

Voiceover Artist | 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 ProductivityCast, the weekly show about all things personal productivity. Here are your hosts, Ray Sidney Smith and Augusto Pinault with Frances Wade and Art Gelwix.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 00:19

Welcome back everybody to ProductivityCast, the weekly show about all things personal productivity. I'm Ray Sidney Smith.

Augusto Pinaud | 00:25

And I'm Augusto Pinaud.

Francis Wade | 00:27

I'm Francis Wade.

Art Gelwicks | 00:28

And I'm Art Gelwicks.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 00:29

Welcome, gentlemen, and welcome to our listeners to this episode of ProductivityCast. Today, we are going to continue our conversation around procrastination and conscious deferral. And the conversation last time really covered mostly us discussing the defining nature of or just defining the nature of these two constructs, both procrastination and conscious deferral. And so what I'd like us to do is So if you have not listened to that episode, I would highly recommend that you hop back to the part one of this particular two episodes, and then we will now continue today in terms of really discussing the What we're going to do today is then start discussing why we procrastinate in the first place? What are some of the understandings of why we procrastinate and what are reasons for conscious deferral?

And then we will... Discuss probably in and amongst that ways in which you can overcome procrastination and when it's probably appropriate to do conscious deferral. When it actually may not be, and it then bleeds back into procrastination. And there's a fine line there, of course.

So let's talk about what are the major reasons why You all procrastinate. What are the reasons you've determined that procrastination ekes its way into your everyday life?

Art Gelwicks | 01:51

I'll throw myself under the bus first. One of the most common reasons that I'll put something off is lack of definition. If I haven't taken time to truly define out all the steps necessary to execute something, it winds up with this anchor weight attached to it to say, "Well, you don't know what you don't know, and you don't know quite what you're supposed to do, so maybe you should go do something else." Whether true or not, That's kind of where things wind up getting pushed to.

So that, I'd say that's my primary one is lack of definition around what I'm supposed to be executing.

Augusto Pinaud | 02:28

Yeah, I need to agree with you 100%. For me... I can tell. By Monday morning. How good or bad my weekly review was on Friday. And I wish to tell that all of them are incredibly good. And I get out of there with a clear mind. And sometimes it doesn't happen. Even sometimes I do some kind of weekly review on Friday. I need to compliment that over the weekend because that is Lack of clarity, that lack of have that clear list of projects and actions, all that it produce is emergencies, fires and procrastination in my world.

Francis Wade | 03:12

I have a question though then, because the kind of the procrastination that Art was talking about sounds to me more like conscious deferral. That he's not unconsciously putting off. The lack of definition. He's consciously doing it.

Well, I should ask him. Are you unconsciously doing it because you haven't defined the action or are you consciously doing.

Art Gelwicks | 03:33

It? No, it's... I would agree it would look like conscious deferral that I'm making that action that, I don't have enough detail, therefore I can't get started. I'm not going to give it that level of credit. It's really a, it's a two-step problem. And the more I think about it, the first step in the problem is recognizing that I now need to allocate time to gather that information to know what I need to do for that thing.

So for example, let's say I'm planning out an online ad. And I have some of the information I need, but I don't have all of it. And I know it needs to go out at a certain time.

Well, I could just say it needs to be done. Or... What happens is I recognize that I need to spend some time filling in those gaps of the process necessary for that item, which means I'm going to have to chase down information to fill those gaps. So to execute that task? There's a bunch of extra work that I need to front load. And that makes that task feel bigger, creating a bigger anchor, creating a bigger roadblock, therefore, subconsciously encouraging me to push that back to do things that I know I can accomplish and move forward on, which unfortunately winds up in that thing getting pushed back to a point where it becomes problematic.

So. There may be times where that's a conscious thing where I say, look, I just don't know what I need to know. Therefore, I'm not going to do that thing. But to me, that's not procrastination. You're absolutely right. That's a choice. That's somebody hasn't provided me an update or something like that. That's a waiting on or a follow up. It's when I myself have not defined things clearly enough. To say should or should I not proceed with this? That's when the procrastination part will kick in and say, you know what, why don't you hold off on that? You can go do something that you feel better about. And it's, I think it's the feel part more than anything. Because there isn't a rational reason to delay that work. It has to be done. There's nothing about it that says that you shouldn't be doing it. But there's a subconscious feeling there that's saying there's an almost an anxiety that's attached to it. Saying, you're going to find something that is going to be a real problem. Maybe you should put that off. I don't know if that helps any of us.

Augusto Pinaud | 06:00

No. And you bring a great point that it's that anxiety. It's the procrastination. It starts happening because I start getting all that anxiety of, is this really up to date? Is this really possible? The valuable task that I need to move forward? Is this really what need to happen? Or not. And that or not is the killing part of that.

Francis Wade | 06:25

I have a different, not different, but I have a... As I'm thinking about this, I wrote an article on procrastination. It was a long time, like a decade ago. But I basically said that something along the lines that procrastination was not well defined. And it seemed more like a feeling. Than a fact. But what's happened over the years is that if someone were to ask me if I procrastinate, I would say no. I don't have that. Kind of self-talk. I don't use that term. I deliberately don't

use that term because of all the problems that we've talked about. We're talking about now and we talked about in the last episode. Do I consciously defer? 99% of all tasks that I'm not doing at the moment, I'm consciously deferring. Do I unconsciously defer?

Sometimes, yeah. But then do I procrastinate? No. I don't use the term.

So imprecise, it's not helpful. So what's the difference? I just kind of avoid.

Art Gelwicks | 07:33

It. I'm sorry.

So what's the difference between unconscious deferral and procrastination. I know last episode I said we should throw the term procrastination out completely, but are we just coming up with a two word term for a one word thing?

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 07:50

No, so unconscious deferral is your unconscious mind ...choosing that there is either a missing resource or there is something else going on under the hood, and therefore it's more efficient for you not to do this thing now. That's how I see it.

Art Gelwicks | 08:05

Okay.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 08:06

Versus you. Procrastination being a conscious effort to do something else that's not what you know you should be doing, want to be doing. Right now.

So if you sit back and say to yourself, I know I should be working on this, writing this paper for my class. And you then start listening to music. You have created a value system whereby you know that the higher value item is to work on the paper, for the class. You're doing a lower value item, which is entertaining yourself instead. The imbalance in value is very different than saying, I don't know what the teacher wants me to do. And so therefore, I'm going to talk to him or her on Monday. And find out.

And then come back with that answer. And now do this thing. I don't see this, I don't see the latter as procrastination, but I see the former as basically conscious deferral. But if I, if I'm not mentally aware of that. I may perceive myself as procrastinating, except that it's not. It's unconscious deferral. Your unconscious mind is doing a job. That it should be doing. I see this in, basically cognitive dissonance when you emotionally are not understanding the conflict in your mind over two different things. You... Then choose to delay that thing And frequently we understand that as procrastinating. Whereas I just think that's unconscious deferral. If I disagree with, say, " And they want me to do something. This actually happened in my first year of college. And the professor asked us to do an assignment that I vehemently disagreed with. And so therefore... I just wouldn't do it. Right? Every time I sat down to do it, I thought, this is horrible. I'm not doing this. I'm not writing this paper. And Ultimately, I recognized that I was actually having unconscious deferral happening, right? My value system, not necessarily values in the most objective sense, but my value system, my moral system was rejecting that thing. And so on the like, prefrontal perspective, I was like, I keep procrastinating on doing this thing. But what was really happening was that I was having this dissonance between my moral systems and the thing I was being told to do.

So that's where I'm coming at it.

Art Gelwicks | 10:41

So let me ask it this way. And I don't know why we're struggling some, or at least I am struggling so much with this definition. Is it? That we're deferring with no

rational reason for the deferral?

I mean, if we talk about a conscious deferral, There's something that we can articulate that says this is why we're putting it off, even to the example you just provided. You didn't agree with the assignment, therefore you were making the conscious choice to say, look, I'm not going to do it. It may have been emotionally motivated. It may be in have internal drivers, but you were still making that conscious decision. Is this truly... Such a narrow case where Procrastination is really only those cases where you're putting something off and you can't give a good reason why you're putting it off. You just are.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 11:32

I would continue to say no. It's a situation where even if I don't know consciously why I'm not doing something, I consider procrastination the doing of something when you intend to do something else that's of a lower value. That becomes procrastination. Because you've made that choice.

Art Gelwicks | 11:53

So it's singular procrastination. Maybe that's the quantifiable thing that we need to say is that you're procrastinating on something. Not just procrastinating in general.

We're talking about individual selected tasks, selected actions that we are putting on. So you may not procrastinate 99.99% of the time. But one or two things you may put off. Does that make you a procrastinator?

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 12:32

I never advocate for labels. So when people talk about being a procrastinator, remember that you should never label yourself something that you don't really want to be labeled. And that really comes down to a lot of different forms and modes of identity. In *The Atomic Habit* by James Clear, he uses this notion for what he believes is positive behavior. He talks about labeling yourself. Okay, well, if I label myself a runner, then I will go running. Except that there's a flip side to that. I see the, you know, the tails side to that coin, which is that if you call yourself a runner, but then you never run. What does that do to the rest of your internal value system. You can go out there and say, okay, well, I'm a runner, and so therefore I should run.

And then you don't run, and then you feel this sense of imposter syndrome about the whole notion, and that ultimately competes with your confidence and erodes your ability to actually get going in the first place. Labeling, while can be powerful for some, it tends to only be powerful in my view in group settings. We are runners and we get together and run together is a far more powerful tool than say the Gretchen Rubin style upholders who can say, I am this thing and I go do that thing. That's totally fine. But for most of us, we need groups there.

So one is just be very cautious about labeling yourself a procrastinator because you will then potentially harm yourself more. Identify the action of what you are doing, be tough on the problems, not on the person, right?

So this is procrastination. We're going to tackle this problem. Let's not tackle ourselves. We need to be kind to ourselves in that sense. You.

Art Gelwicks | 14:14

Brought up a very key point that's helping me catalyze this in my head. We're talking about basically giving ourselves permission to choose to not do things. And everything we have paired off in this conversation, the conscious deferral, the unconscious deferral, the rationale because we're not having enough information for something, all of these things are boiling down to rationalization. One or two or

three very specific edge cases where a deferral happens and we really can't say why we've deferred it. We just have. And for some reason that has had a stigma attached to it. With this term procrastination.

So let me back this up a little bit. What about somebody who does it all the time? I mean, we're talking about very specific cases, but what if you find that you've got a day's worth of activities you know they have to be done. And you spend that day watching Netflix. Doesn't that fit the definition?

I mean, it's not a singular activity you're putting off then. You could have 20 things that you need to do. But yet none of them get done because you're just going to watch Netflix today. Is that a conscious decision? Is it an anxiety driven decision? Is it one of those things where it's just like, I don't know why I had that day, but I had that day.

Francis Wade | 15:46

I think the point you're making is that slapping the label on. As you watch your Netflix isn't helpful. It doesn't tell you what to do about it.

So. Netflix watching.

Art Gelwicks | 16:00

No, you're right. All it does is it makes you feel bad about it.

Francis Wade | 16:04

Hence my, hence the question I have, which is why not just ignore the term. It's imprecise. And it's Pajara too. And it doesn't help you with your problem solving, it doesn't. It allows for too many possibilities and too many interpretations. It gives you more work, in other words. It's kind of like a blunt instrument. That I think it's lost its value.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 16:33

So identifying procrastination in that moment, say I decide to Netflix and chill all day as opposed to doing what I'm supposed to be doing in terms of work.

Procrastination is a symptom. It's not the diagnosis.

So in this particular case, if you recognize it, now you can actually say, okay, well, clearly... It's not procrastination that's the problem. It's whatever the emotional underpinning that's causing me to want to avoid the real world and draw myself into the surreality of television or the fictional world by using escapist media.

So it can be used in just that thin perspective. But then otherwise, I agree with everything else Francis is saying here, which is that the term ends up being somewhat vapid. It's kind of like the word happy, right? When we tell people, are you happy?

Well, what the heck does that mean? There are many different flavors of happy, and we need to be more precise with our language. And I feel like, for me at least, the concept of procrastination exists purely as a term for me, and this is self-defining, of that which we've created this imbalance between two values and we've chosen to do the lesser value thing.

And then, of course, unconscious and conscious deferral, which is that we see the value of something and we've chosen to do it because there is some other resource, some condition involved. That has not yet been met yet in order for us to get to the end. And this... Happens all the time.

You know, if somebody assigns us something, it frequently happens when people assign things to us. We tend to have this problem of having to do conscious deferral and sometimes we have unconscious deferral because of something being assigned to us and we're just not recognizing it and we're labeling it as procrastination.

So it's like, It's just mislabeling of these particular items. And the reason I'm adding the additional terms is so that As you are making your way through your life, you're not consistently noting everything as this big lump of procrastination. If you can parse it apart, you then recognize that there are real and good reasons for you not doing things. And as a GTD- I sit down and I clarify intros and inboxes, and I put them and organize them onto lists. I am consciously deferring every single one of those items so that I can be more focused on my goals and attend to the actions ahead of me right now that are going to be the most valuable. And that's the prioritization in the GTD concept.

So if I'm not doing those things, if I'm not consciously deferring those things, then I am causing more problems to my system because I can't do everything now. I must consciously defer things to a later time in order for me to give the appropriate attention in the moment. And I think that's why I'm pushing the notion of having these different terms. You can use your own terms if you need to, right? Because I'm using somewhat pseudo-psychological terms here that may be a little bit more repulsive than attractive.

So... Use terms that are going to work for you.

Art Gelwicks | 19:43

So how do we fix it?

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 19:45

Yeah.

Art Gelwicks | 19:46

If I'm sitting here and I'll use myself as the case study today. I got a boatload of work today. I know I've got something on my docket. That I'm putting off doing. I should do it. It's an important thing. It has a deadline attached to that. But I'm putting off doing it. Technically, I'm procrastinating on it. What do I do about that?

Francis Wade | 20:12

I don't think there's enough information to say. First thing you may want to do is stop the shooting. Because the shooting implies some guilt. This is kind of a... The due date is when... The consequences of not meeting a tarawat. The time to start if you work your way back is Yes. And if you're willing to live with the consequences of not doing it by the due date. Live with them. If you're not, And whatever you need to do to get started.

Art Gelwicks | 20:45

Yeah, but that sounds like a very easy answer. I mean, it sounds almost, it's going to sound terrible to say it this way, it almost sounds dismissive of the challenge that's tied to it. Nothing that you've described to me gets rid of the anxiety I have about doing this task. It doesn't work me past identifying why I seem to have a block about getting this ball rolling. How do.

Francis Wade | 21:12

I solve that? If there is anxiety, I agree. If there's anxiety, then there are different ways to deal with it. I have my ways of dealing with it. You could talk to a coach. You could, I do a method of, I borrowed from Byron Katie, where I write down sentences and questions, and da-da-da-da-da-da. But the anxiety has nothing to do with procrastination per se. It's anxiety. It's some self-talk. That has resulted in feelings that are unwanted.

So whatever that is that, If... It's a different show, I think, than the one that we're on, but I think it's a good conversation for us to have actually, probably a show in the future. But there's ways of dealing with anxiety once you've identified

it. And I think whatever method you use, you bring that to the party and you implemented.

Art Gelwicks | 22:02

So let's say I let's say I recognize the fact that, yeah, I'm kind of internally churned up excuse me, about this thing that I need to do.

Francis Wade | 22:04

Kind of...

Art Gelwicks | 22:15

Or let's say for example, maybe there isn't any real anxiety, I'm just not doing it yet. How do you get someone started? How do you help somebody cross that line. And I'll answer my own question a little bit first. One of the things that I'll tell people is, The first thing you have to do is you have to answer the question, Why are you not starting it? And that's a really hard question. And it may be anxiety or things like that. You're right. That's a whole different conversation. But often it's something much simpler. In the case that I'm talking about, it's because this particular thing for this particular group has never been done before. There's no historical data or information to operate from.

So I am producing a completely new result product for this particular situation, which means I don't know how this is going to go. It's not like I have a true rule set to compare against or a yardstick for evaluations. I'm going to take a shot and I'm going to throw this thing out and it's either going to work great or it's going to be mediocre or it's going to be a travesty. I have no idea.

So my framework is first figure out why. Well, I know in this case, again, I don't have the historical record. Second, How do I correct that?

Well, unfortunately, I can't correct the fact that there's no historical record for doing this, so I have to find comparative solutions. I have to find other places and other examples of how this was done.

So I at least have some sort of a measure or a target of what I need to get to. That I get a sense then as to what a successful outcome would be. And if I, I'm being specifically vague because I have to be with this client, but let's take something in the real world. Emptying the dishwasher. It could be just something you procrastinate. Why are you procrastinating? Because I hate emptying the dishwasher because I get wet and everything else and it's a mess. But you know what emptying the dishwasher successfully looks like. And if you answer the question in the beginning, why am I not doing this?

Well, because every time I do it, all the stuff in the top rack has water in it. Then maybe I take a step that keeps me from getting doused in water. And all of a sudden it's not a bad thing and I'm able to do it again in the future.

So that's my first recommendation I give to people. Take a few minutes to figure out exactly why and be honest with yourself as to why you think you're not starting this thing.

And then see if that can be mitigated.

Augusto Pinaud | 24:55

As you were saying, what is the knowledge or the experience that I have? The dishwasher is something that, as you said, I know the successful outcome. I know what I need to do. And I may be procrastinating for many reasons. I think that's, That is in a different... Than when you talk on things like, okay, I need to start this project that I may not know the outcome that I may not have the clear experience. And now I am procrastinating. I think they belong to two different places to be analyzed. The first kind, take the trash, do the laundry, all those

routine things in which you have experience and you decide to watch Netflix instead of those don't tend to produce insight, at least for me. Okay. I don't get anxious because the clothes doesn't get done or the dishes are piling or any of those things. I think the anxiety comes from two places. One is when there is an agreement, conscious or not, with others or yourself about that project. Okay. And dishes doesn't qualify for that. And the second one is when The outcome of that project, you cannot guarantee.

You know that at the end of the day, if you sit there the 20 minutes, you will clean the dishes, kitchen will be clean. Okay. And you will feel better regardless how much you procrastinate about. Okay. The problem is on the other is you set an outcome. Real or not on your mind, okay, in written or not. And now you are not sure if you can actually bring Shout out, come back. And we put this, so we said productivity cast. Okay, we are going to record here. Okay, every week X amount and we're going to publish X amount of episodes a year. We know what they need to do. We meet here. We are on Monday. We are recording. But then... If we don't make the other part plus it unconscious goals that each one of us set for this podcast. That's what I start producing the anxiety. The anxiety is not for coming and recording. The anxiety is not for coming and editing and publish the show. The anxiety comes when those things that we don't know how to fix start showing up.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 27:29

Let's start from the very beginning, which is... The point starting is the answer. So as Dr. Neil Fiore talks about in the now habit, he uses this technique he calls persistent starting and I like to think that every outcome that I'm trying to get to Ends. With me beginning many times.

So if I just keep starting, toward an outcome. Then I'll eventually get to the end. So no matter how many times I fall, how many times I stumble, Failure is permanent giving up of something, right? So I don't use the term fail. I would say fall or stumble. Every time I stumble, I'm still moving in a direction. And therefore, I can correct course and continue toward the goal. Progress is the imperative here. So starting is the answer. When you feel procrastination, if you lean into starting... Then you will have a much better chance at Finishing. And so I don't think too much about completion because completion is sense of finality that I think a lot of people are uncomfortable with myself included so if I just keep starting toward the outcome, then I feel a sense of accomplishment Once I get to the completion status. Next is I just fundamentally believe you need to be tracking your time. And tracking what you are procrastinating on when you come across these things.

So the data needs to start to bring awareness to when you are procrastinating so that you're able to understand that better. Now, I say time tracking, maybe you say journaling, whatever the term is that you are adopting for this, you are taking time to reflect on why it is you feel that you are procrastinating or consciously or unconsciously deferring projects or tasks. And this brings me to what I believe are kind of the bulk reasons for that. In the unconscious deferral space, Many times you see it as procrastination, but you're doing problem solving and you problem solve when you're mind wandering and usually when you're sleeping. Your brain takes time to solve problems and it makes that pattern recognition and all of that kind of solving of problems happens when you are not doggedly looking at the problem. And so a simple problem like how do you put a square peg into a square hole? That's a pretty simple problem for a human. But how do you solve our human resources problem that has 50 different permutations and 150 people to deal with? That's a much more

complex problem, and that's not the same for our mind. We need to allow our unconscious mind to do that work. We need to step away from it. And so we will. Potentially unconsciously defer things, And what we need to start doing is recognizing that it requires time.

So we need to step away from it and then come back to it. And one good thing I like to do is just anchor in time, right? Create a chronological flag in the sand and say, Here goes a project. Let me do some planning around it. Recognizing that I don't necessarily know this is the right plan, but then set it aside for some time and come back to it. It's kind of like when you're writing, you might write a first draft, put it in the drawer, and then come back to it a couple days later. Our brain requires that for almost all of our complex projects in the world. And this leads us to the types of projects that we tend to have. We have I'm calling them linear projects, but basically projects that are non-creative. Creative projects have a value to them for some people, and for other people's, they scare them. And there's a fear-based response to it because they conflict with the idea that they can't see the successful outcome. Or if you're trying to paint something, but you don't know what the painting looks like, what is how it's going to turn out, maybe because you feel that you don't have the right skills or the right resources to make that thing come to life in whatever medium. You will then have a natural conflict. Whereas with linear projects where you can see the successful outcome, then that's pretty easy for you. And unless you have some other motivational reason for not doing it, right?

Like I hate my boss, or I don't have the resources to be able to make that project happen, or I don't have the, you know, the available people to make that happen, those kinds of things, then you're going to be able to get that project done. And then there's this tertiary one in linear projects, which are linear tasks, which are that They're mundane. Why do I need to take out the garbage? You don't think it's worth it in the moment. Even though in the aggregate they then pile up, right? Why do I need to go running this morning? It's for my health, but I don't feel healthier the moment I run. I feel healthier 30 years from now. For having kept my body in good working order. The timeline is...

Something that is disconnected from the immediate value of doing so. So we need to remember that there's kind of a horizon issue Again, using GTD parlance to understand why motivation being disconnected.

So we need to create smaller little bits of reward for us as we are thinking through some of the tasks that we may traditionally call procrastination, when we traditionally say that we're procrastinating on doing those types of things.

Augusto Pinaud | 33:08

You made an interesting point and we tend to think when we look at these things, and even with the procrastination, is what I'm going to lose. When you think about health, we don't think, hey, if I go to the gym, what we think is what we are going to lose. Okay, well, I'm going to lose the access to sweet or candy or dessert or instant pleasure. And we are really bad at thinking, okay, let me stop. And look at from the other side, the other perspective, what can I gain? And as you said, what can I gain in the next 20 years? What can I gain if I implement these things? And As of... Art was asking earlier what can be one of those things that people can use is that, is ask that question. Instead of looking all that you're going to lose, all that you're not working, all that, you know, you are missing in Netflix, think all that you can gain by finishing. That acting. I think that question and the other question, you know, why I'm not starting this thing in combination could be a really

powerful duo.

Art Gelwicks | 34:24

There's something that came to mind as you were talking, Ray, and this is a more of a tactical thing. Going back to the question of why am I delaying? I think a lot of times people will delay because they are trying to plan and do at the same time. They're going through and trying to execute maybe a multi-step task or project or who knows what. And they're trying to plan the next step. As they're doing the previous step. That can be extremely overwhelming because again, you don't have that end goal in mind. I was looking back at some plans I made for today to take care of something that I need to do. And it's not a lot of steps. It's about seven different steps. But looking at it, If I were to try and do those while I was trying to make that list up, I guarantee I'd miss something. And having missed something in the past in that type of a list structure, When I think about future instances of doing it, I start to feel anxious about what am I going to miss the next time. Is it going to be a QA step? Is it going to be a functional step? Is it going to be a documentary step? I don't know. I won't know what I miss until I catch it after I missed it. But having that opportunity to recognize that planning an execution of something is as important, if not more important in many cases, than the thing itself that you're doing. Can get you moving forward. It at least gives you a sense of, yep, I figured out what I need to do. I've gotten over half of the action required. And maybe that's one of our key drivers is the fact we have to acknowledge that almost everything we do We are only identifying half of the work involved in it. When we say that I need to produce an ad for Facebook, Part of that is I need to plan an ad for Facebook and then I need to make it. We only think about the outcome. We don't think about the work necessary to get ready to create the outcome.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 36:38

Retrospective planning is very difficult for humans. And so don't blame yourself for not being good at it. What you're talking about, Art, though, is that you need to start becoming conscious of that missing element and the more you do that level of retrospective planning that is setting an outcome in a timeline and then working yourself backward to what is necessary to make that outcome come to be is not the way in which we think. Humans think what can I do in the next five minutes?

And then they think, if I want to build a house, in their mind's eye, if they can see the house, they want the house now. It's that simple. And yet at the same time, we need to do those planning functions in order to get there. And so I fully think that's part of the piece. The other part that I find, there's probably two other parts here. The first one that I think about is And it relates to what Augusto was talking about, and that is deprivation. Anytime we are depriving ourselves of something in the moment for a longer term goal, we need to recognize the sense of pushback that our unconscious mind provides to us. But remember, the brain is doing this purposefully. It is most efficient for us not to go after things that are not going to give us immediate gain. We are. Basically being hunted, you know, in our primary development of these parts of our mind. And so it makes much more sense to us to get a short-term immediate reward than it is for us to think about long-term when your life is so short. And humans now have much longer lifespans. For some of us, double, some of us triple our lifespans. And therefore, we are now capable of depriving ourselves, like the whole idea of saving money, right? Saving money means depriving ourselves of immediate earnings. For future benefit.

Like, how stupid is that to the hunter gatherers mind? Right.

Like that mind is like, you're an idiot. You're not going to live that long.

So why would you save money? Right. That's what's going on in the lower baser parts of your brain. It's like, come on now, buy candy now, eat as much of it as possible so that you can live for the next winter. That's what's going on. You don't get a reward for the heart attack you've prevented. Right. And what we need to start doing is rewarding ourselves for ongoing, regular behaviors that help us prevent heart attacks.

And then we're like, okay, I could do that. I can give myself a small reward today. That prompts me to know to keep motivated toward doing those things. The second item is that There is... A consistent quality and efficiency argument that your brain is doing. Again, I really believe that your mind is doing this work behind the scenes to be most efficient. I think there's a little bit of a warping of things in another way though, which is that if you do something last minute, And many people do, right? The concept of procrastinating to the last minute is something we all have heard, as some of us have done it and some of us do it on a regular basis. And this breeds a sense of excitement. If you're working on, say, a presentation for the next day, there's all that rush of adrenaline getting yourself prepared for that presentation the next day. There are some immediate benefits, but of course your work product is poor. And You can conflict with me and argue with me to the end of the day, but I bet you that if you started the project and worked on it in small... But consistent ways, your presentation would probably be better on the whole if you didn't work on it all the night before. And this is the same thing with learning and remembering. You can cram for a test, but you will not remember most of those things after the test is over, which means that you didn't really learn anything. And therefore, what was the value of cramming for the test other than to get the letter grade or the number grade?

I mean, what's the value of learning if you don't value learning? And so The last minute action problem in procrastination is that What I've understood from the various research studies that I've read is that your brain is doing this analysis, which is that If I wait until the last minute and then I do this thing and it turns out Okay, well then, great. I saved time and energy, and I don't fault myself for the shortcomings of the outcome.

And then if I don't Then I go gosh, you know, I only spent, a night on it. So of course it came out poorly. And so you're giving yourself an out on either end in terms of holding yourself to a standard. And I consider that a standard of excellence. I want to have a standard of excellence with the things that I do. And by procrastinating to the last minute, then it gives you that exit door, it gives you that exit strategy. And I think that what we need to do is more and more think through How do we break projects up? Again, going back to your point, Art, about doing that kind of planning so that we can meter out the work, make it less stressful on us all, and have greater and better outcomes. For the planning work that we're doing.

Francis Wade | 42:02

I agree with all that. I think the And we've been talking about different possible causes of what people call procrastination. I think.

Art Gelwicks | 42:13

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Raymond Sidney-Smith | 42:13

Okay.

Francis Wade | 42:14

In a way, we're talking to each other because we're all You know, we've been on this

journey of, greater productivity for decades, each of us, right? But for someone who is just starting out, is still using memory. And they're still trying to remember a bunch of stuff and they often would use a term like procrastination, which is kind of a catch-all phrase which includes I'm not ineffective. They don't know this, but we looking on would say, The person is not an effective task manager. The person is not managing their emotions effectively. In general, the person isn't a very good self-manager. What they're calling procrastination, is multiple ways in which their lack of skill is manifesting. I think that's what we've discussed is how, what are the different manifestations when someone says they're a procrastinator or they procrastinate, what are the different manifestations of it? And what are the different possible causes of it? But I think it's a, in a way, it's a beginner... Problem. That as we become more sophisticated. We don't use the label. I don't think any of us use the label that much when applying to us. We go straight to the emotional cause or the task management cause or the self-management cause, we're able to zero in on the cause without going through the blunt instrument to get there.

So in other words, we're better at self-diagnosing. You become skillful at self-diagnosing what's going on with us. And zeroing in on the cause. But I think there's great value in people who use this term and I feel a sense of compassion because it's not as if. That term is going to really help them Get rid of procrastination, which is what people talk about, getting rid of it. It's like... That's not really a useful way to think about it. It's more useful to... So think of going to the cause directly and figuring out the symptom. And forget about the term. Just become skillful at fixing what there is to be fixed. And then moving on, whether it's emotional or task oriented.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 44:31

I think there are actually benefits to procrastination. It becomes a filter for the unnecessary in life because if you and choose not to do a whole group of things, the cream will rise to the top. The bigger fires will become immediately apparent, and the fires that weren't so worrisome will Basically, become embers, right? They'll fizzle out. And so there is a way in which really procrastination is has these benefits to us that we recognize on some unconscious level. And so we see them And therefore, our mind just starts to do it. Our mind does that kind of procrastination and That's fine. I think that the point where it becomes difficult is that when it becomes debilitating, it becomes dysfunctional for us in some way, shape or form. And when we are in a place where we have been doing this for a while and we want to optimize.

So there's two very different planes of existence where you're, say, the new person or you have been potentially trying this for a long time and it feels dysfunctional and keeping you from the goals you want to achieve especially when you have a goal that is something that has moved from year to year procrastination on that plane is very difficult for people because there's an there's that guilt and shame associated with not having done that thing right so if you've deferred doing say your taxes for several years and now you know that there's this big unknown of what could happen in terms of punishment. There are good reasons why people procrastinate on doing those things. They're fearful of the outcome.

So we need to address those head on in terms of what's the help we can get. And I really believe that you need to bring other people into this because in essence, we require that as humans to have that level of group accountability. It may be one additional person, a spouse partner, a trusted friend, professional help, whatever

it is to be able to say, okay, I can't get this thing done. I need someone else. Maybe you just need somebody else to talk the project through because maybe they're a more creative professional and they have a sense of what... Can be done in a particular project, and you're more a linear person.

So you're thinking about this from a linear approach. Bring people in, and then it becomes less daunting. It becomes clearer, and by being clearer, it becomes more actionable. And so I think on any of those layers, no matter where you are in the timeframe of being and feeling like procrastination is holding you back, you can, one, parse out whether it is conscious or unconscious deferral, an unconscious deferral is okay i'm deferring this but why and then many things that you think were procrastination were really unconscious deferral and then if you are consciously deferring something why and identifying what the condition needs to be in order for it to become active and for you to now actively do that thing do the actions toward the outcome I mean... Other and final thoughts. In terms of things people can do to overcome, to tackle procrastination.

Art Gelwicks | 47:53

You mentioned it earlier, the fact of retroactive planning is so difficult for people. I think that's one of the biggest steps that you can do for yourself is after you do something, go back and write down what happened. What were the steps you went through? What did you miss? What was the outcome? What would you do differently? That for lack of a better term, that post-mortem analysis of that thing that you did that you were resisting to do, can help you be prepared the next time you have to start to tackle something like that. As I mentioned before, the thing that I'm tackling right now, there's no historical precedent for it.

So I'm going to look at something related to it. But when I'm done it, I'm going to take time to write down what went well, what didn't go well. And then have that. For reference next time. Can't guarantee it's going to help, but it's certainly going to make life easier.

Raymond Sidney-Smith | 48:50

Thank you, gentlemen. This has been a lot of fun discussing procrastination and conscious deferral.

And then we've even tacked on unconscious deferral into this conversation, of course. And so I just think for anybody who has been listening to this, these two episodes together, recognize that there is no one. Best solution for overcoming and tackling procrastination, but recognize that there is and are small tactics and little things that you can do to be able to overcome it over time. It is not something that immediately becomes you take a pill and then it's done with. It's something that really takes conscious effort and applied practice. Practice to be able to get to an outcome where you feel like you procrastinate less and you do the things you want to do more, what we consider self-efficacy. And so thank you, gentlemen, for this conversation. And I'm looking forward to our next episode for a different topic on productivity. 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 ProductivityCast.net. They're on the podcast website. At the bottom of the page, feel free to leave a comment or question. We read and respond to comments and questions there. As well, you're invited to join our listeners group inside Personal Productivity Club, a digital community for personal productivity enthusiasts that I host, where you can interact with the ProductivityCast team directly. To join for free, visit [productivitycast.net](http://productivitycast.net) forward slash community, and you can get started there. By the

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Voiceover Artist | 52:11

That's it for this episode of Productivity Cast, the weekly show about all things personal productivity, with your hosts, Ray Sidney-Smith and Augusto Pinaud, with Frances Wade and Art Gelwicks.