



by Mark Gorkin L.I.C.S.W.

Productively managing your time is critical in an always on-anytime-anywhere world that is forever cycling between upgrading and downsizing (or, reorganizing), or when there's serious blurring of the boundary between your work and home lives. When under the gun or with deadlines looming, sometimes the best thing to do is **PANIC!** Just consider this acronym for surviving the time crunch and for helping you declare your "Emancipation Procrastination."

- P** = *Priorities and Perfection*
- A** = *Avoidance and Advance*
- N** = *"No" and Negotiate and Designated Nagger*
- I** = *Initiation and Incubation Vacation*
- C** = *Compartmentalize and Creative Space*

The following techniques and tips can help you manage time and to focus and free up your mind.

P = Priorities and Perfection

Priorities — "I can't do it all!" According to the often cited Pareto Principle (propounded by a 20th century Italian sociologist), 80 percent of your results are achieved by 20 percent of your activities. Another way of envisioning this concept: for a restaurant, 20 percent of the items on the menu account for 80 percent of the orders. So, unless you run a restaurant, the nice thing about this principle is you can drop 4/5 of your activities without feeling guilty.

Another key component of priorities is the criticality of the task, request or demand. Remember, only "urgent" must get done NOW! "Important" allows for response time options and can be prioritized. However, it is often critical to let others know of your priority list or of changing priorities. Especially when the other is significant, and you have a question about what and how to prioritize, discern what tasks or results are essential for the other party.

Perfection — Actually, rigid perfectionism can block an ability to delegate. The perfectionist often has an inordinate need for control and a fear that others will not live up to his or her expectations. Remember, complaining that no one works to your standard may eventually evoke agreement and a self-fulfilling prophecy: "You're right, no one can do things like you. Go ahead and do it yourself!"

And perfectionist tendencies can induce paralysis — a fear of getting started as well as a fear of completion. The dysfunctional inner mantra: "If you don't try, you can't fail." And in a society where winning is everything, who wants to risk being a "loser." Time to attack this disease of procrastination.

A = Avoidance and Advance

Avoidance — Why do we start cleaning the living room when we should be working on that important report with a looming deadline? Here are several factors contributing to delay, dalliance and denial:

- 1) Fear of failure — not live up to expectations of significant others or of your own hypercritical standards.
- 2) Fear of success — what will others expect of you the next time; can you live up to your own benchmark?
- 3) Smoldering anger — you resent having to do the task; perhaps you believe the project was assigned without clear or sufficient instructions or was delegated unfairly.
- 4) Time disorientation — you convince yourself that there's no rush, you have plenty of time; another rationalization is that you do your best work at the eleventh hour. And even when the last minute does motivate the procrastinator, it rarely encourages his or her best effort.
- 5) Insufficient resources — sometimes there is a logical (as opposed to a psychological) reason for procrastination: you do not have the proper supplies or tools to successfully and/or safely meet the demand. It is time to express your frustration and concerns with your manager. However, if you are reluctant to take a stand, then avoidance issues may be at play.

Advance — The only folks who might be able to write a quality report before the clock strikes midnight are people who have been mentally rehearsing or writing the report in their head over a period of time. However, most people want to do quality work that also is original or displays some imagination, then you need to sleep on the job. That is, you need to hit that problem-solving wall, sleep on the issue and then bring a fresh set of eyes to the project — this problem solving process should be oft repeated to maximize the creative effect. Clearly, for this multi-step procedure you need to give yourself sufficient lead-time.

N = "No" and Negotiate" and Designated Nagger

"No" and Negotiate" (N & N) — In light of our 24/7, always on world, "N & N" is as vital as "R & R" (Rest & Recreation) for managing stress as well as organizing a schedule. And, there's an art to saying "No" and "Negotiating." Consider these steps below:

- 1) Be Decisive. When someone makes a request (and the person does not have demand power, e.g., disciplinary or firing authority) give a quick and clear "No" — not a slam the door "No." A more tactful initial reply might be, "Based on my existing schedule, I have a problem meeting your request as presented."
- 2) Clarify Your "No." Paraphrase the request; the other party needs to hear that you understand the importance of the request. Then state what you cannot do at this moment, while also sharing how you can be of assistance.

- 3) Ask for Feedback. By encouraging the other party's feedback you are flushing out their disappointment, anxiety or anger. Handling their emotional display in a non-defensive manner helps build trust. The other person has also demonstrated that they can blow off steam in your presence. Ironically, research shows that this push back process actually makes people more open to your initial position.
- 4) Repeat, If Necessary. People do not like to hear a "No," especially if they have an accommodating nature. These folks are not above trying a guilt trip. Some will test you to see if there is resolve behind your "No." So do repeat your "No" and the parameters of helping. Remember, *Difference and Disagreement does not equal Disapproval and Disloyalty*.
- 5) Be Concise. State your "No" in as pithy a manner as possible. Being brief and to the point lends both conviction and authority to your "No."
- 6) Take a Time Out. If you do not feel comfortable proclaiming a "No," consider getting back to the person in a defined period of time. However, whenever possible, trust your gut and risk the "No." You can always reconsider at a later point.
- 7) Summarize the Understanding. Review the parties' perceptions and expectations. Take time to have a constructive dialogue with resolution.

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I = Initiation and Incubation Vacation

Initiation — The key to overcoming procrastination when an important project seems so daunting you do not know how or where to begin. *structured steps:*

- 1) For profound paralysis lay out your thoughts the night before, with no expectation of completion in the evening. Sleeping on a problem may provide new energy or perspective.
- 2) For a difficult writing project; sketch a rough outline or just jot down some bullet points. By breaking into the amorphous mass, by creating a small working window, the nature of the writing project has changed. It is no longer so impenetrable or imponderable.
- 3) Similar to the above, limit your start-up time to five or ten minutes. And no matter what you have or have not accomplished, walk away from the task. Knowing that there is an acceptable escape plan will likely: a) *reduce some start-up anxiety*, b) *allow you to survey the problematic battlefield*, if not *plant some conceptual seeds* and c) *help you mull over or engage in an area of attack*.

Incubation Vacation — Once getting started on a project, especially a complex one, it is often necessary to hit another wall if you want

to achieve something novel or surprising. This process of being stuck has been called "thrustration" (a term coined by psychiatrist, Richard Rabkin) — being torn between frustration and thrusting ahead with direct action as you have not quite identified the key pieces of the problem solving puzzle.

Do not try will-powering your way to a solution. You want to take an "incubation vacation" to hatch a new perspective. What is the link between thrustration and incubation? Thrustration tension stirs up the right hemisphere of the brain, stimulating brain chemicals that help produce more emotionally evocative and visual imagery. So after you have done considerable logical preparation, the thrustration experience primes your psychic volcano. And taking an incubation vacation means you have let go of a habitual problem solving path or procedure.

C = Compartmentalize and Creative Space

Compartmentalize — Juggling and working on several projects or tasks simultaneously is accepted as a necessary survival skill in this "TnT" (Time and Task-Driven) world. Inappropriate or excessive multi-tasking often divides and compromises one's attention and skill capacity. Not surprisingly, the stage is set for accidents and errors. And being spread too thin can also undermine project efficiency ("do the thing right") and effectiveness. While the need for multi-tasking is often cited as a necessary skill for high performance, high performance is often achieved with less multi-tasking (do more). *Compartmentalize:* Divide and conquer. Essential tasks and high performance. How to compartmentalize:

1) Turn off the phone, TV, and other distractions. 2) Schedule a block of time, 30 minutes to an hour, for focused work. 3) Communicate your schedule and timeline with your supervisor, colleagues, and family. 4) Prioritize tasks and tackle them in order. 5) Use technology to your advantage. And whenever possible, find "a room" for focused work.

6) When working, leave the home-office behind. 7) Create a focused state of mind by creating a "TnT" workspace where "Time" and "Task" are the focus. Frustration; you are not just being "Task"-driven. An individual mind planted in a fertile space, with hours and days to sow and reap, will not just manage time. Such a mind-dygestalt is on the path of "Emancipation Procrastination." And such a space-time continuum often helps launch the liberation of the imagination along with the creative spirit. ▼

Stress management concepts and tools will help one and all Practice Safe Stress!

Mark Gorkin, "The Stress Doc"™, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, is a keynote speaker and "Motivational Humorist," a team building and organizational development consultant, and runs a weekly chat group on AOL. He is the author of Practice Safe Stress and of The Four Faces of Anger. See his award-winning, USA Today Online "HotSite" — www.stressdoc.com — called a "workplace resource" by National Public Radio (NPR). Mark is also an advisor to The Bright Side™ — www.the-bright-side.org. For more information on his "Practice Safe Stress" programs or to receive his free e-newsletter, email stressdoc@aol.com or call (301) 946-0865.

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