

Procrastination: 10 Tips for Banishing our Barriers

“How many others are fickle when it comes to competition?” This, a question presented to me recently during a discussion regarding how each of us approach competition differently, got me thinking about procrastination and how pervasive it is not only in the competitive bodybuilding world but among individuals in the work place, at home, at school, and really virtually any environment. We are a society grasping and searching for immediate gratification. We want and we want NOW. As bodybuilders we are looking to make massive gains in our off-seasons. When we diet we desire to lose body fat with speed and efficiency. Embracing the process has become a burden!

Competitors come to me struggling with making decisions about what show to do and when to start dieting. They will ruminate on this for months, and when they finally decide it is almost too late to implement a sound, somewhat slower dieting strategy for the most effective fat loss and muscle retention.

For myself, while I can decide on a show schedule fairly easily, and printing off the applications and sending in entry fees just solidifies it and even serves to lower my anxiety, at work I most certainly engage in procrastination-type behavior. My to-do list is long! Each day I will cross off the items as I complete them, but there will inevitably be two or three tasks that are revolving and end up at the top of the list day after day after day! What is it that keeps me from these items? Am I consciously avoiding these tasks? Barriers are present, but what might surprise you is that they are far from tied to my personality. Any of you who know me well are aware of my drive and determination, my desire to do things well, correctly, and without mistake. I'm relentless in the gym. I have to have the dishes done and not lying in the sink. And I've never, ever used the snooze button! Am I a perfectionist? A type-A personality? In many ways, I do exhibit characteristics closely related to these descriptions, so how do you explain my wavering?

You may be surprised to know that procrastination is closely linked to our perceptions about how difficult a task might be, how long it will take us, and more importantly, how high it is on our priority list based on the incentives we have subconsciously identified are attached to it. Procrastination has not been linked to a particular gene or an area of the brain, and it cannot be blamed on a personality type. I have friends who may be disappointed to hear this, but perhaps if they know, they will begin the lessons in self-control that I will outline shortly.

Procrastinators may believe that their behavior can be explained more easily as a decision to push things off until a later time. I've heard people tell me that they just do things better when they feel a pressure to complete them—like the student who crams the night before an important exam. Time could have been made prior to the eve of this test, but for some reason or another it wasn't until right before that she sat down with some intensity and vigor to learn an entire half a semester's worth of material!

To be accurate, this person's behavior was governed by an emotion brought upon by a negative thought. "Here we go again," you're thinking. For some reason Kori always gets on this "emotion" kick. It's true, I do! There's a reason my articles always lead back to this! There's an emotional cause to everything we do, with an attached belief. The belief may be limiting. Is this making sense now? Your conscious mind may think, "I'm going to call Kori now to sign up for her Mental Edge program." An emotion arises in response to this thought, and if it's negative, you'll avoid doing it. If it's positive, you'll pick up the phone!

Like I mentioned above, your perceptions of the activity play a role in whether it will be carried out. If we perceive it as negative, we may distance ourselves from it. Distancing can occur to a greater degree if we perceive a task as perhaps dominating a significant amount of our time and for little reward. On the other hand, and in the bodybuilding world, we may perceive our training and nutrition as time consuming, but our perceptions may be positive and linked to a very measurable, achievable goal. If we can imagine concretely what we will gain by engaging in these behaviors, see ourselves being successful in them, observe them as immediate and available, and view them as inherently rewarding, we'll do them.

Often what I'll see with my clients is a fear of change, a fear of failing, or self-sabotage. With weight loss, exercise, and competing, there is an embarrassment factor playing a role in the choices we make. When we make decisions, we are engaging in an internal volley between the pros and cons of the action. If we perceive the price as too high, we will likely distance ourselves further from the task. My clients who struggle to complete even a few more weeks on their diet after having seen some success often identify a fear of becoming someone else, looking unlike themselves, and then being treated differently by others. Legitimate? Sure. Legitimate weight loss carries with it many changes in one's lifestyle and environments. What about the competitor who trains and diets like a maniac up until right before the show and then binges? Stress, anxiety, and fear about the possible outcome "I could win this thing!" You're thinking, but that's fantastic. It's what every competitor wants! But like the weight loss client above, what could it mean? More expectations? What if this person gets on stage, everyone thinking she's going to dominate the competition, and then she doesn't pose well? She could be

thinking this very thing, which could lead to stress and subsequently negative behavior. Studies have been conducted that have illustrated the weight that incentives and perceived benefits carry in completion of a goal. If these benefits overpower the fear and perceived challenges of navigating new experiences and changes in life, success will occur.

Tips abound for banishing the barriers of procrastination. Use the following as a guide to being your best:

1. Develop a plan. Because we typically want immediate results we need to plan out a course of action that is concrete and manageable. If we perceive it as cloudy and vague, we are not likely to try. For example, have a plan for your nutrition for contest prep. For the first two weeks have your macronutrients mapped out for each day of the week. Then break down what your cardio and training schedule will look. We work more effectively when our tasks are broken down into manageable and achievable pieces.
2. Identify the advantages of performing the task. Ask yourself what you will gain by embarking on this 4 month journey toward your next competition? We thrive in environments where the benefits are in front of us.
3. Identify your negative and limiting beliefs and change them. Our limiting beliefs are often unfortunately shrouded in assumptions and black and white thinking. Distorted thinking can lead to unhealthy beliefs about ourselves, about others, and about life in general. These thoughts can impact our self-esteem and mental well-being. If your beliefs are defeatist in nature, substitute them with positive language. Go from “I’m going to screw up my routine” to “I’m going to rock the stage.”
4. Use positive affirmations to increase determination, consistency, and drive to accomplish the tasks you want to complete. Put them in places you frequent—the car, the kitchen, the bathroom, and your dresser mirror.
5. Identify concrete incentives to reward yourself with when you have completed a certain step or progress to a certain level. Keep a log to record your steps and to keep yourself accountable.
6. Act as if. This is a technique you can use to change negative behavior and to avoid procrastinating. Act like you do not procrastinate. Adopt a new you. Try on a new skin!
7. Identify what currently gets in the way of making good decisions and engaging in more positive behaviors. If you binge eat, list your triggers, then remove them if possible. They may be emotional, environmental, relational, or physiological.
8. Practice visual imagery. Imagine yourself accomplishing your goal. Close your eyes, breathe deeply, relax your body, and go step by step through the process.

9. Surround yourself with a positive support system and people who support your goals and can reinforce your successes.
10. Identify the environments and people who drain you of motivation and speak negatively of your goals. Avoid the naysayers, those who cast doubt, and those who express negative attitudes toward your goals.

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