

Success Mindset: 10 Ways to Conquer Procrastination

Paul's Principles

<http://Nicheology.com>

1. Introduction
2. Evaluate Your Goal
3. Bring on the Pain
4. Break It Down
5. Pair the Pleasant with the Unpleasant
6. Make your "Why" Bigger
7. Go for Public Shame
8. Partner Up
9. Give Yourself a Break
10. Go with the Flow
11. Get Honest with Yourself
12. Conclusion

Introduction

So many people know what they need to do to achieve their goals, but they don't do it.

"I'll start my diet... tomorrow."

"I'll make those calls... on Monday."

"I'll go exercise... later."

What is the problem? It's simple: Procrastination. Somehow doing what you know you need to become less appealing than doing what you're doing right now – watching TV, reading blogs, or reading the sports page. Your dreams and goals disappear, and all you can think about is the Family Guy or the Giants' record.

There are ways to get yourself going, though, and that's where this report comes in. Read on for tips to get moving... right now!

Evaluate Your Goal

You know you want to declutter your house, find a new job, or lose weight. But somehow, you're not getting around to it. The first place to start is with your goal. Sometimes procrastination occurs because your goal simply isn't clear enough. To have an effective, motivating goal, you need to know precisely what you're heading for.

Decluttering your house is too broad; to make it motivating, try breaking it down more specifically. Measurable is helpful, too. Getting rid of 50 books, clearing out all clothes that the kids haven't worn in six months, reducing the number of DVDs the family has so they all fit on a single shelf... these are motivating goals! They give you something to aim for.

Another common problem with goals is not setting a deadline. Which is more likely to get your rear in gear: Losing weight in order to attend your high school reunion in three months, or losing weight... someday? Even self-imposed deadlines can be effective, so don't set a goal without setting a deadline.

Many goal-setters set a goal that is too ambitious ("Be debt-free by next month") or not enough of a stretch ("Ask one person about job openings at her company this month."). The best goals lie somewhere in the middle. They're large enough to require some serious effort, but realistic enough that you have a good chance of achieving them.

Effective goals need to be reviewed regularly, too. Just writing them down on an index card on January 1 and sticking them in the back of your Day Planner isn't going to get you very far; some experts recommend re-reading your goals – OUT LOUD – at least once in the morning and once at night. You might also try posting them throughout your home: On the bathroom mirror, on the refrigerator, on the dashboard of your car. This leaves no doubt about what you're aiming for, and also serves as a constant reminder. (It's harder to reach in the freezer for the Ben & Jerry's when there's a picture of a

bikini-clad you stuck on the door!).

Maybe the most important thing to evaluate your goal for, though, is to make sure it's really yours, and really what you want. Sometimes we set goals because they sound good, we think we *should* want them, or someone else told us it was a good thing to aim for. Forget all that! If your heart isn't in it, no wonder you're not working towards it and are watching reruns of "Lost" instead. Find something you can truly put your efforts into – learning Japanese, drawing pictures of famous people on your Etch-A-Sketch, feeding pets that were abandoned in natural disasters – and work on that. You get one go-round in this life, so you may as well spend it where it matters to you.

Bring on the Pain

Most of us spend our lives in avoidance of pain. It's not surprising; researchers have shown that the drive to escape pain is greater than the drive to experience pleasure. All things being equal, if we're not hurting bad enough, we're not going to be very motivated to seek out change.

The good news is that we can use this human quirk to our advantage. If the good parts of achieving our goals aren't enough to get us motivated, maybe the bad things that will come from NOT achieving our goal will get us moving. It's the carrot-versus-the-stick debate, and let's face it: Sometimes we need the stick.

Put bluntly, if you increase the pain associated with the status quo to a high enough level, you'll be motivated to change. In fact, the higher the pain, the greater the motivation. For instance, think of:

- The businessman who won't quit working on the weekends until his wife threatens to divorce him.
- The overweight mom who won't lose weight until she's diagnosed with diabetes and told that she may die and leave her small children motherless if she doesn't lose 100 lbs.
- The employee who can't seem to arrive at work before 9:30 until he's threatened with being fired.

Pain can be the ultimate motivator. But there are ways to kick it into high gear before you're being threatened with termination or death. Here's how to ramp up the pain quotient:

- **Focus on the negative.** We're all told to focus on the positive, but sometimes it's the focus on the bad that will get us going. Dave Ramsey, the personal finance guru, suggests that people post a list of their debts on their refrigerator. The constant in-your-face nature keeps you motivated and moving forward.
- **Extrapolate.** Again, psychologists and counselors will recommend that you don't extrapolate your worries. Well, if you're trying to motivate yourself, worry away! Think about yourself living as a bag lady if you don't bring in four new clients this

week. Picture your kids growing up in day care if you don't find a new job. Paint a vivid picture of what you're trying to avoid and remind yourself of the horrible alternative.

- **Find a negative role model.** Just as you can find role models to inspire you to great things, you can find negative role models who have dropped to the depths of despair (VH1's "Behind the Music" is especially helpful for this!). People DO die of diabetes. People DO get fired. Find a few folks who have experienced your greatest fear and remind yourself that it can happen.

Of course, it's a lot more fun to imagine yourself in a string bikini and paste a picture of Cindy Crawford on your fridge. But if that's not working, you might have to go to the other extreme and post your bikini "before" shot in a public spot. Do what you have to in order to reach your goal.

Break It Down

We're an impatient society. We want it all, and we want it now. After all, this is the era of "It's there in 30 minutes or it's free!" and next-day Amazon deliveries. Why should we wait and take our goals a step at a time?

Because that's really the only way to achieve them. In fact, taking a little longer to achieve your heart's desires may be better for you in the long run:

- It gives you time to adjust to changes along the way.
- It lets you overcome obstacles and develop new skills that you may need once you're on the top of the mountain.
- It allows you to evaluate whether the goal you're aiming for is *really* what you want.

Achieving large goals in a single fell swoop usually only happens on TV or in the movies; the rest of us have to take the not-so-short cut. In fact, trying to tackle a big goal all at once can actually discourage you, as perfectionism, fear of failure, lack of confidence, and other negative emotions can arise if you try to change too much at once.

Here's how to break your big goal down into manageable chunks:

- **Set your first milestone only as far ahead as your headlights shine.** Right now, you may not be able to see the entire path from where you are now to where you want to be. Instead of trying to map out your whole plan, just map out the next step. For instance, if you want to go back to school to finish your degree, you know one thing for sure: You'll need to find out how to apply to school. Make that your first goal, and set a reasonable deadline. Don't worry about the rest of the steps (getting transcripts, taking an entrance exam, applying for financial aid) until you've tackled that first step.
- **Work in chunks you're comfortable with.** Many of us are very comfortable planning about three months in advance; this is the length of an academic quarter in school and a financial quarter in business. Figure out what you need to

accomplish in the next three months, and map out steps for doing so. At the end of the quarter, review your accomplishments and map out the next quarter.

- **Base your daily list on your longer-term goals.** Break down daily activities based on your quarterly or monthly goals. Each activity on your list should be something you can accomplish today that moves you forward to your bigger goals. That way everything rolls up together, and you're not wasting your time on unimportant tasks.

How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. How do you achieve any goal, no matter how large? The same way – one step at a time.

Pair the Pleasant with the Unpleasant

In the immortal words of Mary Poppins, “Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.” Sugar – or its psychic equivalent – doesn't just work for medicine; it can help improve the “taste” of any nasty, scary, or unappealing task. Why do you think there are so many TV sets in gyms? No one actually wants to *think* about working out while they're doing it!

If you find yourself bogged down in the pursuit of your goals, try this same principle. Figure out a way to pair up something you don't want to do with something you love. Some ideas:

- Take a class with a good friend. Not only will you feel obligated to show up for your sessions, the time will go faster when you're distracted by entertaining conversation.
- Listen to music or podcasts while you're working out, cleaning out the garage, or decluttering the attic.
- Cutting back to pay off your debts? Make it a game with your family and see who can spend the least, come up with creative ways to save, or unique plans for making a little extra cash.
- If your goal is to be on time, get yourself a Mickey Mouse watch so you can keep track of the minutes in style – and smile every time you look at your watch.
- Can't seem to get around to writing that book that you resolved to finish this year? Treat yourself to a cup of your favorite expense latte when (and only when!) you're sitting down working.
- If making follow-up sales calls is the bane of your existence, sweeten the experience by sitting out on the back deck in the sun, or having your partner massage your back while you're on the phone.

The key to making this strategy work is to not cheat. That means you have to hold yourself to skipping your latte if you're not working on your novel, or refusing the backrub if you're not on the phone with sales prospects. The more you limit your treat to the time when you're actually working toward your goal, the stronger the association between working towards your goal and pleasant feelings. If you cheat, you short-circuit that connection.

Of course, it still comes down to you doing what you said you'd do. But hopefully by aligning not-so-fun tasks with pleasant associations, you'll be more inclined to get it finished.

Make Your “Why” Bigger

Earlier in this report, I asked you to take a look at your goals to see if they were big enough or too big, if they were yours or someone else's, and if they were really your burning desires. All those are important, but even more important is your “Why” behind your goals.

Why do you want to lose 50 lbs.?

Why do you want to get your counseling degree?

Why do you want to declutter your house, start your own business, quit smoking, find a new job?

The deal is, if your “Why” is big enough, the goal doesn't really matter. The obstacles don't matter. You're going to barrel through and get it done. By the same token, if your “Why” is lukewarm, you're going to be missing a key part of your motivation for success.

Who's going to be more likely to start their own successful business: The single mom who has two kids to feed and no safety net to fall back on, or the independently wealthy trust-fund baby? I'd bet on the mom every time, and here's why: She is going to fight tooth and nail to keep those kids fed and clothed and safe. The trust-fund baby doesn't have his or her back against the wall – at least not for financial reasons.

You may not be facing the same survival-level motivation, but other “Why's” can work, too. Here are some that I've seen drive people on to incredible feats. Imagine what goals go with these “Why's:”

- To prove to my father I'm not a loser.
- To make my ex regret leaving me.
- To keep my kids in private school.
- So I'm not embarrassed on our vacation.
- So I'll live longer.
- To make my family proud.
- To keep my kids out of day care.
- To pay for the college of my choice.
- To keep my mom in her nursing home.
- To impress people.

Whether you're trying to save money or lose weight or start a new business, if you want it bad enough at an emotional level, you'll do what it takes. So spend some time digging into your own “Why.” Go beyond the obvious, and ask yourself again and again why this goal matters, not just in and of itself, but for your life. You might be surprised at the

answer – and it might be just what you need to get you moving.

Go For Public Shame

In the olden days, lawbreakers were put in the stocks in the public square so everyone in the village could walk by and take part in their humiliation. Nowadays, we practice a similar punishment when we publish the names of prostitution solicitors and drunk drivers in the newspaper: We know that humiliation can be a great deterrent.

It works in reverse, too. Making a public commitment about something positive can help hold us to it. Not only do we constantly have people asking, “So how’s it going with (blank)?” We also face the fear of public failure if we don’t carry through with what we said we’d do.

There are all sorts of ways to make your goal public, including:

1. Tell everyone you know what you’re working towards. This will keep your mind on the project as well as give you a huge cheering section.
2. Add a line at the bottom of your email signature, charting your progress (“I’ve lost 15 lbs. 38 to go!”). It might sound a little cheesy, but it works.
3. Join a support group. If you can’t find one in your area, check out Internet-based special interest groups. Google Groups, Yahoo! Groups, and Facebook are all great places to check.
4. Put a “thermometer” in a public place (on the refrigerator, in the break room at work, on your website, etc.). It works for the local elementary school, so why not you?
5. Create a blog to track your progress. This is the secret behind the blockbuster movie and bestselling book, “Julie and Julia,” which began as a blog, as did Gretchen Rubin’s “The Happiness Project.”
6. Encourage people to ask you about your goal – and don’t get nasty when they ask you how you’re doing and you have nothing new to report!

The key to public accountability is the threat of being exposed in public. Being shunned from the group is a primal fear, leftover from the days when outcasts literally died because of their isolation. While we don’t face the same degree of risk, no one likes to be the one who’s seen as a failure.

If you are one of the few who is immune to others’ thoughts and opinions, this method might not work very well for you. But if you are like most of us and care deeply about being held in high regard, then the threat of public humiliation – even just online – might be the kick in the pants you need to make your dreams a reality.

Partner Up

Not ready for the scorn and ridicule you might face, were you to make your goals public and then fail to achieve them? Then maybe what you need is a partner rather than a whole community of people monitoring your progress. There are a few types of partners, so let's review the different kinds and the advantages of each:

1. **A Buddy.** A buddy is someone who's in the same situation as you and is striving towards the same goal. You might be working to launch your first internet businesses, or lose weight, or train for a 5K. The key is, you're doing it together. Buddy partners are great because they understand exactly what you're experiencing, because they're going through it, too. You can help each other over the obstacles you encounter, and you work to motivate and inspire them as much as they motivate and inspire you. The one drawback is that you might come up against challenges that neither of you really knows how to handle.
2. **An Accountability Partner.** An accountability partner is like a buddy, but you're pursuing different goals. You meet regularly to talk about your respective goals. You're not aiming for the same ultimate goal, but you still might be able to help brainstorm or provide perspective.
3. **A Mentor.** A mentor is someone who's walked the path before you and can give you the benefit of their experience. Mentors are typically not paid, but are a more personal, informal relationship. But because it's a little bit loosey-goosey, you may find that when you need your mentor the most, you can't "demand" their time.
4. **A Coach.** A coach is basically a paid mentor. Because the relationship is a professional one, there are better-defined boundaries and expectations. You know you can rely on him or her for a certain amount of time, a certain day of the week, or via e-mail. The drawback is obviously that you pay for the relationship, but most people will testify it's well worth the investment. Often, people will feel more accountable to a coach because you don't want to waste your money (think about paying for a personal trainer; you're less likely to skip your workout if you know you're paying either way!).

There are many options for finding a partner that's right for you. You may even find having a few different kinds of partner relationship make you that much more motivated, as each person will bring a different skill set to the table.

Give Yourself a Break

Sometimes, pushing harder just doesn't work. You can threaten yourself, punish yourself, browbeat yourself, and feel bad all you want, but it just doesn't make a difference. So what do you do?

You take a break. Take an hour, afternoon, or even a whole day off. Do anything BUT what you're supposed to be doing – without guilt. And then come back and try again.

This method works especially well when it comes to creative pursuits. While I don't believe in writer's block per se, I do believe the well can run dry. You can use up all your ideas, and if you don't replenish the source, you're going to have trouble coming up with fresh material. And the more you feel guilty about your inability to produce, the more performance anxiety you have. Actors, writers, singers, comedians, and pretty much any creative-type feel this way more often than they'd like to admit:

“What if I can't come up with any more jokes?”

“What if I don't have ‘it’ anymore?”

“What if people don't think I'm funny?”

“What if my second book isn't as good as my first?”

“What if I forget how to sing/act/paint?”

If you keep pushing, you get nowhere. The solution is very Zen: You must accept the uncertainty and fear and move with it to get through it. If you fight it, it lasts longer. But if you just give yourself permission to rest, you can recoup your strength and emerge on the other side renewed and refreshed, ready to create again. You'll have new ideas and new material to draw from, and the creativity will return.

Breaks are also great to reward yourself with at the end of a big project. You have accomplished something momentous, and you need to relax and regain your strength. Just as a marathon runner wouldn't sign up for a 10K the morning after the Boston Marathon (unless he's Dean Karnazes), we business-types also need time to recharge the ole' batteries.

One word of warning: Your breaks shouldn't last longer than your periods of productivity. If you find yourself constantly “on sabbatical,” take a good, hard look at what you're doing. And read the next section of this report.

Get Honest With Yourself

There comes a time when working towards a goal when no one else can do anything else to help you. The bribes, the rewards, the threats, the accountability: It means nothing. The only thing that matters is looking yourself in the mirror and getting deep-gut honest. If you find yourself continuing to procrastinate after working through the other hints in this report, maybe it's time for a heart-to-heart.

Sit down in a quiet place, take off your mask of professionalism, unshoulder your responsibilities, and get down and dirty. Ask yourself these questions:

Why am I having trouble following through on my goals? Number a sheet of paper from 1 to 20 and write answers for each line. Don't stop until you've filled the sheet. The real answer will come somewhere around #16 – after you cut through all the superficial BS.

Are these really my goals or someone else's? Sometimes it's hard to tell the difference between a goal you have for yourself and one someone else has had for you, particularly if it's been around a long time. If you really don't want to hold that goal anymore, wouldn't you rather own up to that fact now, rather than 10 years from now? The only thing worse than a 40-year-old frustrated stockbroker/lawyer/tennis coach is a 50-year-old frustrated stockbroker/lawyer/tennis coach.

Have these goals outlived their usefulness? Sometimes one goal was necessary to move you outside your current situation, but once the immediate danger has passed, the goal fades. For instance, you think you want to go back to school to get your masters of fine arts. You quit your job, enroll in grad school, and realize what you really want to do is teach writing to inner city kids – and you don't need two more years of school to do that. You needed the goal of the MFA to get you out of your job (going back to school seems safer than starting your own non-profit). But once you're out of the stifling job, your real goal comes to light.

What am I scared of? This is another number-your-paper-from-1-to-20 exercise. Start listing what you're afraid of, and once again, the real meat will come at the bottom of the page.

You may discover that you are pretty darned happy right where you are, right now. You don't need to get a raise, get a degree, make more money, or buy a bigger house. Your "now" is just fine. And that is okay! Not everyone needs to own Trump Tower to feel satisfied. The key is to recognize it and accept it. Own your ideal life. And if your ideal life is what you have now, more power to you.

But you just might find you've been hiding a few things from yourself. Get honest, now. There's no time like the present.

Conclusion

Procrastination is like unhappy families: Each is unique in its own way (thank you, Tolstoy and *Anna Karenina!*). The result is the same: You aren't accomplishing what you think you want or need to do. But the cause is as disparate as the one doing the procrastinating! Hopefully this short report has given you some ideas about where your procrastination is coming from, and what you can do to move past it.

Whatever the cause of your delays, when it comes down to it, the only thing to do is to do it. Yes, Nike said it first, but that doesn't make it any less true. Sometimes you need to just shut off the monkey chatter in your brain and go get it done.