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Facing Up To Procrastination

Procrastination is becoming a chronic problem in America according to research published in the *Psychological Bulletin* (January, 2007).

Defined as the avoidance or postponing of tasks perceived as unpleasant, fully 26% of the American population now think of themselves as procrastinators compared with just 5% in 1978. While we tend to equate procrastination with laziness, the actual reasons are typically fear of failure or a paralytic indecision on how to tackle a task that seems daunting or complex.

The researchers did, however, cite five strategies that many have found extremely useful in overcoming procrastination:

- Tackle unpleasant tasks early in the day when you have the most creative energy. Your success will contribute to a sense of exhilaration that will boost your confidence to take on more challenges.
- Break complex tasks down into smaller "mini tasks" that are easy to complete and will simplify the overall challenge.
- Invoke the "5 minute rule." Commit to focusing on a threatening task for just five minutes. At the end of five minutes, either commit to another five minutes or take a break.
- Minimize and unplug all distractions that can reinforce your tendency to procrastinate, including Internet access, cell phones, television or I-pods.
- Honestly examine your true reasons for postponing action. Do you need training or assistance with time management skills? Or might you be a *catastrophizer*; i.e., someone who chronically and automatically falls into a depression imagining how awful the impending task will be?

Writing in *Psychology Today* (August, 2003), Hara Estroff Marano observes, "There are many ways to avoid success in life, but the most sure-fire just might be procrastination. Procrastinators sabotage themselves. They put obstacles in their paths. They actually choose paths that hurt their performance."

If procrastination is a problem for you either at home or at work, your Employee Assistance Program can help you address and overcome this common problem. Please give us a call *today!*

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