

# *Is Procrastination Killing Your Dreams?*

*by Sandy Geroux*

Do you have a dream that has been pushed to the back of your mind, unfulfilled? We all have desires, dreams, goals, hobbies – call them what you will, but too many of us put them off until “a better time.” We wait until “we retire”, until “the children grow up”, until we have “more time”, until we “finish this project” – you get the picture.

Procrastination, as well as fear of trying new things, holds us back from accomplishing our goals. While tackling our fears may take a little more work and practice before they can be overcome, procrastination is much easier to recognize and eliminate as we pursue our goals.

For example, my husband and I love to travel. Since there is a large difference in our ages (he is 62 and I am 46), we have been compelled to do all we can at a younger age than we might have otherwise considered. And thank goodness for that! Instead of waiting until we retire to travel, we have planned (and taken) a nice trip at least once a year, almost every year since we were married in 1982. This has led to exciting and fulfilling experiences that, had we waited for retirement, we may not have had the opportunity to enjoy together or with our children.

We all know people who have waited until retirement to “enjoy life”, only to get to retirement age and have neither the money nor the health to do so, if they are even still together by that time.

Don't put off your dreams and desires until tomorrow. Enjoy life now! Now, this doesn't mean you should throw yourself into debt, creating stress and worry in the here-and-now. But it does mean that you need to focus on what is important to you in life and take steps to begin accomplishing those dreams and goals before it's too late. And while you're at it, be sure to take in the simple pleasures of life, enjoying every moment with loved ones while they are still around.

With that in mind, here are 7 tips you can begin using now in order to enjoy life and loved ones to the fullest – and accomplish your dreams, now and in the future:

## **1. Make a list**

It is essential to write down your goals and dreams. The mere act of writing goals makes them more real. Have everyone in the family do this activity. Make a list of common family goals, as well as the individual goals of each family member.

In addition, if you keep the written goals in a prominent place (such as a colorful binder on top of your desk or dresser, or on a poster taped to the refrigerator), it's much more difficult to forget about them as you go through your day-to-day life. Too often, we become so busy trying to get through our daily chores that we simply forget to focus on our bigger goals and dreams in life.

Plan a “Family Review Day” once a month (at least) for everyone to assess their progress toward the goals. Make necessary adjustments at that time regarding timeframes and budgets, as well as actual stated goals (which may have changed since the last review session, especially in the case of children). This prevents everyone from getting too far off track before making the modifications necessary to accomplish their goals. You can make this a fun family event, with pizza and ice cream (or whatever your favorite foods are) as you review family and individual goals together. This way, you can encourage each other and help each other stay accountable to your goals, while teaching children at a young age the value of setting and achieving goals.

*NOTE: Be certain to reassure young children that these goals are not cast in stone, but may be changed as they grow and experience more of life. You don't want young children feeling like they are locked into goals they may no longer want to achieve, nor do you want them to feel like a “failure” because they didn't accomplish their original goal.*

## **2. Make a plan**

Plan out how you intend to accomplish your goals and dreams. It is impossible to achieve a goal simply by stating the desire to accomplish it, without determining the action steps necessary to make it happen.

Begin at the end of the process and back your way through the steps, making a list of the action items necessary to accomplish that goal. This ensures that you don't forget a crucial step somewhere in the middle, which could result in unnecessary delays as you work your way toward the goal.

Be sure to include deadlines and budgets (if necessary) for each step in the process. This helps you accomplish the goal in the planned timeframe and within your financial means. If you don't set deadlines for accomplishment of each action item, your mind perceives no sense of urgency, thus allowing you to sabotage your own goals with procrastination and the constant urge to "do it tomorrow".

### ***3. Ignore the Nay-Sayer Inside***

Think back to a time when you had a great idea. Now, think back to your very next thought. It was probably a negative one, such as "Oh, that's a stupid idea!" or "No, that will never work!" Experts now claim that we have 50,000 – 60,000 thoughts per day, many of them negative! Often, what may seem like procrastination is simply just the fear of doing something new because we're listening to that little voice inside our head that tells us we can't do it. Procrastination simply allows us to justify that fear and give in to the temptation to ignore our dreams

Ignore that negative voice; don't let it stop you! Take that first step, admit you have the dream, write it down and make a plan to accomplish it. Do it now – before procrastination takes hold and causes you to push it off "until a better time." Only by becoming vigilant about our thoughts, and stopping the negative ones from dominating all others, can we get to a point where we will be able to take action on our dreams.

### ***4. Get things off your To Do List that really don't have to be done right now***

Many of us clutter up our lives with "chores" we don't really need to do, leaving no time for the things we'd really like to do. Sometimes the sheer size of our To Do list is so intimidating that we procrastinate on everything because we can't even decide where to begin!

Even if we do know where to begin, if we constantly fill up our days with activities that don't move us closer to our goals and values in life, we will find ourselves in the unfortunate position of going through the daily motions and "chores" of life without making any progress toward what we really want to accomplish.

### ***5. Plan fun activities you can do now***

Make specific appointments in your Day Planner for these activities. If you don't schedule them as appointments, you'll never find time to do them. This includes "dates" with your significant other, family events and get-togethers with friends. At one point, my husband and I realized that we hadn't seen some good friends for almost a year. When we finally got together with our friends, we all pulled out our appointment books and scheduled our next "date" before saying good-bye at the end of the evening. This way, if something occurred in the meantime to force us to cancel, we had to contact each other to reschedule, preventing us from letting another year go by without seeing each other! Pretty soon, we were doing this with all our friends – and they were doing it with their other friends – because it helped everyone keep in touch. We all had just gotten sick and tired of always saying, "Let's get together sometime," when "sometime" never came!

Be sure to keep only one Day Planner for all your activities. Or, at the very least, keep one master planner that is consulted for all family and personal activities outside of the work environment. Before committing to a personal activity, each family member must consult the master planner to be sure there is no conflict with other previously scheduled activities requiring the presence of that person. This will reduce the stress of double-booking, over-committing and priority conflicts. Also, seeing appointments in black and white helps you cut back when necessary in order to avoid burn-out.

### ***6. Stop putting everyone else ahead of YOU all the time***

Many people, especially women, are nurturers. However, we often take this nurturing nature to extremes as we continue to subscribe to the belief that everyone else's needs are always more important than our own. While our children's needs are *often* more urgent than our own at any given time, this is not *always* the case. We must be careful not to burn ourselves out simply because we forget that all human beings occasionally need a little "down-time". Don't keep putting off your own personal needs by thinking "I'll do that later." If you keep putting it off, it simply won't happen.

Schedule an hour or two (more than that is OK, too!) each week for yourself – whether it's to read a book, go shopping, take a walk, exercise, or participate in a hobby. If you take care of your own mental and physical health, your stress level will be reduced, enabling you to handle your family issues and “crises” much better as they arise. In addition, when you are able to handle yourself and your children better, your guilt level will also go down. Very few things feel worse than yelling at a loved one because we are frustrated about something else, or resentful of the fact that we can't ever relax and enjoy our lives.

### ***7. Stop perpetuating the “constant motion” syndrome***

We must be very careful regarding what we consider our children's “needs” vs. their desires (or our own desires for them). Many of us fill up our children's calendars (not to mention our own, carting them to and from their excessive activities) without giving rise to the thought that there is no need to fill every second of every day with so much busy-ness! Do our children really need to take music and voice lessons, as well as tap, jazz and ballet, and play soccer in the fall, basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring, in addition to enrolling in karate or judo – all at once? When we add this to homework, studying for tests, dances and other planned school or church activities, school and community plays, band and chorus concerts, holidays, and just plain playing with their friends, we realize we are inadvertently creating a generation of stressed-out children who have no concept of relaxation or a normal pace! I can't believe the number of children I've seen who are enrolled in so many activities that no one in the family has time to take a breath!

The best advice I can think of is to find out where your child's interests really lay, limit the number of activities they are allowed to do at one time, and enable them to make adult-like choices (no matter how old they are) to select the ones that are most important to them at that time.

The benefits of this course of action are numerous: your children will feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment in being able to choose their own activities; limits will be imposed regarding time away from the family, not to mention the family budget; and children will learn at an early age that life involves choices – they simply cannot have everything they want at the precise moment they want it. Finally, as a result, your time demands and subsequent stress level will decrease, leaving you more time to spend with your family and more energy and patience to make the experience enjoyable!

Besides, if you don't want your children to grow up thinking they must put off (or sacrifice altogether) their own goals and dreams for those of their children later in life, you have to start setting a good example for them to follow now. Many people grow up knowing they want to do something differently, but they have no idea how to go about accomplishing that goal because they've never been shown how to do it. All they know is what they've seen and grown up with, and this perpetuates the cycle.

Do you recognize a pattern of procrastination in your own life? Put these ideas into practice; don't procrastinate! Use them to help you plan for more fun and enjoyment in your life, now and in the future, and stop putting off until tomorrow the things you most want to do today. And remember these wise words:

*The best way to get something done...is to begin*  
- Anonymous