

SCENE

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Lonnie Sterling and Christine Michaels, Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) and Certified Employee Assistance Professionals (CEAP) and the co-founders of the Center for Change of Florida, have worked in the mental health, employee assistance and substance abuse fields for over 25 years. Their Center provides clients with outpatient counseling and area businesses with Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Together they have established a reputation as dynamic professionals, each bringing unique and varied experiences to their practice.

The Center services a diverse client population dealing with a broad range of mental health issues, such as mood disorders, relationship and family problems, anger and stress management, grief and loss, addictions, eating disorders and relapse prevention. The Center's staff is highly skilled, utilizing a brief, solution-focused, therapeutic approach and techniques such as EMDR and Hypnotherapy.



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After All... Tomorrow Is Another Day.

Scarlett O'Hara from *Gone with the Wind*

For some people, putting things off until tomorrow is a healthy choice; for others, it is a way of life.

Frank has struggled with procrastination his entire life. He postpones so many activities that he has a hard time remembering what excuses he has used when and with whom. Family and friends cannot understand why Frank chooses to live with so much worry and dread about not getting things done. Frank has lived this way for so long he can't even imagine thinking, feeling and behaving differently. Frank is frustrated and angry about his inability to get started and finish projects. He wonders if there is something wrong with his character or is he just lazy.

Frank shares many of the common characteristics of procrastinators. He is disorganized, emotionally dishonest, lacks time management skills and has low self-esteem. He feels overwhelmed and anxious and is paralyzed to begin or finish tasks at hand. As he repeatedly struggles but fails to improve his behavior, he blames his problem on his "bad character".

Procrastination is like a credit card: it is a lot of fun until you get the bill. We often think of procrastination as merely not following through with a decision or task. However, as you can see by Frank's example, procrastination is much more complex than that. It encompasses cognitive, emotional and behavioral components. **The thought:** believing your justifications for not doing are valid. **The feeling:** delaying task completion to the point of experiencing emotional discomfort, such as anxiety, guilt and dread. **The behavior:** relieving emotional discomfort by postponing or ignoring tasks despite negative consequences.

Some people put off procrastination as long as they can. M. Susan Roberts, PH.D, in her book *Living Without Procrastination: How to Stop Postponing Your Life* describes two distinct profiles of procrastinators. One is characterized by **overarousal** and the other is marked by **underarousal**. In the real world, however, pure types rarely exist; most procrastinators are a combination of both.

The overaroused variety has a difficult time tuning out stimulation from the environment. Anxiety is their common experience. They worry incessantly how others will judge their performance. They become overwhelmed and avoid work as a way of coping with fear. Other related characteristics include fear of failure and low self-esteem.

Those who are underaroused have difficulty maintaining attention so projects are not started or left undone. These people

are constantly seeking sensation. Boredom, restlessness and high distractibility make it difficult for them to concentrate, follow through and plan. Due to low frustration tolerance and difficulty delaying gratification, they cannot maintain concentration long enough to do what they know needs to be done. Other related characteristics include: rebellion, perfectionism and depression.

In general, procrastination occurs equally in both sexes. It usually peaks twice in our lifetime, once in our mid to late twenties and then again in our late fifties and early sixties. There doesn't seem to be any correlation between procrastination and intelligence; procrastinators are no less or more intelligent than the general population.

Do you know what happens when you give a procrastinator a good idea? Nothing! All procrastinators have an extensive list of justifications and excuses for doing nothing. None of us are immune to them. Some common ones we've all probably thought, used or heard at one time or another include: "It's too difficult"; "It's too time-consuming"; "I lack the knowledge or skills"; "I'm afraid I'll make a mistake"; "I'll do it tomorrow"; "I'll do it tomorrow if..."; "I need to relax first to clear my mind"; "Maybe if I ignore it, it will go away"; "I'm entitled to have some fun". The problem with this thinking style is it perpetuates procrastination. Every time we delay action we: reinforce negative attitudes toward the task; strengthen the habit of not doing; impede our acquiring training, skills and competence; and indoctrinate ourselves with fears.

Move a muscle, change a thought. The simple cure for procrastination is **do everything opposite—stop doing what you want to do and start doing what you don't want to do.**

- Challenge distorted and negative thinking
- Disarm your critic—change "shoulds" to "wants" and "must" to "choose"
- Be positive and self-affirming
- Create diversions to old habits
- Do a cost-benefit analysis weighing the benefits of procrastination vs. the consequences
- Break the task into manageable and time-limited sub-tasks
- Provide small rewards for accomplishing each sub-task
- Modify your environment by either elimination or enhancement of stimuli
- Find and mirror a good role model
- Be accountable to someone
- Enlist assistance from others
- Be willing to seek professional help
- Don't rest on your laurels—just keep doing

The best way to get something done is to begin. Anon