



The Balanced Lawyer

Jeff Davidson

Pulverize Procrastination

When starting a task or project, people sometimes will procrastinate if they don't have a clear starting point or a logical sequence of steps to take. Don't get all flustered about how or where you start: it's often more important to simply start. Identify a starting point, even if it's not the perfect starting point.

Some people think that if they can initiate tasks at just the "right time," won't that be grand? Objectively speaking, for most tasks there is no "perfect" time, so get over it.

If it helps, seek an early, easy "win"—for whatever you're seeking to accomplish, pick some aspect of it that you can complete quickly and easily. Take the easy win: an easier approach to getting started than to tackle some difficult portion at the outset.



Small Promises to Yourself

What if you're up against a challenge where everything about it is difficult for you? In a law practice it happens all the time. How could you get an easy win right off the bat? Open the file folder, review the contents, and seek something, anything that's familiar to you.

Sometimes merely organizing materials, allocating them to smaller file folders, paper-clipping items, or shuffling their order serves a suitable early win. Now, at least you've gained a better idea of the project.

Suppose you're experiencing an unusually difficult time initiating a case. Promise yourself that you will delve into it for a grand total of four minutes. By the fourth minute, often you won't want to stop! Strange how

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that works. If you have a large job, break it down into individual tasks, each as a distinct entity. Make bite-sized pieces for yourself, which will be easier to swallow than tackling the entire project at once.

When you tackle a four-minute job and gain the completion for having it all done, you have more energy, focus, and direction for say, another four-minute task. Likewise, if you do five four-minute jobs, with each job fueling a sense of victory, however minor, you're spurred on to the next and the next. In this manner, five four-minute jobs can actually be easier than one 20-minute job.

Gain an Edge

Toiling each day in a work setting overripe with distractions does little to aid the person whose ability to concentrate is already strained. In too many office environments today, the noise and hubbub directly contribute to procrastination. For virtually any task or project you're working on, less distraction adds up to less procrastination!

Suppose you have many tasks to handle, each of which would only require about four to eight minutes to complete. Singularly, none of these tasks would be that difficult to tackle. The thought of grappling with all of them, however, becomes discouraging.

As the roster of things you need to take care of grows, and you feel yourself slipping behind, they all seem to grow in complexity. In such instances, recognize that even the smallest step in pursuit of a desired goal is better than nothing.

Observe the best. Is there someone in your office who is a take-charge go-getter? Action-oriented role models, fortunately, might be nearby. Extract the benefits of closely observing the behaviors of the action-takers around you.

Alternatively, is there someone in reach who is seeking to finish the same sort of task? If so, you may have the ideal partner to join you. Whenever you can identify someone who's facing the same

challenge that you are, you have good potential for getting things done faster and easier.

Rut Busting 101

You have the best chance of doing your best work when you're well-rested and well-nourished. Conversely, when you don't have enough sleep or haven't eaten well, the simplest of tasks can seem larger than they really are. Much of the time, when you can't get started on something, it is due to fatigue.

Here are several rut-busting approaches, one or more of which could prove to be effective for you:

1. If you face many items competing for your attention (and these days, who doesn't?), trade one project off against another. Suppose you have to do Case A, and you've been putting it off. Along comes Case B. It's more difficult, more involved, and scarier. Suddenly, Case A doesn't look so bad. So tackle Case A headlong. You'll still have Case B to worry about and that might keep you humming along on Case A
2. As you know, if you have somebody waiting for your results or waiting to hear about your progress, you significantly increase your ability to get started and stay on the task at hand. One reason that you don't procrastinate in the office as often as you might at home is that at work you generally report to a boss or team leader who awaits your results (and who pays you based on your efforts!)
3. Having too much in your visual field can be an impediment to getting started on something. When you have one case or one task at hand, your odds of maintaining clarity and focus increase dramatically. A singular focus can work even better if you're not in your own office but at a conference table or at

some other post where you only have the project materials at hand.

4. Pain is a great motivator, perhaps the greatest of all. What are the consequences of not getting started? If you can identify the pain—what you will experience as a result of not doing the task or not starting the project—that could be an incentive for you to get started.

5. Sometimes the only way to get started on a task is to dive into it headlong, cold turkey, not allowing yourself the opportunity to stray. Surprisingly, when you practice the cold turkey approach to procrastination, it's not nearly as upsetting as it sounds. In fact, it can be a great relief.

What If?

Suppose you have to tackle a project on Monday, and you're dreading it. Days beforehand, how can you make the project seem more palatable? One effective maneuver is to review the project contents on, say, the Friday before you're going to start. Over the weekend, you don't have to do anything.

Unbeknownst to you, by reviewing project contents on a Friday, you're already in a germination state. When it's time to start the project on Monday, you find that you can actually get started with greater ease than you anticipated. The early preview you gave yourself on Friday was the key.

Suppose your car conks out on the side of the road, and your battery gets a jump-start. All of a sudden, the engine is revving. This is certainly not a time to turn the car off—you want to keep it on for a good twenty minutes. Sometimes, a small action

such as turning on your computer, popping a DVD into the player, or flipping on your pocket recorder is enough to get started on a task that you have been putting off.

In essence, flipping on the switch to your PC, having it boot up, and perhaps taking it to the appropriate folder and file, are analogous to jump-starting your car. Once your PC boots up and your hard drive is humming, you could experience a jump start in your ability to delve into the project.

Trump Your Progress

Full partner or newly hired, the more items that vie for your time and attention, the larger even smaller projects can loom, perceptually. Who among us does not feel the crush of what he needs to get done, even when the accomplishments may be nothing but the mundane? In perspective, much of what you face requires only a few minutes to complete.

For any given task, at any given time, if you have difficulty starting, you now have many techniques to draw upon. Not all techniques work for everyone all the time. Still, employ one or another, or another, until you get rolling.

If you still have trouble getting started, recall the times you had trouble getting started in the past. What happened once you finally got started, and how good did you feel once you accomplished what you had set out to accomplish? If you can evoke those same feelings of satisfaction, happiness, and the sheer joy of accomplishment, you could well have the winning formula for getting started right whenever you need to.