

## Is it all about control ?

In all the above cases, these learned patterns of thinking and behaviour can act paradoxically in keeping the person 'away from' the very opportunities that would ensure success. In trying to avoid the unpleasant associations, those very difficulties become the focus of attention that soaks up valuable time.

We can be so taken up with **trying to gain control** – to eliminate doubt and reassure comfort - that we lose sight of the original intention, e.g. doing the assignment well.

### Possible strategies for confronting procrastination

**1. Self-awareness** is key, so keep a personal log of problem times, and feelings arising then.

- What did you do, or not do, in response to those feelings ?
- How did these actions distance you from your original intention ?
- How did that then leave you feeling ?

Remind yourself of what your priorities actually are.

**2. Be vigilant to these potential displacement activities** and create reminders to yourself of how to avoid these, for example:

- Notes / sign cards
- Divide tasks into small stages to sense progressive accomplishment
- Rewards for continuing with your original intention

**3. Exaggerate the victimised feelings**, with a parody of the self-dialogue (the real reason) that you've already spotted underlying the procrastination activity , e.g. "Oh this is so terrible, I'm so bad at these assignments that there's no point in continuing, I'll just have those seven bars of chocolate in the fridge, right now, and then everything will look so much better ..."

**4.** Consider varying activities, so that you **mix important tasks** to maintain interest in all of them, e.g. revising for different subjects in alternative sessions, during exam preparation days.

**5.** Instead of fixating on our emotional dissatisfactions, perhaps it is better to **ask more productive questions:**

- How can I best accomplish this task, easily and fluidly ?
- What do I find most interesting about this project ?
- How can I get excited about this ?
- What examples in my own life relate to this assignment ?
- Where's the easiest place to start writing ... what do I already know most about ?

**6.** Remember that in writing an assignment, for example, you are **never** aiming for the final submission. This is your first draft of what should be several others to be revised in editing to a much more polished version.

This first attempt is just that – you're trying out your ideas by typing them in and then seeing what they look like. The blank screen is the barrier – start filling it, and it no longer can be.

### **7. Can we gain control by not really trying ?**

Perhaps **flexibility** in our life generally is a key factor. Can you ...

- Let go of some resources, you haven't used for some time ?
- Allow yourself to trust someone else to help ?
- Act in an opposite way e.g. dress differently, speak in a new way ... and notice the differences in yourself.
- Identify one of your personal control symptoms and do the opposite e.g. listen more openly to constructive criticism, relax deliberately for five minutes each hour ...

*With grateful acknowledgement to: Dr William J. Knaus, on whose ideas much of the above is based.*

#### **References:**

Coombes, F. (2008). Teach yourself self-motivation. London: Hodder.

Knaus, W.J. (1979). Do it now: How to stop procrastinating. New York: Prentice-Hall.