

**101 TIPS FOR
AVOIDING
PROCRASTINATION!**

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I. Introduction

On the back of the jacket of Jack Canfield's book, *The Success Principles*, this quotation caught our attention: "The principles always work if you work the principles".

Perhaps this is too simplistic a statement or merely echoes another familiar marketing "come-on", but it does translate into a variation of the work ethic. To us, this means doing instead of just thinking.

And doing is synonymous to action, execution, implementation, carrying out – all these convey the **active** mode as opposed to the **passive** mode of just thinking.

The human brain knows *no limits* when it comes to thinking out ways and strategies in dealing with all kinds of problems, but if these strategies and plans are NOT acted upon, they really hold no meaning – they're like empty blueprints camouflaged in sparkling rhetoric. And rhetoric comes cheap these days.

We've made up our minds to be less ambitious about this work, and called the 101 recommendations and suggestions contained in this book as simply TIPS. Tips on how NOT to procrastinate.

Procrastination pervades every aspect of our lives. And we've mastered it to perfection having learned a subtle form of it when we were babies.

We *delayed* falling asleep because our mothers wouldn't cradle us in her arms. We've procrastinated in performing our duties at home, in school, in the work place, and in our most fragile human relationships. We shudder to think what the final tally of lost hours will be because we procrastinated habitually.

Some of the tips we share here may be useful and some may be irrelevant. Others will come in handy not necessarily today, but at a later stage of our lives.

Procrastination is an expensive habit. We discovered that one of the ways that will not make us procrastinate is to figure out the dollar amount of something that was not done because of procrastination.

It all points to the generally accepted idea that time is money. This alone can serve as a strong motivator not to procrastinate again. Or at least to try not procrastinate!

Jack Canfield quoted Brian Tracy to drive home the message: "Life is like a combination lock; your job is to find the right numbers, in the right order, so you can have anything you want".

We'd be lying if we told you that if you followed our 101 tips on how not to procrastinate, you can have anything you want. It doesn't work that way.

These tips are ideas that have come from our heads and from other people's heads. And it's up to you to apply them in every segment of your daily routine. Avoiding procrastination is more effective when we

start with little steps. It does not mean having to change our lives drastically.

But as one writer said, not procrastinating will make us appreciate the life we have now. And as we build on the small steps, we'd be amazed at how much we can accomplish over the years.

In deciding not to procrastinate, you may want to accompany this determination with clear cut and well defined goals.

In other words, have a goal that is quantified, and not just qualified.

For example, saying "I will lose weight" is NOT as powerful as "I will lose 35 pounds in 1-1/2 years." These are concrete data you can work with. "I will lose weight" sounds noble enough, but let's count the ways, shall we?

II. Self-Evaluation

Tip # 1 Everything starts and ends with the self

If someone said to you that you were a procrastinator, your immediate reaction would be to defend yourself. "It's his fault", "My mother was like that too", "I was forced to do something I didn't want to do".

Some people like to blame their misfortunes on others. But the truth is, you are equally at fault. You procrastinate because you yourself

choose to procrastinate. The sooner you accept that, the better you'll be able to overcome procrastination.

Tip # 2 *I want NOT to procrastinate anymore*

In line with tip # 1 above, once you accept that procrastination is your weakness, the next step is to eliminate this weakness. Your desire not to procrastinate anymore should be sincere. You need to demonstrate that determination through small daily gestures.

Tip # 3 *Mea Culpa-Take Responsibility*

You've accepted the fact that (a) you're a procrastinator, and (b) you have a sincere desire to change. Now tell yourself that if you fail to achieve a particular goal or a given task, it's because you procrastinated. *Mea culpa*. Admitting guilt is a giant step. Note, however, that there is a huge difference between admitting guilt and being too hard on yourself. Admitting guilt is taking ownership of your actions. Being too hard on yourself is unjustified self-blame. Continue from where you left off.

Tip # 4 *Ask: In what ways do I procrastinate?*

Ask yourself, "In what ways do I procrastinate?" Sit down with pen and paper. Writing them will help you focus and identify them more clearly. Here are some ways where people procrastinate:

- paying bills

- not discussing the complaints you've received about a member of your team for fear of hurting his/her feelings
- repeatedly postponing a dental appointment because you've got better things to do
- not returning the call of your son's teacher because you know what the problem is and you're fed up
- not discussing your resentment about your husband spending too much time at work or with his buddies
- not getting that hair cut, that dress dry-cleaned, that donation mailed
- not visiting a sick relative in the hospital
- not telling your significant other you no longer love her/him
- not calling your doctor about that persistent numbness in your right arm or not fixing a colonoscopy exam date
- not having the car's squeaking brakes checked
- not going to confession because you never know what the priest's schedule is
- not sending that overdue thank you note or making that overdue call to your mother-in-law

Tip # 5 Goals not met because of procrastination

After listing the ways in which you procrastinate, make a second list of goals that you failed to achieve because you procrastinated.

Let's take two typical examples: you promised your editor you'd get that article done by a certain due date. On the day the article was due, the editor calls you. You tell her sheepishly that you didn't have time to do it, and you say something like, "My son was sick for days

and I couldn't concentrate" knowing full well your editor was generous with a deadline date.

Result? You took one step farther away from your goal of becoming a professional writer, and two steps farther away from developing a good relationship with an editor who picked you from the 25 writers who applied for the assignment. You can be sure your name has been taken off her address list.

Second example: you delayed lobbying for your colleague's promotion even if he was the best man for the job.

Result? The job went to someone less deserving; second, your colleague resigned to take up another offer.

When you measure the consequences of a missed opportunity because you procrastinated, ask if the consequence was worth the delay.

Tip # 6 Taking the hint from tips 4 and 5: what is the dollar value of missed opportunity?

In fast-paced societies, people tend to think of time as precious and valuable. Expressions such as "time is of the essence," "time means money," "you missed the train", "you missed a window of opportunity" reinforce the value of time.

When wheelers and dealers on the stock exchange take time off to whisper sweet nothings to their better half, those three minutes can mean hundreds, even thousands of dollars in missed transactions.

So, install a permanent calculator in your brain and calculate how much that missed deal meant in terms of dollar value.

The article you didn't submit could have cost you \$150.00.

Your colleague's resignation from the company wiped off an important asset from your human resources ledger.

If we make it a practice to tag a dollar sign for each of our procrastinations, we'd probably resolve to procrastinate less.

Tip #7 What kind of information do you need in a hurry?

We spend half our lives on the phone. We spend an equally big chunk of time looking for phone numbers and names. The directory is cumbersome. Putting them on your outlook means you have to re-boot your computer.

Here's a neat trick: tear out sheets from your notepad and label each as *kitchen, bedroom and living room*.

Kitchen sheet: jot down the following telephone numbers:

- supermarket
- butcher's
- pastry shop
- utensil stores
- take out pizza and other delivery shops
- drug store
- Oriental grocery

Bedroom sheet:

- dry cleaner's
- doctors and dentists
- walk-in clinic
- shoe repair shop
- alteration shop
- department store
- Catalog order stores, etc.

Living room sheet:

- professional house cleaners
- plant shop
- local home centre
- florist
- bookstore
- eyeglasses
- airport

Or if you prefer to use your cell phone, use its memory feature.

Tip # 8 Filtering the essential from the petty

Procrastination is the opposite of action. When you decide which of your tasks need immediate attention and those that can be done later in the week, you've just learned the fine art of prioritizing. So decide – once and for all – which should be assigned top priority, and then act.

Tip # 9 *Better in black and white than dreaming in technicolor*

That's just our way of saying that when you read things on paper, you're able to act logically; this is much more effective than just thinking out how to avoid procrastination.

Putting down things in black and white is even better than brainstorming with another person. Here's the reason: if you write down what needs to be done, you're the only one who knows what's urgent and important.

You focus on this task from the implementation to completion. Once it's completed, you take it off your list. There's that sense of accomplishment, no matter how small the accomplishment is.

You go on to the next task, until you actually get used to the idea of doing, rather than procrastinating.

Brainstorming with a friend, on the other hand, can be viewed as a positive, but can be a form of procrastination. You'll say to yourself, "what she said makes sense", so you mull over it, leaving the task undone.

Thinking about your tasks yourself and then doing them – without anyone's feedback – is much more productive.

Tip #10 Discard old habits

We're creatures of habit. Even if we know that a certain activity is no longer cost effective, we continue doing it anyway.

One example: not looking for alternatives. It's a lot easier to use the same, familiar road to work, but if there's a quicker, or more relaxing route you can take, find out what that other route is.

It's always good to have alternative routes. Traffic snarls occur in times when you're in a hurry.

Tip # 11 It's mantra time once again

Once in awhile you'll deviate from your intentions. You're a human being with limitations, or else life, without warning, takes a detour, and we get derailed.

Let's take a lesson from our brothers and sisters in the east who live by mantras that they recite to themselves every day.

Here's one you can recite in the morning as you wake up: *"I will not procrastinate today. It is unproductive. I have tasks to do, and I will write them down so I can decide which of them need to be done by 12 noon. My goal is to finish at least 2 big tasks and 2 small ones".*

Tip # 12 Have a second mantra for after the job gets done

Have a second mantra that you can recite after you complete a task. *"I completed my task! I focused well and didn't allow myself to procrastinate. This translates to about \$150.00 that I can take to the bank."*

It may sound vulgar to attach a monetary value to every task accomplished. This reinforces the belief that time is money. And when you make a final tally, you'd be surprised at what you end up with.

Time can always be expressed as a savings or a loss. It's all up to you. And people don't have to know. After all, a mantra is something you keep to yourself!

Tip # 13 If you fall back a few steps, climb the stairs again

If you're a chronic procrastinator, you will experience problems staying on course for the first few weeks. It's like going to the gym for the first time. You're all gung-ho for the first 3 days and then you stop.

Old habits die hard. So you missed doing the three tasks yesterday, big deal. Revise the list, and plan on doing them within a specific time frame. Don't dwell too long on what you failed to do.

Start climbing the stairs again and get to the top without looking back. Aim for completing four tasks today - three from yesterday and one for today.

III. Procrastination at Home

Tip # 14 Keep it simple

This is a common advice. Simplifying your life means a simpler, uncluttered way of living. Get rid of grit and gunk from your house.

When your house overflows with objects, it tends to distract you. And we all know what happens when there is too much distraction. It prevents you from thinking and acting intelligently, hence you procrastinate.

Go around your house and make a list of everything you don't really need. For instance, do you really need three toasters in the kitchen? One hasn't been working for months. You either dispose of it or have it fixed.

Tip # 15 Ask family members to do an "inventory"

Ask your husband and children to do an inventory of clutter. Your husband can do the garage and the basement. Your children can do their bedrooms. Stipulate that you need their lists in three days, no later. Explain to them why junk has to be eliminated from the house.

If you explain your intentions clearly, they will understand and would be more willing to cooperate. Tell them that the house needs a much needed airing, and when all the junk disappears, so will the distractions.

Tip # 16 Encourage them not to replace old junk with new junk

It can be a vicious cycle. Just as we managed to clear the house of unwanted bric-a-brac, in come new ones. Explain to your family that there was a specific reason for clearing junk. Old clutter should not be replaced with new clutter. Encourage them to think twice before acquiring additional material possessions. Examples:

- Will I consult this book more than once, or is it just for one school assignment? Maybe I can borrow it from the library instead?
- The hubby loves tools. He spends his weekly allowance on them. He just filled up an entire wall with all kinds of tools. Ask him which ones he hasn't used for 6 months and ask him to throw them away.
- The clothes in your closet. Which of them have you not worn for six months? Call the Salvation Army or the recycling center.

As soon as the closet is half-full, and you can finally see the wall of your closet, you'll be inspired to re-organize your whole bedroom: dressers, commode and night table drawers – shoe racks included!

Tip # 17 Don't let your house budget stick out like a sore thumb

Budgeting for house expenses is a chore people put off indefinitely. They know something is wrong with the budget; bills pile up and

remain unpaid for weeks, and the only time you jolt out of your complacency is when the utility company calls to advise you that power will be cut off in a week if you don't settle your bill.

It's not because you need to earn more; it's because your budget needs fixing. Nurse it back to health. Procrastinating will only make the problem worse. If it's easy for governments to get into a deficit, it's even easier for individuals to fall in the same trap.

Tip #18 With the help of family members, identify time wasters at home

Solicit the cooperation of the entire family and ask them to come up with potential sources of time wasters. Here's a handful:

- × miscommunication
- × misplaced objects and personal effects
- × documents and papers not filed
- × too many magazines and CDs strewn about
- × mistakes
- × indecision
- × inefficient use of family vehicles
- × too much TV viewing
- × different meal times
- × non-adherence to curfew rules
- × friends who hang around indefinitely

Tip # 19 Divide and delegate house chores

Obviously you can't do it all. So it's time for a strategy: plan a nice dinner for your family on one long weekend, and tell them in advance that you have something to announce. Cook them a special dish or two and whip up a dessert that everyone will adore.

At the end of the meal, tell them that you want to make some changes at home. Say that you've been procrastinating in doing some important chores around the house because you lack their support.

Bring up your divide and delegate plan, ask them for suggestions, and get everyone's commitment. Your concrete, well laid-out plan will get you the results you want.

Tip # 20 Set up chore chart after division of labor is decided

As the initiator of the plan, you must be the first to set the example. If you committed to re-organize the cupboards and clean out the fridge once a week, do it. When everyone sees you're doing your part, they'll do theirs.

Set up a chart in the kitchen or in the TV room where everyone can cross out the task once it's completed. Check the chart once a week; tell them how pleased you are with their progress. If some members have been delinquent, ask them why. Don't scold, give them another chance. This chart is an effective way for you to identify who the biggest procrastinators are, and you may need to supervise them more closely.

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