



The ADHD Productivity Manual



Sample



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ISBN-13: 979-8-9985784-0-3 (Paperback)

ISBN-13: 979-8-9985784-1-0 (eBook)

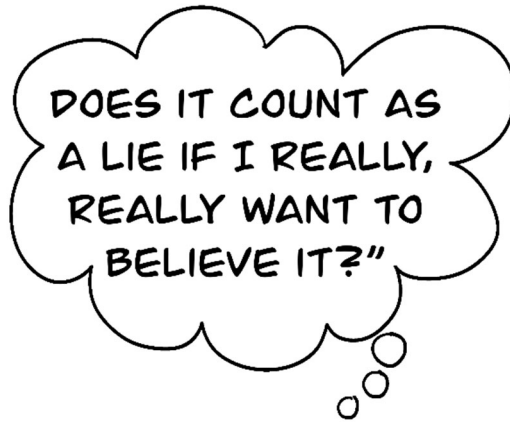
Library of Congress Control Number: 2025908845

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23. The Lies We Tell Ourselves

LIFE IS HARD. SOMETIMES WE don't want to do that boring, uncomfortable, responsible thing when there's something much easier and more fun to do instead. This is why french fries exist. To make matters worse, we still want to see ourselves as saints while we enjoy the sin. We want it both ways. This is why diet soda exists. This is why Miller Lite claimed that it both tastes great and is also less filling, when clearly only one of those is true.

This is a universal struggle, that we want to see ourselves in a positive light even when we knowingly give in to temptation or take the shortcut. In order to pull this off, we find ways to justify these less than optimal decisions (e.g., by downsizing to the second largest order of fries). We use semi-plausible reasons to feel better about what we know isn't the best decision. For example, taking a break from working on a grueling report to check email—you know, in case anything important came in.

Making the most of the present and making the most of the future are in a constant tug of war.

Life is full of tempting moments when willpower wavers. One of the ways of thinking about this is as a tug of war between doing what will make the present moment more enjoyable versus what will make a future moment better. For example, chatting with a coworker versus working on that big report that's due in a few days. If you have ADHD, you will feel more of a pull from the present and need to exert more effort to resist it in order to improve the future. (Go back to 3. *ADHD Makes It Harder to Feel the Future* for more on this.) This can have massive effects on your productivity since getting things done mostly involves sacrificing in the present in order to create a better future.

I say that bad situations make bad choices more likely. The more stressful and chaotic your life is and the more depleted you feel, then the harder it is to muster the willpower to resist temptation and do that more responsible thing. It's too easy a fight for the present to win out over the future. This is where our favorite justifications come to the rescue—not by changing what we do, but by changing how we feel about what we're going to do anyway. It's impressive sometimes what we can talk ourselves into. We get to be a scoundrel with a heart of gold. If it makes you feel any better about what we can wind up believing, there was a time when doctors recommended smoking for its health benefits.

It's helpful to notice these little lies that we tell ourselves, these talking points that justify our less than optimal behavior. It's not my place to decide what you should do—the real arbiter is how you will feel about it after. If you're OK with how things worked out, great. It's when you will likely regret it later that maybe you should take a harder look at how you're trying to sell yourself on some awesome idea.

ADHD Makes Some Lies More Tempting

We all have some favorite lies based on the situations we find or place ourselves in and what we have the hardest time resisting. For example, someone who drinks too much will tell themselves that they really aren't drinking that much or that it isn't impacting their relationships. Someone with social anxiety will tell themselves that they don't really have much in common with the people at that upcoming gathering, so there's no point in going.

If you have ADHD, certain lies are more likely, such as:

- I don't have to write that down—I'll remember it
- This will only take a minute
- I will be more productive after I . . .
- I have plenty of time to work on that
- That task won't take that long
- I'll remember that I put this here
- I can do that tomorrow
- I don't have to go to bed now
- I'll put that away later
- I don't have to start getting ready yet
- I'll just watch one video

Any of these call out to you?

The problem with these lies is that sometimes they work. You know, except for all those times when they don't. It's tempting to feel lucky, as if this is one of those times when it will work out. All the benefit, none of the suffering! If we were really honest, we might be less optimistic about it working out well, but we like the idea that it will, so we run with it.

Feeling lucky and being lucky are sadly not the same thing.

One of the ways to spot when you're trying to talk yourself into something dubious is that you use "just" to downplay it—e.g., "I'll just watch one quick video." That word is almost always a red flag since it's a handy way to round something down a little. By the way, you may also want to notice when your kids use that word with you. (Sorry, guys.)

Beware of the slippery *just*.

It's also noteworthy that all of those lies involve ways to get out of doing the harder thing now that will benefit you later. They make the present moment

more enjoyable or at least less unenjoyable. They kick the can down the road. This makes sense because of the way ADHD makes future consequences feel smaller. I have more on this in *3. ADHD Makes It Harder to Feel the Future*, which will explain a lot more than just why you sometimes talk yourself into bad ideas.

Be Honest About the Odds

My goal here isn't to be a buzzkill, but to make you more aware of where you get yourself into trouble. The good thing about identifying your favorite lies is that there are probably only a handful that cause the most heartache. That makes it much easier to keep an eye out for them.

The most important thing is to be honest with yourself about what you're doing and what the likely cost is. This way you're less likely to regret your decision later. No one needs more ill-fated decisions to beat themselves up over. The example I often use is that if I go to a concert, I accept that I will be more tired the next day, but it's worth it, so I feel good about that decision. This is different from watching one more episode of some show I can watch later and telling myself that I'll feel fine tomorrow—I know that's bogus and the fun isn't worth it the next day, so I will regret that choice.

Tolerate the Discomfort

These lies that we tell ourselves make an uncomfortable situation a little easier. They probably work in the moment, but then bring more discomfort later—it turns out that the universe and its consequences don't really care what we convince ourselves of.

The first step in being more honest with yourself is to reduce the number of situations where honesty is just too hard. The more stressful and chaotic your life is, the more willpower it takes to plow through—until you start to run low and the more shortsighted decisions seem more tempting. This is when those little lies begin to slip through. Getting more sleep, using your schedule more, and everything else in the book will probably be helpful here. Not that any of that is easy, but it's yet another reason to put in the effort to get your life under better control. And yet another reward for getting on top of your ADHD a bit more.

We all have our moments where we're tempted to believe our own sweet-talking. This is the moment of truth when we need to notice that we're lying to ourselves or at least shading the truth a bit. Maybe rounding things up or down to make them seem like a more reasonable option, like telling ourselves that one video is only twenty minutes (actually it's more than that) but also there's a strong possibility that we will watch more than one. The most important moment is that small space between having that tempting thought and acting on it. With ADHD, that space can be smaller and therefore make it harder to resist temptation. The goal in that moment is to pause just a moment longer so your conscious brain has time to kick in and remind yourself that this may not be the best idea. Seize that moment. Take a deep breath to stop yourself from whatever you're going to do next.

When you catch yourself using one of your favorite lies, here's the real test: If you had to throw down a fat stack of twenties and bet a thousand bucks of cold, hard cash, would you bet for or against this optimism? Picture that pile of bills and imagine everything you could do with it. Feel how much it would hurt to watch someone else pocket it. How do you feel about your odds now? Are you feeling a thousand bucks confident?

The chapters in the rest of this section deal with all the mental ways that productivity gets tangled up, such as perfectionism, overwhelm, ambiguity, etc. These are also uncomfortable and can make it tempting to lie to ourselves, so check out the upcoming chapters to make honesty easier.

Living with integrity and feeling good about yourself don't mean that you need to live like a monk. Hardly. It just means being honest about what you're doing and what the likely consequences are. As long as you are, you will feel good about yourself. As I've said before, the goal isn't to make you into a relentless productivity robot but to find the right balance between getting things done and enjoying a good life.

Put It to Work

- What are your three favorite lies? What do they (hopefully) allow you to get away with? What discomfort do they reduce? How do you feel, knowing that you're not being fully honest with yourself, even if it works out? How do you feel when it doesn't work out?

- What are the situations where you're most likely to lie to yourself? What is difficult or uncomfortable about those situations? How can you set yourself up beforehand to make the temptation to lie easier to resist?

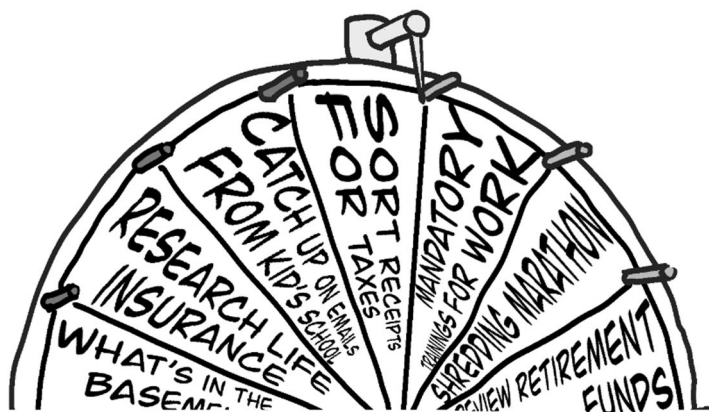
- When you use your favorite lies, how often do they work out? How can you remind yourself of the cost if the lie doesn't work out? How can you really feel the benefit of doing the task in the present that will benefit your future?

- **What, When, Where, and Why?**

What strategies are you going to apply from this chapter? How will this be different from what you're already doing? Or perhaps have done before?

When and where? The more specific you can be, the better. Then actively look for these moments. Or set an alarm or other reminder to pull your attention to it. How can you set things up beforehand to make this easier to stick with?

Why? What problem will this solve or improve? What are all the direct and indirect benefits of this change? How is your life better for it? This is your motivation for when you don't feel like it.



24. Just Bite the Bullet on Things You Hate

IT'S TEMPTING TO CONVENIENTLY AVOID what we don't want to do—life has plenty of obligations that fit into this category. They're usually labelled as “the responsible thing to do” by the self-righteous, which really only makes them even less desirable to do. Pass... If you have ADHD, then what may just be boring for someone else may feel painful and exhausting to you. And, obviously, you'll feel as if it took ten times longer than the clock somehow indicates. (Maybe the battery is dying?)

Tempting as it is to pretend that you didn't get the memo, life has a way of dishing out consequences for not getting around to certain tasks. Best case, it's just as bad to do it later as it is to do it now. More likely though is that it somehow gets worse with time. For example, you miss out on doing something better when you're finally forced to deal with whatever you've been avoiding, or it's late and you're dragging. You may also lose options by waiting, like when reservations get all

booked up. Or you need to buy the more expensive option that's the only thing in stock when you do get around to pulling the trigger. The ADHD tax strikes again.

Even if somehow you're lucky enough to dodge any consequences, at least this time, at least so far, there are still the psychological costs. First, there's the worry that you will eventually have to pay the piper, that someone will suddenly call you out. Busted. Second, even if you somehow make it to the end of class without revealing that you didn't do the reading, so to speak, you still know you didn't do it. While you may try to spin it as you're blessed with good luck and a brilliant ability to look confidently knowledgeable, all this faking it can wear on your image of yourself. If you really struggle with this kind of self-doubt, check out *31. Social Pressure, Faking It, and Falling Short*.

Having a conscience is a real bummer sometimes, so it's worth it to find ways to bite the bullet when you need to. Some tasks run on a regular schedule, such as paying bills or filling out weekly reports. For these, you may find it best to drop them into your schedule on repeat. Perhaps in red pen or something.

Don't forget to give yourself extra credit for the tasks that are the hardest to make yourself do.

Even if it's a one-time task, you may still find it helpful to plan where and when you will tackle it. Or maybe just have a regular time where you plow through whatever tasks you're avoiding. I talk more about putting to do list tasks into your schedule in *20. And Probably a To Do List, Too*, so be sure to add reading that to your to do list.

The rest of the book has plenty of other ways to make things easier or at least less hard. So look for all the ways that you can smooth down the frustrating parts, make boring tasks go a little faster, feel less anxious, etc. The less awful a task is, the less motivation it will take to get it done. This not only makes it more likely to happen, it also preserves more of your precious motivation for other stuff.

Get That Ball Rolling

I would love to guarantee that there are ways to make it fun or easy to do the things that you hate, but I'm not stupid enough to think that you're stupid enough to believe it. Here's what I can guarantee: you will still kind of hate it. Not very inspiring, but honest. The goal is to hate it less.

One way to hate it less is to tackle undesirable tasks when you've got more mental gas in the tank rather than waiting until you're running on empty but have to do it anyway—slogging through mental mud is a good way to hate it more. So, bite the bullet when you're well rested, have good focus, your meds are working, you just worked out, you had a snack, etc.—whatever brings more of your A game. That way you can plow through quickly and move on to better things.

Related to this, I often recommend scheduling your avoided tasks for earlier in the day since it's less likely they will get squeezed out by the day's events (even though you're hoping that they will).

You may also want to add in some small reward to top off your motivation. For example, after you finish a task or do a certain amount of work, you let yourself do something more enjoyable. This is a nice idea in theory but it's hard to stick to it, so your reward shouldn't be too tempting or you'll skip over the work. Also, if you're hoping to get back to work, you may also want to avoid rewards that tend to keep you stuck, like algorithm-driven online content. Or beer. (OK, so that's a weak joke, but I have had some college students who had to learn that lesson the hard way. Repeatedly.)

You can also set up some accountability by telling someone else what you're going to work on. Even if you just mention it in passing, that may be enough to make the difference. To really turn up the heat, tell them you will let them know when you're done. You might ask them to check in later if they're OK with that, but you don't want to create a situation where too much of the initiative is coming from someone else. If you do recruit someone else, you may want to coach them on what to say or how to say it (and also how not to say it), so they don't inadvertently do more harm than good. No one needs more nagging or judgment even if it is well-intentioned.

Accountability partners are pretty standard advice and they can be helpful, but I think it's important to be clear on how they work, especially if you have a bit of an oppositional streak. Unless this other person actually moves your body to do the task, it's still you choosing to do it. They don't make you do anything. Rather, their presence makes you face your own feelings about not holding to your commitment since there's someone there to witness you wiggling out. It's harder to ignore, minimize, or gloss over feeling guilty or disappointed under the accountability partner's cold and knowing stare. If you're the one who does the task, then you still get credit for it. And for being smart enough to set up a winning strategy.

You could also make it more entertaining by adding a ridiculous bet—as in, some ridiculous thing that you don't really want to lose but won't cost you any fingers. This could be something like you have to eat whatever appetizer of their choice or you have to pretend to love an episode of a show that kind of makes you nuts. Or explain to them why your favorite team's biggest rival has a lot going for them this season. Or sing the song of their choice, complete with dance moves. Good times. It adds a fun competitiveness to it all and is fun for both people, regardless of who wins or loses.

It's also important, when you do knock off that dreaded task, to take a moment to give yourself credit for it. You might push back on this idea by saying that you shouldn't give yourself credit for doing what you should do anyway. I push back on *that* by pointing out that you would almost certainly knock on yourself for, yet again, not doing it. So, fair's fair. If you had a bunch of years of undiagnosed and untreated ADHD, you have had more than enough experiences of knocking on yourself. Let's start evening that score.

We Knowingly Set Up Failure

Sometimes when we don't want to do something, we preemptively wiggle out of it by not putting it onto our to do list or schedule or setting an alarm. Whoops! Then, shockingly, we forget to do it. Is this motivated forgetfulness? Intentionally unintentional? A way to dodge the bullet without admitting that we decided not to do it? This might look like a time management or memory problem, but it's actually more about motivation and commitment—or lack thereof. Ideally, it

would probably be better to make a real decision beforehand. You may decide that you're not doing it, at least not yet, and be OK with letting it go. This is probably how the story ends anyway. But chances are good that you will feel better about yourself if you didn't do it because you actively decided not to than you would if you just plain didn't get it done.

Alternatively, you may decide that, unfortunately, you really should just do the task. In that case, commit to first doing whatever you need to do to set it up (e.g., setting a reminder), then to biting the bullet when the time comes and actually getting it done. It may help if you remind yourself that people with interesting lives sometimes need to do the boring stuff too. By "interesting lives," I mean being able to pursue what is meaningful to them, not the kind of interesting that comes from panicked realizations and frantic scrambling. That's also pretty exciting, but in a more stressful way.

Don't Suffer More Than You Have To

Suffering comes not only from being in situations that we don't like, but also from what we tell ourselves about it. I'm not one of those annoying influencers who says that all you have to do is decide to be happy. That's a good idea taken too far, but there is some truth to it. Once you've done what you can to change your situation (like applying the strategies in the rest of the book), then what's left is acceptance. This doesn't mean that you're 100% happy about what's happening, but rather that you aren't going to burn a bunch of extra mental energy (and make the task worse) by complaining about how boring it is. Fully accepting that the task will be boring means not trying to fight it or let yourself complain about how boring it is. Probably no one would debate you on the boringness, so all that complaining and anger suggest you're subconsciously hanging on to the hope that being indignant will somehow change it. It won't.

By focusing on what you're unhappy about, you just feel more unhappy. This includes griping about what is unfair, unnecessary, redundant, poorly designed, annoying, and/or just plain dumb about what you need to do. The slippery slope is that the more right you are, the easier it is to feel justified in your

This task may be mandatory, but suffering isn't.

complaints—and then trapped in your unhappiness. Remind yourself that part of the cost of a good life is sometimes doing things you hate, because it benefits your life in other ways.

Whistling while you work may be too big a stretch, but you can try to shift your focus. Maybe there's an aspect that is somewhat less annoying. Maybe focus on the next progress marker, whether by time (e.g., fifteen minutes done, forty-five to go!) or by accomplishment (e.g., halfway done!). Bring enough energy to keep pushing forward at a good pace rather than trudging through it—that only drags out your misery. Add other fun things, like music, podcasts, videos, call a friend, a new location, some sort of variation, or whatever will distract you enough while still allowing you to make progress.

Finally, make a point of reminding yourself of how good it will feel to know you did it. Look beyond the suffering of the present moment and put yourself into what it will feel like when you're done. Give yourself some credit for doing a pretty good job. Remind yourself that you can hold your head high without worry of being called out for not getting this done, and that you can confidently answer if anyone asks you about it. There's a freedom that comes from that.

Put It to Work

- What boring tasks are you avoiding? What price are you paying for that, both tangible and intangible? Does anyone else know what you're not getting to? Do they have any feelings about that?

- Write out how your life would be better when these dreaded tasks are done or at least done enough. How can you remind yourself of these rewards, as vividly as possible, when you don't want to do something?

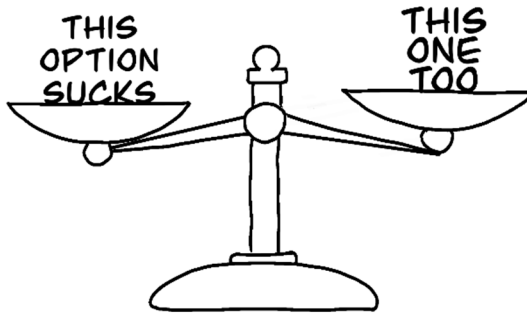
- Identify how you can set yourself up to get to those dreaded tasks by making it easier to do the work or reducing the barriers to starting. How can you remind yourself of the benefits so that you keep setting yourself up for success?

- **What, When, Where, and Why?**

What strategies are you going to apply from this chapter? How will this be different from what you're already doing? Or perhaps have done before?

When and where? The more specific you can be, the better. Then actively look for these moments. Or set an alarm or other reminder to pull your attention to it. How can you set things up beforehand to make this easier to stick with?

Why? What problem will this solve or improve? What are all the direct and indirect benefits of this change? How is your life better for it? This is your motivation for when you don't feel like it.



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25. Ambivalence: Pick a Side

WE CAN ALL HAVE MIXED feelings about a task that we want or need to do. Part of us wants to do it (or at least is willing), and another part of us would rather do something else. Most of the time, it isn't that close a call, so we decide to do the task or let it go. Fine. Life moves on, no looking back.

Sometimes, though, we get stuck, caught between doing and not doing. We feel ambivalent—part of us feels like we should do it, but another, equal, part really doesn't want to. These are the tasks that loiter on our to do list and make us curse a little every time we see them there. There's a certain kind of suffering that comes from these torn-in-two situations. It's different from what we feel about tasks that we might be procrastinating on but know we will eventually get to. We're ambivalent, and ambivalence involves more angsting when we really can't decide which way to go.

Being perfectionistic leaves you vulnerable to feeling stuck in ambivalence. If you set high standards, it can feel hard to hit the mark, so you hesitate to start but still

feel the pressure to do the task. The pressure builds and builds, but you're still stuck in neutral. Really stressful.

Maybe You Only Feel Like You Should Do It

When I've had clients wrestle with ambivalence about a task, there's usually a part of them that feels like they should do the task, either because someone else told them to or because they're assuming that someone else really wants them to. It feels like an externally imposed obligation. Sometimes, just to make it worse, there's also a feeling that they should *want* to do the task even though they definitely don't.

We all have times when we act out of obligation but have accepted that we just need to do it. The task is boring or frustrating, but whatever. We don't feel torn about it though, so we find a way to slog through or at least do enough of it to be able to call it quits. When we are stuck in ambivalence, we haven't come to that acceptance. Or alternatively, we haven't accepted the cost of telling that other person no. So, we sweat in the middle, squeezed between the expectation and not wanting to meet it.

Saying no is
always an option
if you're willing to
pay the price.

If you have struggled to get things done, you may feel like you can't say no, that you owe it to the person to agree to this task even though you really don't want to or can't do it. Or you may worry about the social consequences if you say no because it will be yet another time when you disappoint them. This leaves you feeling trapped between guilt and your true desires, between being good to the other person and being good to yourself.

Can You Tip It One Way or the Other?

If you're feeling haunted by an unfinished task, step back and take a look at the two sides. Why should you do it? Why not? Make a really good case both ways. Maybe even write out your reasons on each side. While you're at it, write down any assumptions you might be making that affect how you feel about it, one way or the other. For example, you may be making assumptions about how good the

end result needs to be or how awful the task will be to complete. In this case, it could be helpful to get more information about the task or desired outcome. As in, can you get some guidance that will make it easier to do? Or maybe find out how big a deal it would be to not complete it?

Ambivalence is all about that feeling of 50/50, that you can't decide either way. Maybe you can tip it one way or the other so it's easier to decide. You might try to make the task more of a winner. This might involve looking for ways to make the task less awful. For example, would a smaller production suffice? Or lower quality? Can you get someone to help you or maybe use a different process to pretty much get the job done—such as buying cupcakes for the bake sale instead of making them yourself? The less the job sucks, the less willpower it takes to get over that hump.

You can also make it a winner by pumping up the positives that come from completing it. What would it get you? Maybe you need to find out what you stand to gain from it. For example, how much could you potentially save by researching new car insurance? Above a certain point, it will be worth the hassle, so what's the potential upside?

You could also try to break the tie by deciding that the task is actually a loser that isn't worth the effort. This might involve accepting the consequences that will (or may) come from cutting that task loose. If there's a financial cost, you may decide that the money isn't worth the headache. Or maybe cutting the task loose involves disappointing someone who might try to pressure you to change your mind. That's not fun, but it may still be better than suffering through that dreaded task. It should also be noted that preemptively telling someone that you won't be doing something, hopefully with plenty of lead time, is a very different situation from dropping the ball by forgetting a commitment or by just not finishing it on time. The former involves making an active decision for yourself. The latter is letting your ADHD decide. The more you decide for yourself and are good about letting people know before the last minute, the easier it is to be assertive when it really matters.

Accept Still Being Torn

Sometimes people get stuck in ambivalence because they don't like either option and are hoping there is another way to resolve this that they will feel good about. Perfectionistic folks will hope for one clear winner so they don't need to worry about not choosing the other one (which is obviously terrible).

You may be able to tip that 50/50 into 60/40, but it's unlikely to ever get to 90/10 where you can go forth with a clean conscience. Probably you will be stuck with something closer to 51/49—enough to declare a winner but definitely not enough to feel good about it. Some decisions don't feel good, but that doesn't mean that they're the wrong ones. They're just the least bad—which is as good as it gets sometimes. Perhaps you've reached the point where it's unlikely there will be new information that would change your mind. Or maybe the deadline is upon you and it's go time. You may need to hold your nose while you choose, but just pull the trigger and move on. Then don't look back.

Some decisions just feel bad, even when they're the right one.

Just Not Important Enough

You may have a collection of tasks that keep hanging in there between dumping and doing. You never actually get to them, but you feel like you can't just cut them loose. Every time you get close to doing them, some other, more important task takes your time. This is called *pseudo-procrastination*. It's easy to assume the problem is that you're not productive enough or that you're procrastinating on those tasks, but the real problem may be that these tasks are OK ideas but not actually good enough to make the cut. The solution is either to decide that they need a promotion or to just accept that you're never going to get to them. Either way, clear the decks so they don't clutter up your to do list.

Put It to Work

- Identify a few tasks that you're ambivalently stuck on. What are the two sides that you feel torn between? Would it help to write them all out? Which side has at least a slightly stronger case? Do you just need to pick one and move on?

- How can you make one of these ambivalent tasks easier or less awful so you can pick a side and move on? What standards can you lower or corners can you cut? What's good enough?

- Identify a task that you feel obligated to complete but just can't get going on. How can you explain to the other person that you are not going to do it? What response are you worried about and how could you handle that?

- **What, When, Where, and Why?**

What strategies are you going to apply from this chapter? How will this be different from what you're already doing? Or perhaps have done before?

When and where? The more specific you can be, the better. Then actively look for these moments. Or set an alarm or other reminder to pull your attention to it. How can you set things up beforehand to make this easier to stick with?

Why? What problem will this solve or improve? What are all the direct and indirect benefits of this change? How is your life better for it? This is your motivation for when you don't feel like it.



26. No, That's Fake Productivity

BEING BUSY IS NOT THE same thing as being productive. Sure, it can look like it, but the real question is whether what you're doing is actually worth doing—versus just kind of worth doing. Sort of. At least eventually. . . OK, fine, I just couldn't make myself sort through all those health insurance claims.

Life is full of difficult, challenging, boring, and/or frustrating tasks that really are important. Fortunately and unfortunately, life is also full of tasks that may not be as important but are definitely less awful, so it's tempting to do these B-list activities as a way to avoid doing the tasks that require cognitive or emotional heavy lifting. See, I'm getting stuff done here! This feels much better than doing

Real productivity means finding a way to do the hardest jobs. Eventually.

something that's indefensibly unproductive, like slack-jawed scrolling. The kind-of-beneficial activity gives us some cover, whether from our own guilty conscience or others' judgey opinions. In these moments, we're not

aspiring to greatness, but we're also not totally wasting time—we walk the unobjectionable middle.

Russell Ramsay, PhD has coined the term *procrastivity* for this procrastination via productivity. This is when we work on marginally productive tasks as a justification for procrastinating on more cognitively or emotionally demanding tasks. We all have times when we just can't muster the motivation or mental energy for the task that's hanging most heavily over our heads. Doing something easier could actually be the best we can get in that moment. Where procrastivity comes in is when it might be possible to bite the bullet but instead we let ourselves off the hook. It's more about avoidance of the harder in favor of the easier.

Life brings plenty of random excuses we can dive into, but we all probably have favorite procrastivity tasks that we use most. This could be something like checking email or other messaging, scanning the news, putting a few things away, etc. That feels good because we're staying on top of things. We're being responsive! We're doing our share! It may also be easier to click through messages than it is to do "real" work. At home, it could be things such as loading the dishwasher rather than staring into the fridge and figuring out how to cobble together a dinner that won't elicit a mutiny.

Be on the lookout for the times when you're sliding into procrastivity, when you're going towards the softball rather than what you really need to take a swing at. Here are some questions to ask yourself to figure out if you're taking the easy route:

- *Is this really what I should be doing now?* Could I make a good case for doing the easier task—a case that would convince someone else?
- *Am I doing this, or not doing something else?* The heart of procrastivity is that we're avoiding a harder task. We use the easier but still kind of productive task as a way to feel better about our choice.
- *Am I going towards something or away from something?* If you didn't have that harder task hanging over your head, would you still be doing that easier task, or is it only appealing by comparison?

As I've said before, you don't need to be a relentless productivity robot. It's fine to cruise in the right lane sometimes. The problem with procrastivity, when overdone, is that we then regret the consequences of that unfinished task. There may be time to do it later, but sometimes there isn't, at least not without some undesirable price.

To avoid these frustrating later moments, you need to accept and tolerate the discomfort of the harder task. In other words, you need to acknowledge that it won't be fun—it might even totally suck—but it will be worth it. You could easily find something more enjoyable to do instead, but you won't. Pump up your motivation by really reminding yourself of the benefits of biting the bullet now. How does it make your life better? How will you feel when you're finished and know you have done a good job? How does that feel compared to knowing you wiggled out again?

If you can't get yourself to commit to the whole job, can you at least talk yourself into starting? Just five minutes. Just see how it goes. At least gather up what you need for this task or figure out what you need to do next. Any little bit of progress can build momentum.

If you put up a good fight even though you couldn't get those wheels turning, it will be easier to walk away with your head held high. Work on that easier task instead and give yourself partial credit. Tomorrow is a new day.

Over-Thinking and Under-Doing

We should also take a minute to point out another form of fake productivity. Sometimes thinking about a task feels like we're doing something about it, especially if we're really burning mental energy on it. Maybe. Sometimes—if we're considering new information or perspectives and our thinking is going somewhere. This is that back-of-the-mind problem-solving that can come up with some great new ideas. But just ruminating on something isn't that. Going round and round in the same circles with the same information doesn't really move our understanding forward. This is especially true if it's mostly worrying or angsting, which bring suffering but not much to show for it.

However, because we're actively engaged with the problem, it can feel like we're doing *something* about it. This can even take on the role of a pressure release valve that drains off the motivation to act because we feel like we're working on it. This same thing can happen when we talk to others about the problem. And keep talking about it. This thinking and talking can take the place of real action towards a goal. And, of course, because no real progress has been made, this keeps the problem alive and gives us something to keep worrying about.

If you find yourself on this torturous merry-go-round, then take a few deep breaths and ask yourself what you can do that will actually move you forward on this goal. Maybe you need some new information. Maybe you just need to go with what you have, try some things, see what happens, and make adjustments. Maybe you need to spend less time thinking about this and actively slide your thoughts over to something better.

Unfortunately, thinking about an anniversary gift doesn't necessarily round up to having one.

You probably need to accept that you won't enjoy the process, that it will be uncomfortable, but remind yourself that that's OK. You can handle uncomfortable. If you really feel stuck on it, go back and read 24. *Just Bite the Bullet on Things You Hate*. If it feels like a relief to read another chapter rather than work on that dreaded project, then remind yourself that you will eventually need to apply what you learned there.

Put It to Work

- Identify your favorite procrastivity tasks and when you're most likely to use them. What makes them easier to do? What makes them feel kind of productive? How beneficial are they, really?

- Identify the tasks that you're most tempted to avoid with procrastivity tasks. What makes them so uncomfortable? How do you convince yourself that it's OK to delay getting to them? How much better would you feel if you were to just get them done?

- Notice those times that you're tempted to slide off onto a procrastivity task. How can you make the procrastivity tasks harder to jump into? What can you tell yourself to resist them? How can you make the avoided task easier to start?

- **What, When, Where, and Why?**

What strategies are you going to apply from this chapter? How will this be different from what you're already doing? Or perhaps have done before?

When and where? The more specific you can be, the better. Then actively look for these moments. Or set an alarm or other reminder to pull your attention to it. How can you set things up beforehand to make this easier to stick with?

Why? What problem will this solve or improve? What are all the direct and indirect benefits of this change? How is your life better for it? This is your motivation for when you don't feel like it.

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