



Read this now, not later

Resolve in your heart to develop a sense of urgency. It is one of the most valuable work habits of successful advisors.

I'VE BEEN PLANNING to write this column for months, but never got around to it. No wonder . . . my topic is procrastination.

If you are like me, you occasionally put off a task you should really do now. That's human nature and it is acceptable once in a while. But when procrastination dominates your work and life, watch out. As Mae West once purred, "He who hesitates is last."

Hesitation takes many forms. It ranges from not prospecting or returning a client's phone call immediately to not handling an important administrative task or answering a client's technical question right away. Whatever form your procrastination takes, it's not good, since forceful, timely action is a vital step on the ladder of success.

Procrastination hurts clients because it slows down the fact-finding and solution-design process. In financial services, time literally is money. The longer it takes to get things done, the weaker the client's ability to leverage the time value of money.

It hurts your reputation because the more you procrastinate, the more likely you will create unhappy clients. And negative word of mouth will spread through your community like Britney Spears gossip on the Internet.

Procrastination weakens your self esteem because even though it makes you feel good temporarily (you get to avoid doing something hard or unpleasant), you start to feel bad eventually when you realize you should be working more diligently to serve your clients, which drives success. Slacking off is never good for the soul — or the P&L statement.

So why is procrastination so prevalent? Because it relates to core attitudes about work and human relationships. For example, one major cause of

procrastination is not viewing a task as being personally relevant or meaningful.

Another cause is perfectionism. Some advisors have such high standards that they become discouraged from acting. This is a case of perfectionism becoming paralyzing and ultimately self-defeating.

But the most common cause is the fear of rejection. If you are not sure what a client thinks about you or your advice, you may avoid putting yourself on the line.

Whatever the cause of your procrastination, it is crucial to take steps against it. Here's what to do:

- Resolve in your heart to develop a sense of urgency. It is one of the most valuable work habits of successful advisors.
- Sharpen your focus by cleaning up your workspace.
- Work at a brisk pace and maintain an "up tempo."
- List your most important tasks in writing, giving each a clear, specific deadline for 100 percent completion.
- From this list, tackle the most important task that gives you the most fear and anxiety. This enables you to move on to remaining tasks with confidence and conviction.
- Force yourself to put off low-priority tasks until you complete all your high-priority tasks.
- Finally, find a way to reward yourself each time you complete a high-priority task.

To steal a quote, "Procrastination is the thief of time." Don't let it rob you of your most valued commodity.

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