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[00:00:00] Are you ready to manage your work and personal world better? To live a more fulfilling productive life? Then you've come to the right place. Welcome to Productivity Cast, the Weekly Show about all things personal productivity. Here are your hosts, Ray Sidney Smith and Augusto Pinot with Francis Wade and Art Gelwick.

Welcome back everybody to Productivity Cast the Weekly show about. All things personal productivity. I'm Ray Sidney Smith, and I'm a Gusto Pinot. I'm Francis Wade. And I'm Mark Gelwick. Welcome gentlemen, and welcome to our listeners to this episode of Productivity Cast. Today we're gonna be talking about procrastination versus or and conscious deferral.

And what we're gonna do is we're gonna define procrastination. I think everybody procrastinates a little bit and sometimes a lot in their lives, and we wanna talk about why we procrastinate and what are some of the things we. Do when we consciously defer projects, goals, and tasks from what we are [00:01:00] presently and actively working on, and then we can close out with discussion on maybe if you are struggling with procrastination, what are some things that.

If it's hindering your productivity, what can you do to get over that hump? And we can give some quick tips for folks to get started with conquering procrastination at the end. So let's start off at the top, which is, let's all get on perhaps the same page relating to procrastination. How do you define procrastination?

I am gonna pause here for a moment. Francis, if you could just stay if everybody just stays off mute, I wanna see, I can void out your audio, so don't worry about muting yourself. Only because when I'm wondering if that has something to do with why it gets into the drift mode. 'cause when you are muted Oh.

I'll start us off and you all can perhaps add on to the definition. And I went to a bunch of different places, but I think Wikipedia actually ended up having a, an interesting [00:02:00] definition that I don't necessarily agree with.

And I think this is helpful for us to start the conversation, which is Wikipedia defines procrastination as an action of unnecessarily and. Voluntarily delaying or postponing something despite knowing that there will be negative consequences for doing so. So I immediately feel like this is not true in some perspective here because it says unnecessarily and voluntarily, and we know that not everybody is aware of the.

Negative consequences and sometimes there are not negative consequences for procrastinating. And so I'm curious about just that base level definition from Wikipedia. Do you agree or disagree? That only works if you're taking involuntary delay and giving it a different name because [00:03:00] procrastination is a blanket term that any sort of a delay on something.

It's either do it or don't do it. And if you do it, you're in action. If you're not, you're procrastinating. It's not about the how, so I don't know that I necessarily

agree with their definition of procrastination. But I also don't think the term necessarily needs to include the cause. It is a delay of action.

When an action should be taken. Maybe phrase it that way or it would be. Beneficial for an action to be taken, what the trigger of that could be, any number of things. And I don't think they, they are remotely related to the term procrastination. So this is where I have some difficulty because the most tasks, of course, are delayed until later.

If not every task that you plan to do in the future is based on a delay and. There's a cost for delaying any [00:04:00] task. In other words it's, there's a risk that it might not get done. So the only way to remove the risk of doing a task and not doing a task in the future is to do it. No. So by that definition, procrastination covers every single task.

That is, in other words, every time demand, every one that you're gonna do in the future, at that point, the verb procrastinate loses its value because all it's saying is, whatever you're not doing, whatever task you're not doing. No. At that point, I don't think it has much value. So I don't like the, I don't like the idea that procrastination is putting off a task.

I don't think it, it adds a lot of value. I think there's a, what if we were to rephrase the definition? 'cause we were all about definitions to procrastination. Being inaction when action should be taken. Because theoretically, if you're not doing something and you're [00:05:00] supposed to be doing that thing, you're either unintentionally putting it off.

You're intentionally putting it off. It's an either or situation. There is a, there's a decision point for the conscious part, but the unconscious part, no, it can just happen. One of the things when we talk about what is procrastination, we never start to look at it from the standpoint of saying, okay, this, take something simple.

Taking out the trash. I choose not to take out the trash. Or I'm going to do something else. I may have chosen to do something else. And what happens is taking out the trash gets put off. But if that context isn't provided in the definition, the perception is then, oh, you procrastinated on taking out the trash.

No, I did make a conscious decision to do something else I prioritized over. So when we go back to [00:06:00] procrastination. I still think it comes back to that inaction when action is warranted. How you get to that point could be any number of factors, but I think that's as simple in my mind. That's as simple as it gets.

A piece that comes into mind for me though, is that your wife might say that you were procrastinating, and that's where the definition breaks down for me because there's an internal judgment versus external judgment piece here that changes whether or not something is procrastination, depending upon your view.

Perception. Yeah, absolutely. Perception is a huge component in this. Who is defining what a task is that was being procrastinated on. And if I use it in a work

context, if I have a developer who's working on building a user interface, I may think he's putting off he or she's putting off the form design when he is actually working on the code review for a different component.

[00:07:00] My priority. As to what things are, determine whether I think you're procrastinating on something, but rather than that external influence, thinking about our own internal thing, when do we apply that label of procrastinating on something to ourselves? At what point do we know that it's just not just something on the to-do list we haven't done yet, but we've had a bunch of opportunities to do it.

We haven't done it, and we need to understand why. This is where I think we're in the realm of a psychological object that could cause a whole lot of trouble because I think procrastination is a label that we apply after the fact, and it's based on art. You use the right words. It's a should or a supposed to.

I think procrastination is a label that we apply to ourselves when we're, it's a way of shoulding on ourselves. In other words. An after the fact [00:08:00] judgment of something that should not have happened or we were supposed to do, or we weren't good enough to do, or we were lazy or did some, it's some personal judgment.

I have a suspicion that it's possible to live without procrastination at all because you just give up the judgment. You just say, you know what, I'm not gonna judge anything that I do as procrastination. I either do it or don't do it. I either put it off for later and manage it. Or I don't manage it, but I wonder, could I live without the judgment that I think procrastination is bringing and be even more effective?

This is like beating yourself over the back. I think you could to a certain degree, but I also think we recognize that. There are certain actions that we should take and we don't, and there, as we talked about in the definition, there are negative ramifications from that delay and we are aware that happens.

It may not be the reason why it gets delayed. [00:09:00] But we know that because it's being delayed, there's something bad that will happen. Paying a bill, let's use that as, ~um, in a DHD circles, ~that's a really common thing. Financial challenges, because things get delayed due to executive dysfunction and that sort, we know there's a bad thing that'll happen if that doesn't get done, and yet it still doesn't get done.

That really fits into that definition of procrastination. It's inaction when action should be taken. So I go back to this point, and you raised it really well there, Francis, is procrastination. Is it important to understand that procrastination has such a negative stigma attached to it, and we balance it with this terminology and this concept of conscious deferral, voluntary procrastination.

To me that makes a lot of sense and it, not so much on the prioritization of things and the categorization, [00:10:00] but for the emotional connection. Because if I'm willing to say that, yes, I put that off and I'm accepting that and there's no, personal beating tied to that, I understand why I did it and I'm okay with that and

I'm able to move on those times where I put something off that I shouldn't have.

And I'm not okay with that. That should be an opportunity for self-analysis and self-awareness and say, how did that happen? What triggered there? Because it could be a symptom of something much larger pr, process wise or even personally. I like the delay the the definition of a conscious deferral to me is very specific.

It's very precise. I can work with that. I am to play devil's advocate in a way, I guess I'm thinking if I do away with a procrastination bucket or the label, because it holds everything, gets too many things get thrown into it. For it to be valuable in, I think in today's world [00:11:00] that everything gets labeled procrastination.

If I just say conscious deferral or mistaken deferral, I just leave it at that. I wonder if I'm not better off. So I'll star procrastination of all of its negative connotation. It's judgment, self-judgment. It's meaning. Don't use a term, don't label, don't put anything in the bucket. And I just talk about conscious and unconscious deferral.

I use those two terms because those two terms are very specific and just leave it at that. I wonder if I'd be free freer than if I were to use the term for my own tasks. It's. It's one of those things from a terminology perspective, I think you're absolutely right. It has gotten too much weight, it has too much built in gravitas, and it absorbs too many things.

And when we, again, we're talking about procrastination, the more I think about it, if I take everything else out of the equation except for those things that I [00:12:00] delay with no thought whatsoever, they just, I just kinda like shy away from them. Even those I have to look at and say, why is that happening?

Is that possibly a subconscious analysis of that particular task or item? And I'm going through those steps of saying, you know what, that's okay if I put it off. That bad thing may not happen. I'm not, I haven't gone through any specific exercise or methodology to get to that analysis, but in the back of my mind, my lizard brain is going, yeah, you can skip that for now.

Even though the rest of the world may be telling me, oh, why didn't you do that right away? Again, lizard brain's back there going, no, go do something else. And that may not be unreasonable. So is procrastination one of those terms that maybe we just need to get rid of completely? You bring up an interesting point here.

Which is that we are frequently told that we need to [00:13:00] be in command of all that we do. And as humans agency comes into our executive function and into our conscious thought, right? So if one of those things is happening outside of executive function or conscious thought somehow that is a lesser thing. I don't see it that way, but people do.

So like breathing is a fundamental core activity. It's involuntary and it is not something that we. Typically think of as within our control, we can control our breath, right? We can stop it, we can speed it up if we wanted to, but generally it

falls into the background of activities.

And therefore we don't think of it as important as what I'm doing right now. It's this other thing. And we tend to think about those other things as being lesser than as it relates to any other activity. And so when our unconscious mind tells us that we should be doing something. Which is frequently, intuition as Dr.

Gary Klein defines intuition as past [00:14:00] experience, informing, present interaction present experience. The idea that we think of intuition as being less than. Our immediate present, executive conscious thought. The idea then becomes somewhat muddy and I think procrastination falls into that bucket of being this other thing.

And we're not quite sure. It may be a little bit of emotional regulation. It may be that our unconscious mind is telling us that there's something else tugging at us that's more important. Since we are in charge our conscious, prefrontal cortex is in charge. Therefore, that other thing must not be as important.

And this may also be a little bit of western cultural stuff where we tend to believe that, our present hedonic world is more important than the future. More mundane things of life, right? So the cleaning up of the garbage, taking out the garbage kind of concept is less important than my relaxation here in the moment, right?

That that's a clear comparison that you then [00:15:00] need to make and then choose whether or not you're gonna overcome the. Momentum, right? Because you need to be able to have basically activation in order to be able to get up from your chair and go take out the garbage. And that little bit of friction is there and it's enough to say if I don't take out the garbage, then what's the worst that happens?

I take it out in the morning or maybe the garbage people come and they don't pick it up and they have to pick it up next week. We do all of this calculus very quickly, unconsciously and we therefore. Are using our unconscious to make the. Choices, but at the same time deferring or at least suppressing the unconscious wisdom at the same time that it's probably best for us to get up and go take out the garbage.

And so it's it's a little bit of back and forth in that space. And I don't know if I was clear in explanation, but I, but that's really what I feel is frequently going on there when it comes to understanding procrastination versus, say, conscious deferral. And I know Francis already brought up the term.

But this [00:16:00] is this is a term that I've used for years and I don't know that it has any particular basis. Art pulled an article that showed that it's been in use in some way, shape, or form related to this topic in the past. And so conscious deferral is what I've typically used as the term for when I say.

I'm not going to do this now and I have a clear reason for not doing this now. And so as Francis noted, there is this clear definition for me of something that is not procrastination and which is why I brought this topic for us to discuss today, which is that I really feel like many times people whip themselves for not having enough emotional regulatory control.

Not enough emotional regulation. And when in reality you, when you make a choice not to do something for a good reason, then that is not procrastinating. And therefore we shouldn't self-flagellate. We shouldn't, go through this whole beating [00:17:00] ourselves up over the issue. We should just set a condition precedent that will then.

Create a trigger for us to do that thing or that what, that's what a condition precedent is. So we, we set that trigger in place to make that thing happen, and then we move on. And I think society has a way of, like pulling back into the situation and asserting themselves and causing more, harm, psychological harm than good I think.

Thinking about this, and I think you're right on topic with this thing, what occurred to me is the fact that, is this not symptomatic of us trying to justify why we delayed something? I, all I can imagine is who are you trying to explain to that you did not do this thing well you're explaining it to yourself.

But if we use the same thing as if you become your own manager. And your own manager goes to your own self and says, Hey, [00:18:00] why didn't you do this thing? You're going to try and come up with a justification. Procrastination is the worst possible justification for the work. Therefore, if you say, yeah, I was procrastinating.

Oh, that's a terrible thing. Get up and do that. But nobody's saying you have to justify why you delayed it unless there's a, a. Physiological or psychological reason why procrastination is occurring if all else you're making a choice and that choice, maybe at the subconscious level, maybe at the conscious level, but you don't have to explain that to anybody.

You don't have to go up and say, yeah, you know what, I put off taking out the trash, because you may have to depending on your house, but for the most part, no, I just didn't do it. And I did something else. And to me that was the more important of the two things. So I don't think we can unwind [00:19:00] this from ad hoc prioritization, nor can we take it to a situation where, again, it has more gravitas than it should.

I like this term conscious deferral because I like the idea of giving somebody the ability to label something as. I took control of this, and this is how I chose to act on this thing. I chose to act by not acting. It's very zen. So we've looked at this from the inner perspective and we mildly touched on the fact that there is a, an outward judging perspective here, that when we see others procrastinating, we.

Need to deal with that as well. So if I delegate something to someone and they don't get it back to me in the timeframe that I wanted them to in some way, shape, or form, that's by definition to us procrastinating [00:20:00] and. Yet at the same time, it may not have been them procrastinating, as you noted art in the example.

They may have been working on something else. How do we deal with procrastination as a definition or just as a construct when it's not ourselves procrastinating, but others procrastinating? And I wanna get talk about this and then we can move on to

really. Our ourselves dealing with procrastination, both on the project or goal orientation level versus the task level in the moment.

But I think that it's important for us to discuss here and now the ideas of how should we look at others when they're procrastinating versus. If they're procrastinating, 'cause there's a, there's now an argument that they could be procrastinating or consciously deferring something or as Francis noted unconsciously deferring something or consciously deferring something.

And so how should we look at people when they are not getting us things that we expect them to get to in what we consider a, an [00:21:00] appropriate amount of time. I think we take judge judgment outta the party, outta the conversation. We disinvite the judgment because the minute we introduce it only makes the conversation harder.

And as Art said, procrastination is this loaded term that as soon as you introduce it, it's gonna load up the conversation, it's gonna tip it in a particular emotional direction, and it's going to incite a round of finger ble, finger pointing. And then justification and then victim feelings, and let's not use it.

That's what I'm thinking. Yeah. But use words. Yeah. From that perspective I could see that in the academic procrastination perspective, you see a child doing that, if you have a son or a daughter and you say, oh, stop procrastinating on X. That's one level of conversation and you can change that conversation to be healthier with the child, put in input.

Put in appropriate behavioral intervention so that they're not doing task avoidance, they're not distracting themselves from things and they're not creating an imbalance comparison [00:22:00] of one task versus another, or project versus another. But when it comes to the either. Employees or direct reports or even colleagues.

Say if you are lateral with someone in a position, you sit on a board with them, you're another board member and you're waiting for things from others. The conversation isn't, Hey Bill, stop procrastinating on that. It's some, it's another dialogue, right? It's another level of dialogue.

'cause you can't just go. Judging people for procrastinating out loud. You tend to have other kinds of conversations like, Hey Bill, I asked you for X and I haven't yet received it. That navigating of language, there's Implic Couture at the same time. I think what you're talking about, Francis, is still salient here, which is or is salient here because it really makes.

For me, a lot of sense to start asking different questions about why they're [00:23:00] deferring this thing to be done. So maybe then it changes the conversation. The, this goes back again to how this is a front loaded term. When you, and you use the exact phrase, phrasing that I was gonna use, going to someone and say, you are procrastinating.

Stop it. Immediately places judgment and weight on that person with no context, no relevance, and no understanding of their situation. From a leadership perspective, I

would coach somebody to say, instead of doing that, the first step is to say what is preventing you from being able to do this?

Assume that it's not a conscious thing. It, it doesn't hub to that person. Starting with a term like procrastination, you immediately assume that. The person is at fault in the equation, which is literally from a leadership perspective, that's the last place you wanna wind up. 'cause that's the hardest one to fix.

Everything else you can get out of the way. So they may be having conscious issues, maybe they don't understand the [00:24:00] priority structure. Maybe it wasn't clearly explained to them. Maybe they've got too much stuff on their plate. There's a plethora of different causalities that will wind up taking someone to pushing things off to when they should be doing them.

But this is that contextual piece. This is that pigeonholed label that we see so often in the productivity space. It's easy to say, you are doing X, therefore do Y and Z will be the result. This is not one of those cases where you can do that. I have yet to see a simple case of procrastination and it's dynamic too.

It's the other factor we have to take in mind where you procrastinate. And I'm gonna keep using the term until I can beat it into the ground. When you quote procrastinate on something like taking out the trash, it may be because you don't wanna go outside in the cold. It may have nothing to do with the actual task or action, but it has environmental factors to it.

The other [00:25:00] side though, if it may be that you don't wanna pay a bill, you may not have the money to pay the bill. Those factors are never included in that term. The term is you have done something wrong, stop doing it, and at that point it, there's no positive contribution. So I wanted to bring this up because I, I think it's important for us to think about, there's a, the term of art in leadership, which is servant leadership, and even.

Notwithstanding where you are in any hierarchy of any organization or in any grouping, we have to remember that when we're interacting with people, don't think about the procrastination. Don't think about. Why they're not getting it done. Think about what it is that you can do to support them. Moving the obstacles and challenges out of the way to getting that thing done.

You want something from someone else, and it doesn't matter if you're paying their paycheck, if you actually want them to get it done, good project management would dictate that persuasion is better than [00:26:00] demand. And so how do you work with people to be able to help them? Smooth the pavement to getting that thing done.

And that's usually helping them unlock or dismantle blockages. And that's gonna get you a lot further with them, both from a trust and equity perspective with them, but also just getting them to get the thing done. ~Uh, and so that's kind of why I brought this up. I think many times our, our, our conversations open up with the.~

~With the blame and and shame game. ~And if we flip that to there's something going on under the hood, can we figure that out? And can I help you, smooth out the rough

edges so that this becomes more palatable. And for many people, there's just some kind of jagged little pill that is causing them not to do that thing.

And if we can make it, just smoother. Then it becomes easier. And that's I think a really, it's a strong skill to develop. It's a difficult skill to develop, but once we start exercising that muscle, it becomes a lot easier for people to work together in a team environment.

Let's go. [00:27:00] So a lot of more said appreciates the song title drop just for reference for those it was there before her, so I'm sorry. So if for those pop culture people out there that's a key thing. But think about it this way, and I, and it's something that's stuck in my craw. Using the term procrastination with someone immediately absolves you as the person accusing them of that, of any responsibility in solving the problem.

You are a procrastinator. Fix it, and your work will get better. That means that I don't have to be engaged because it's your fault. That is, to me, a scapegoat approach. What we're talking about here and as a project manager, project lead leadership role, even coaching role or just a friend, you don't start a conversation with one of your friends and say, man, you can get more done if you weren't such a procrastinator.

They're not gonna be friends real long. You're not gonna be going out and having beers with 'em, but you're gonna sit down and say what the heck's going on? Why? [00:28:00] What's the challenge? What's getting in your way? That's the conversation you have. None of that is a label that's stigmatizing by the same token, someone who's on your project, say someone new art.

And as you're talking to them for the first time, they say, by the way, I'm a terrible procrastinator. So they blame themselves for this thing, but they actually haven't given you any information as to how to resolve it because. You can't tell if it's conscious or unconscious. Is it something else? Is it just that you like to blame yourself?

What you don't know, you don't know where to go after someone has labeled them that, but there are folks who use that phrase as a way of letting themselves off the hook. It helps. It, yes and no. I agree with you. It blocks them. It blocks them from going to the source. 'cause the real source is not the procrastination that's just a general label, which could mean anything in the world.

It could mean bad luck. But there is more specific [00:29:00] language to use to say, for example art I've had trouble hitting deliverables on my last three projects because I'm on three projects at the same time. And so that's more specific and it tells you what to do as opposed to I'm a procrastinator, which is.

Again, one of those big psychological terms the definition is change. It keeps changing, doesn't take you anywhere, but there's more specific language to use. The other thought I had was that around specific language there's a, an approach called Conversation for action that I learned sometime ago around promises requests.

Deferrals, renegotiated, it's a way of negotiating deliverables, basically all the way from the initial request all the way to the final declaration of something being complete. And it's very specific and it's in every conversation in which you're trying to out negotiate or talk about a [00:30:00] deliverable.

And the thing I like about it is that it strips away all of the emotional psychological aspects of it. It's like the signal that's beneath all the noise. And as we're having these conversations to sort out why someone is late or has a real issue, that's an essential, ~uh, uh, ~approach to keep in mind when trying to sort these things out.

It's way more precise than these general blanket psychological assessments. No, I agree with you. This is the type of term that people can adopt, as I wanna say, almost like a negative shield. Where they use it as the excuse for not taking action to resolve particular things. And I'll parallel it to another one that we all hear all the time.

I'm not tech savvy. I don't, I don't do technology, that kind of thing. That becomes an excuse of not learning how to do I, you've had to reset your password for the 87th time. I'm just not tech savvy. That type of label becomes that negative shield. [00:31:00] Procrastination can be one of those things.

But it's a simple conversation to have. And again, if from a coaching perspective, I would say if somebody came to me and said, oh I'm just a, I'm just a procrastinator, my turnaround would be, did you know that most people aren't actually procrastinators, they're just not totally sure of what they're supposed to be doing.

And working through that exercise, because as soon as you're able to pull that shield down. And start to get them to understand that they're hiding behind something that they don't need to hide behind. They can work towards it. And so often it's, they don't have the right priorities, they don't have the information, which is probably the most common one.

And that creates anxiety and hesitation. And ergo winding up with this concept of procrastination, Augusto. So I think you made a really fantastic point there with the label and really what is the distinction between [00:32:00] procrastination and anybody using the label as an excuse. Even not to clarify, sometimes.

Even when you think you are clear, you later discover, oh, I need to clarify a lot more about this and, but what can we do or how can we change that label to bring it more conscious? So that way when that label come in and we hear, okay. I'm not getting this. This, instead of procrastinating, understand that what we need to maybe do is clarify so we understand what is what we need to do and how can we help people to break that mold of the label and using the label as an excuse instead of using that label so they can get the stuff that need to get [00:33:00] done.

Done. We spent a lot of time defining procrastination. I think this is helpful contextualizing procrastination in a lot of ways, including, this is funny, but, a decade more than a decade ago now I had an episode on prod pod that I talked about defining procrastination, and in reviewing for this episode, one of my, and I think

the one that I tend to enjoy most about procrastination is this concept of basically displacing.

Activities and that's what inevitably procrastination is that you are still doing something. Most people forget that procrastination is what I call procrast to doing because in reality, you're still doing action, you are doing something, you're just displacing other activities in.

It's basically those activities, those other activities become part of the wake. Around the focus of what you are actually doing. And that could be [00:34:00] sitting and resting. It could be you reading an article instead of writing and doing an assignment you're supposed to be working on. We have to remember that in all of this, there is a, is there's basically a supplanting of activity and when that supplanting of activity happens, we are making some kind of.

Value choice. And I think that's the part that I think is really interesting here. I think let's pause here and let's come back next week and talk about the concepts of procrastination and conscious deferral of both projects or goals. And then of course, task orientation related to both of those.

While we are at the end of our discussion, the conversation doesn't stop here. If you have a question or comment about what we've discussed during this cast, please visit our episode page on productivity cast.net. They're on the podcast website at the bottom of the page. Feel free to leave a comment or a question.

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You can leave a voice recorded message or type a message into the message box, and maybe we'll use it as a future episode topic. I want to express my thanks to Augusta Pinau, Francis Wade and Art Gelwick for joining me here on Productivity Cast. Each week you can learn more about them and their work by visiting [productivity cast.net](http://productivitycast.net) and visiting the [00:37:00] About page.

I'm Ray Sydney Smith, and on behalf of all of us here at Productivity Cast, here's to your productive life.

That's it for this episode of Productivity Cast, the Weekly show about all things personal productivity with your hosts, Ray Sidney Smith and August Pinot with France Wade and Art Gelwick.