

In this lesson, you'll learn something you probably never expected: how to procrastinate *better*.

That's right, for all the bad press that procrastination gets these days, sometimes it's exactly what the doctor ordered. And there's a way to do it that will not only recharge you when you're out of energy, but will also make the results you get when you're working hard a lot stronger.

I call it procrastinating strategically.

Now, you'll be forgiven if you've been programmed to believe that procrastination is bad and that it's something to be avoided at any cost. After all, how can you expect to get anything done or get anywhere in life if you're lazing about?

We're supposed to celebrate the virtues of hard work, right? We're trained to earn what we get in life, and we get good things by working hard, not procrastinating and taking it easy.

Well, that story isn't entirely wrong. Of course it takes hard work to get what you want. But there is plenty of history, examples, and research to prove that the story we tell ourselves about needing to completely eliminate procrastination isn't entirely right, either.

There are at least four very compelling reasons why procrastination is not only something that can benefit us, but that it's something we *must* embrace to do our jobs better and live our lives more productively.

First of all, we're not robots. We're humans, and humans need to rest.

One of the biggest factors of burnout that not only causes poor performance but also leads to *more* procrastination is a lack of rest or down time.

Recharging, and doing it frequently—even multiple times per day—is required to draw the most productivity out of you.

There are countless stories of highly successful and productive business leaders—Steve Jobs comes to mind—who frequently left work to go for walks and think. To anyone who didn't know him, that would look awfully lazy. But it was what he needed to work through difficult problems.

Here's another little conflict that you can probably identify with, and it will help you embrace the idea of rest as a necessary part of any productivity strategy:

We only expect endless performance from ourselves. Not anyone else. We don't expect athletes to play their sport all day long. You know, we understand that they need to rest and recover between events.

We understand that a doctor can't perform surgery all day long. They need to let their hands and their brains relax every day so that they can do a great job on the next one.

So, if you're like me, you might be realizing right now that the only person you actually expect to be "more productive" is yourself.

So let that sink in for a minute. It's not an excuse to be lazy, but it's a reminder to treat yourself the same way you treat others.

Next, procrastinating strategically can actually produce better results faster.

How's that possible? How can avoiding work actually help you get more of it done better and faster?

Well, what's important to understand about strategic procrastination is that it's not about turning off and relaxing. Instead, it's about making sure you're tackling the work you need to do in the smartest and most efficient way possible.

And the only way to do that is to remove yourself from it for a little bit so you can look at what you're doing from a more objective perspective.

When I started my business, some of the best advice I ever received was to make time to work *on* the business and not just spend all my time working *in* it.

A business can only grow when someone is guiding it. And it's *really* hard to both *do* the work *and* critique the work or, you know, direct the work at the same time.

Those two tasks need to be separated in order to be done well.

When I realized that, I started holding time every week to just sit around and think. To plan. I would go for a run in the middle of the day or head to a coffee shop with nothing but my pen and a notebook.

Anyone who saw me out for a leisurely jog in the afternoon or sitting around doing basically nothing in a coffee shop at three in the afternoon would probably think I was some lazy trustafarian with no job.

But, really, I was spending that time strategically procrastinating. I wasn't executing and getting work done at a blistering pace, but I was thinking about my work and how to do it better so that, when I started executing again, I'd be even more productive and, most importantly, applying that productivity in the right direction.

And what about saving time? It certainly didn't *seem* like I was saving any time by letting the work pile up while I sat around like a space cadet in a coffee shop but, in fact, that's basically where *all* of my time saving systems have come from.

Those seemingly lazy afternoon sessions were spent imagining new ways to speed up my workflows and cut out unnecessary tasks. It was time spent making all the time that came after it more efficient.

Doing that week in and week out, especially when it felt like I didn't have the time for it, is what helped me really bring order to the business by creating systems and routines that made my work more predictable and a lot faster.

If there's something important you feel like you spend a lot of time doing, I highly encourage you to take time every week to stop doing it—even if it feels like that will put you further behind. Take that time to get out of your normal environment. Find a way to relax—even if you have to lie to yourself a little bit. And once you're in that state, start running your work processes through your mind and using your imagination to find places where you can save time.

Even little improvements to time-intensive work can make an enormous difference.

Finally, I've found that a little bit of strategic procrastination helps me avoid one of my biggest productivity drainers—and that's shiny object syndrome.

Like we discussed in a previous lesson, it can be exciting to start new projects and get ourselves in over our heads with too many priorities. And it can be really hard to say no forever to something fun.

So, I'll sometimes use strategic procrastination as a way to delay myself from taking action on something that isn't a core priority by allowing myself to entertain the idea, but not take action on it right now.

That's just a little psychological trick I sometimes use to keep myself focused. It might work for you as well. It's not no forever, but it's no for right now.

Okay, so hopefully I've convinced you that procrastination done *strategically* isn't the boogeyman it's made out to be, and it can actually make you more productive.

If so, you're probably wondering how to best make use of it. How can you actually put it to work in your daily life?

To get started, you need to understand what I call "The Wave."

The Wave is a metaphor for how productivity flows. Think of your life and your work as if it's the ocean. It's ever present and often unpredictable. But one thing you can always count on is that it will deliver waves on a fairly predictable schedule.

Those waves are your periods of productivity. They're the times of the day, the week, or even the year, when productivity naturally flows. Now, *when* you experience those waves depends on who you are. Some of us always have a wave in the morning. Some of us never have waves in the morning, but always have waves at night.

It doesn't matter when your waves come; it only matters that you're aware of them and you're ready for them when they arrive. And in that way, strategic procrastination is kind of like being a surfer.

If you go to the beach on a nice day, you might see dozens of surfers just sitting on their boards. In fact, you might notice that they do a lot more sitting than they do surfing.

But they're not wasting time or being lazy. Their eyes are on the horizon, watching for the next wave that they want to catch. When they see it roll in, they start to prepare for it. And when it arrives, they catch it, and they surf it as hard as they can because they know it won't last forever.

And when it ends, like it always does, they paddle back out and wait for the next one.

Your job, when you're practicing strategic procrastination is to be like that surfer. Not idling, but spending your time spotting your next wave and getting ready to make the most of it when it arrives.

Okay, let's get out of metaphor land and back into the hard, practical stuff.

What should you be doing when you're procrastinating strategically? What actions can you take to make the most of the time.

The answer is, "Anything that allows you think while also relaxing."

Thinking and planning, as we all know, can actually be a pretty draining task. Probably why we sometimes avoid it more than we ought to!

We went over the goal of strategic procrastination earlier: find ways to get faster and better during your times of active productivity.

Well, here are a few ideas for *what* to actually do to help facilitate that.

If you're the type of person who enjoys video games, I recommend that as an excellent escape. There have been several studies in recent years that have suggested that playing video games during periods of down-time can improve critical and creative thinking. There was a study that found surgeons who game at least three hours per week tend to complete their surgeries faster and with fewer errors than surgeons who relax in other ways.

Personally, I prefer to be away from the screen when I'm having a strategic procrastination break. I find that reading non-fiction—especially biographies—can help me open my mind to new and creative ways to solve whatever problems I'm working through.

Puzzles are also a good way to escape while engaging the problem-solving side of your mind. A really big one can keep you occupied for a long time.

This is one of the reasons why big tech startups keep gaming consoles and ping pong tables and things like that around their offices. They understand the benefits that come with taking active breaks.

Exercise is another great way to procrastinate strategically. Most of us don't get enough of it anyway, so if you can sneak out of the office for a walk or a run, or if you have a gym nearby, simply moving your body and making it exert some effort can force your brain to think more creatively by forcing you to concentrate differently than you're used to.

Personally, I find that going for a run or working out around lunch-time not only helps me focus my thoughts, but the release of endorphins also helps me beat that afternoon slump that seems to come if I don't make myself active.

You might also try meditation. It's a maddening process at first trying to get your brain to quiet down since we've developed such short attention spans, but it can be an excellent use of time when you're procrastinating. Coming out of a short meditation session leaves you with a very clear mind that's ready to find new ways to tackle hard problems.

I try to meditate for just five to ten minutes each day, usually lying on the floor. It looks funny, but it works.

Okay, finally—and this applies if your work requires a lot of studying and research—is to use your strategic procrastination time to do that. Or, at the least, gather all your study materials.

This works for me because it fills that need to consume while also producing something useful. Sometimes, if I'm working on a research heavy project, I'll break up my work and do the research in chunks, and use those chunks as my procrastination time.

It's not the *best* solution because you have to keep your mind active in order to do good research but, if I'm pressed for time, taking a chunk or two of my day that I'd normally spend browsing Facebook or something, I'll spend that time doing active research, which is useful work but less draining than actually producing something.

Okay, so here's what we went over in this lesson:

First, we learned why procrastination is not the enemy we've been taught. In fact, when you do it strategically, it can make you more productive and help you solve hard problems.

Then, we learned a useful way to think about productivity and strategic procrastination. You can picture yourself as a surfer in the ocean. When you're surfing, those are your spurts of productivity. And when you aren't, those are your moments of active procrastination, surveying and planning for the next wave so that, when it arrives, it's even more useful.

Finally, we went over some activities you can try to make your strategic procrastination more effective. Video games are one of the best, at least according to some research, and puzzles, games, exercise, and meditation are excellent things to try as well.

Your job today is to use what you just learned to create more effective downtime throughout your day. Think about when and how you can implement strategic procrastination, and then give it a try.

When you're done, I'll see you in the next lesson.