved this book. Now, I just need to get around to putting it into practice . . .

Mitchell van Ineveld says

Unsurprisingly, took me two tries over the span of 14 months to finish the book, which demonstrates the extent to which I need it!

This book is extremely helpful, and I highly recommend it to anyone who struggles with procrastination, dieting, saving money or any other behaviour that involves putting future needs ahead of present wants.

Where this book is extremely successful is in framing procrastination in a broader context of impulsivity, and attacking it that way. The first half of book offers a lot of insight into why we procrastinate, How We procrastinate, and just how common and ancient a tradition it is. The second half offers useful, applicable solutions laid out using concrete examples. Exceptional work, highly recommended.

Pulkit says

I really need to curb off my habitual procrastination. And I thought this book would do it for me. How wrong I was.

It starts off well by explaining what causes procrastination in psychological and evolutionary terms and I am glad to have gained that knowledge. The tendency that saved us ages ago has become risky in the modern world where we continuously need to control our urges and think on a long-term basis. Then there were a

few chapters putting down the negative impact of procrastination on our personal lives, on the economy and globally. I think it was pretty concise and well written.

But it doesn't end there, The main reason I picked up this book was to be able to put an end to procrastination and that's where this book fails. Instead of recommending behavioral changes or concrete, specific steps to stop procrastination, it offers vague action plans, trusting the reader to follow through with them with no difficulties. That's the whole point of procrastination - we have difficulty doing things that need to be done, so how can the author, who seems to have a deep understanding of the subject, leave us to follow such non-specific instructions and magically end it all? And ironically, I put off completing this book and didn't read the entire thing.

In short, I was (very) impressed by the theoretical explanations offered but gravely disappointed in the practical knowledge I so hoped this book to offer.

Sarah says

So what does it say about me that I started this book and had to return it to the library before I got to chapter 3?

Okay, I finally finished this book. I think it helped that I listened to it. I really did like it, but I can't say it offered anything new or useful to me. Mostly it was a good reminder and motivator to procrastinate less. I like self help books and how they get me to reflect on how things are going.

I must say, I don't think I really cared for the author's style all that much. He seemed too intent on keeping me entertained. He also seemed to have a few agendas he wanted to squeeze in - like global warming - so be warned if you are sensitive to that sort of talk.

Håkan Fleischer says

Innehållet är fantastiskt bra. En god lektion om motivation, om förhållandet mellan limbiska systemet och prefrontala cortex etc, hur evolution och miljö bidrar till uppskjutande, och tekniker för att öka motivation. Allt stadigt förankrat i vetenskap.

Enda smolket i bägaren är författarens sexistiska, gubbiga och ibland plumpa humor. Exempelvis: "Hur koncentrerad skulle du vara om du satt och försökte jobba på en strippklubb?". Helt onödigt. Exemplet hade varit lika tydligt om det handlade om en stökig pub eller café. En gång är ingen gång, men tyvärr är det lite för många gubbiga "höhö-skratt" inlagda. Eller väldigt många egentligen. Om läsaren inte kan se förbi detta, ja då är det ingen bra bok. Men annars så.

Dave says

Would like to get to this book eventually....

Haaike says

Interessant, onderbouwd boek, waar ik enerzijds inzicht en anderzijds tips uitgehaald heb. Soms iets te Amerikaans voor mijn doen, maar niet zo erg dat het stoort (behalve dan in hoofdstuk 10, dat wordt beter geschrapt wat mij betreft).

Ryan says

Very good. Seriously, halfway through reading this book I had a crazy burst of productivity. The action chapters are great, the science/history chapters somewhat less interesting, especially when you are reading the book to seek help!

Gautam Ahuja says

Yup it helped

Kate says

Having been personally shamed by the author into finishing the book, I upgraded my rating from three stars to four and my tagline from "less stupid than many self-help books" to "an intelligent self-help book." It gave me some good ideas, though I kept putting off finishing it for some reason. Ha! Procrastination joke! I recommended it to my shrink as a resource for people who want to read more about dealing with procrastination. I would read more books by the author.

Actually, I'd really like to see what would happen if he collaborated with a shrink to write a book about the components of procrastination that are rooted in people's psychological issues with self care. What maybe made the book less relevant to me when I first took it up is the fact that my procrastination is fundamentally rooted in resentment of having to take care of myself in addition to my responsibility for taking care of others. That doesn't make the author's advice any less sensible, but it predisposed me to give up early on finishing it.

George Slade says

I'll Review This later.

Mike says

As self-help books go, this was very scientifically documented in the "why" and "how" procrastination happens, yet loosely structured enough in the "what to do" sections to make it flexible and approachable. As a veteran procrastinator, I'd say this will be very helpful to organizations and to individuals needing to get better at getting things done.

Satisfying my "red spine book" February reading challenge.

Piers Steel says

With over 90% of "Good Reads" readers giving it a positive rating, it looks like I did well and, it being in the self-help category, I did good too. The ones who like it best turns out to be someone who is educated or at least appreciates that everything is scientifically backed, likes a wry sense of humour, and really wants to do something about their procrastination. They also don't hold my constructed characters, a vehicle to illustrate some techniques, to too high a literary standard; still, they do seem to suffice. And if I could change anything about the book, it would be the author's note at the beginning where I try to establish my credentials and background. To some readers, it comes across as excessively self-promoting. Sorry for that; I was going for credibility.

Thank you everyone for the thanks you have given me. Among the best thing I get from writing this book are the emails where people share with me how it has affected their lives. It is a nice way to start any day.

PS. Probably flirting with credibility/self-promotion issue again but just got the George A Miller award for the book's research, the top award in all of psychology.
