

Procrastination is simply defined as putting off doing something important or difficult. It is a habit, not a fatal flaw, but because time is money in the legal profession, it can reduce your profitability, points out **Rachel Brushfield**.

Changing procrastination habits requires persistence, but it is possible. The solution is to work out strategies to manage yourself and your procrastination. For lawyers it is easy to put off tasks such as marketing, following up sales leads, giving negative feedback to staff, writing proposals or getting started on a big or difficult case. And while lawyers' sharp analytical minds are a great asset, they can also produce "analysis paralysis."

What causes procrastination?

The basic element is simply fear, but each procrastinator develops and responds to his or her own specific fears differently. Procrastination involves a complex set of emotions, skills, thoughts, attitudes and factors that we are often unaware of. In addition the causes and dynamics of putting off an important but unpleasant task vary from person to person and even from task to task for each individual. Its purpose appears to be to make our life more pleasant, but instead it almost always adds stress, produces disorganisation and frequently failure and leads to self-castigation.

You need Procrastination management strategies

- Articulate and write down your personal goals. Post them on your door, mirror, and notebook so you'll see them frequently.
- Learn time management techniques.
- Break your goals up into small parts.
- Write out a plan for yourself.
- Establish regular times each day to work toward your goals.
- Organise your environment, complete with the tools you'll need, so that it's conducive to working or move yourself to an environment which is conducive to working.
- Start your tasks in good time. Build procrastination time into your schedule.
- Explore your limiting beliefs e.g. fear of failure or fear of success with the support of a coach.
- Don't think "all or nothing."
- Create self awareness of your own ways of procrastination; e.g. notice self-indulgence; socialising; reading; doing it yourself; over-doing it; running away; day dreaming; complaining; blaming etc
- Keep your tasks in front of you in interesting visual ways: set up reminders, signs, slogans, notes, and lists.

MANAGING YOUR PROCRASTINATION

Common causes

- Lack of real interest in what you are doing
- Perfectionism: having extremely high standards which are almost unattainable
- Evaluation anxiety: concern over other's responses to your work
- Ambiguity: uncertainty of what is expected for a task's completion
- Fear of failure and self-doubt
- Fear of success: (e.g. if I succeed, will I be able to maintain the same level of performance, will it make others envious?)
- Inability to handle the task because of lack of the necessary training or skill
- Lack of the information necessary to complete the task
- Environmental conditions, such as:
 - Untidiness of work area
 - Lack of needed materials
 - Inadequate lighting
 - Too many distractions
 - Uncomfortable temperature
- Personal physical condition e.g. fatigue or feelings of stress
- Anxiety over the expectations others have of you. This can be either high expectations that you will succeed or expectations that you will fail
- All-or-nothing thinking (e.g. seeing one small setback as total failure)
- Feeling overextended, trying to manage too much

- Use your impulsiveness. When you get going, keep going. Do something when you think of it. Do instant, tiny things.
- Do something daily. Agree to start a project and stay with it for 5 minutes. Consider another 5 minutes at the end of the first.

Sometimes the solution is really very simple...

Amanda's Tale

Coaching revealed that Amanda believed that "I am the world's biggest procrastinator" which gave us something chunky to work with! Her procrastination took the form of putting off writing proposals until the last minute, because she not only had an acute dislike of writing proposals, but also a fear that she would miss something if she structured her thoughts too soon. In theory procrastinating was giving her choice and a perception of increased creativity, two things which were very important to her.

However, in reality doing things at the last minute created stress and affected her relationship with her husband, who often worked away from home. Further questioning revealed that Amanda much preferred speaking to writing and that she was very good at this. The solution was for Amanda to purchase a Dictaphone and voice response software and to imagine that she was speaking to an audience while creating a proposal. She now captured her initial thoughts and ideas a lot earlier than she had done previously, refining her initial ideas and editing her proposal later. This new strategy still allowed her choice and creativity, but provided lower

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spacious guest suites ranged from the smallest at 75sqM to the sumptuous penthouse at 160sqM, each with generous bathrooms with warm cherry wood flooring and circular jacuzzi styled baths - no water shortage here! The hotel's real raison d'être must be its excellent cuisine using the finest local produce with its extensive menus produced by enthusiastic 'chefs with attitude' from Europe and Ireland. Stay over a weekend to experience a Sunday lunch that is not to be missed, I can only liken it to that of a luxury cruise liner without the movement. Deirdre and her warm friendly staff have a passion for their hotel, even going as far as offering a stable if you would like to take your own horse – it's worth thinking about as this is an excellent area for horse riding.

Donegal

Situated at the head of Donegal Bay this is a rugged northern town with a fine castle whose origins date back to the early seventeenth century. From here you can explore the wild and beautiful coastal scenery with small sandy beaches and inland, enjoy the wildlife and mountains of the national parks. If your penchant is for Irish tweed then Donegal is the place to visit as its tweed production is world renowned and you will be spoilt for choice.

Heading home

From Donegal a very scenic 2.5 hour drive through Northern Ireland will take you to Belfast ports or to its city airport.

Derrybawn House, Co. Wicklow

Prices from €275 double room per night incl. breakfast
t: +353 (0)404 45073 or visit www.derrybawnhouse.com

Harvey's Point Country Hotel, Co. Donegal

Prices from €145 pppn, executive room incl. breakfast
t: +353 (0)74 9722208 or visit www.harveyspoint.com

This trip was supported by **Tourism Ireland**. For more information please visit www.discoverireland.com or call freephone information t: 0800 039 7000

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Law for all

It is still easier to succeed as a male lawyer. However, male lawyers love their children too, and are expected to do even longer hours, socialise after work to achieve partnership, and neglect their families. Male lawyers also have to give up a great deal to achieve career success. They can miss a lot of the experience of their children growing up and are on a constant treadmill of expectations and achievements.

The legal profession is still one of the most intellectually challenging and financially rewarding professions, and it is an honour to be part of it, but there are limits and constraints to be adhered to. We are fast approaching the point where no more chargeable hours can be squeezed into a day, and firms must recognise that their employees must be allowed to have a meaningful work/life balance that will help to control the level of stress in the profession, and enable women like Rosie to be both excellent lawyers and great mothers.

Free and confidential advice and support is available, 365 days a year, from LawCare on health issues such as stress, depression, eating disorders and addiction - T: 0800 279 6888 or go to www.lawcare.org.uk. LawCare also provides free (save for expenses) CPD accredited seminars and presentations at firms. If further information is required please contact the LawCare administration number T: 0870 774 3663.

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with her husband and removed the struggle from a key work task.

Hannah's experience

Hannah kept on talking about setting up a business but never did anything about it. Life became a cycle of putting off working and instead of working, feeling embarrassed by friends when asked about the progress of her business idea, and then followed by depression. Coaching uncovered that the block to progress was her working environment. Her home office was uninspiring with insufficient storage or space. She painted her office, put up inspiring images, bought a new desk and created storage tailor-made for her needs. Within just 2 days, she went from spending 8 hours procrastinating to 8 hours happily and productively working and within 3 weeks she took a stand at an exhibition.

Procrastination can be managed. The first step is to choose to address it. Learning how to manage your procrastination will save you a HUGE amount of wasted time in your life which you can devote to what is important to you. Freeing yourself from the shackles of procrastination can not only increase your billable hours, but also increase your satisfaction and sense of well being. Time well spent!

Rachel Brushfield is a coach with over 20 years' experience including marketing and brand and communication strategy. She specialises in helping business professionals to live and work smarter and to market themselves to achieve what they want both internally and externally. Her clients include Peter Cornell, Clifford Chance, and Pinsent Masons. For more information see her web-site at www.energisingconnector.co.uk