

Procrastinate

Everything worth doing is worth doing later. BY SARA BLASK



I CONFESS: I'M GUILTY. I set out this morning to do one thing—and instead I did 20 others. I folded my laundry, cleaned out the spice cabinet, scrubbed the toilet, and Swiffered away the dust bunnies from the corners of my apartment. I e-mailed my mother, Skyped my best friend, and boned up on my knowledge of zodiac signs, including the Libra (ruled by Venus, if you must know). I've scanned the *Times*, the *Observer*, and the BBC. I have five windows open on my computer and four of them have to do with Britney Spears. But it's the fifth one that I can't bring myself to click: a blank Word document. I've had four weeks to write this essay. And now, with just hours to go

until my deadline, I'm finally beginning. Just the way I like it.

A typical writer would feel a guilty pang somewhere deep in the pit of her stomach right about now. It's the cramp you're supposed to get when a looming deadline entwines itself with the conscious distraction of trashy celebrity gossip. But I don't feel it. I've learned to think of procrastination differently—as a pleasure. Procrastination comes with a price, but it's one I'll gladly pay.

And I'm not alone. Agatha Christie and Mark Twain were known to be legendary procrastinators. Douglas Adams, author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (Ballantine),

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once said that he loved “the whooshing sound” of deadlines as they whizzed by. Christie was known to agonize before starting her novels, but look where stalling got her: More than a billion copies of her books have sold in English alone. One of the earliest references to the time-honored art of time-wasting, in fact, goes all the way back to the Bhagavad-Gita: “Undisciplined, vulgar, stubborn, wicked, malicious, lazy, depressed, and procrastinating,” says Krishna. “Such an agent is called a Taamasika agent.”

Today, those agents arrive in more easily recognizable forms. Whether it's the familiar red packaging of a Netflix envelope or the garish pink trim of Perez Hilton's celebrity blog, these pleasures, we're told, should be preserved for an appropriate time. Indulging during a deadline is like eating a Krispy Kreme donut before dinner. I know it's unhealthy, and I know my mom will disapprove. But if only she knew the feeling of relief and self-satisfaction that comes after racing against the clock to beat a tight deadline. My life would be that much duller if I never learned to put routine on the backburner.

The way I see it, the mind needs equal parts adamantium and silly putty. I'll see your Excel spreadsheets and your PowerPoint presentations, and I'll raise you a Drudge Report, a *New York Daily News*, and a sprinkle of Daily Candy. Without procrastination, I might know the meaning of hard work. But would I know the meaning of “bacn”—defined as “e-mail notifications such as news alerts and social networking updates that are considered more desirable than unwanted spam”—a runner-up for the 2007 *New Oxford American Dictionary* word of the year? Not likely.

But it's not just mindless trivia non-procrastinators miss out on. Some of mankind's greatest breakthroughs owe a debt to laziness. “What do you think Isaac Newton was doing sitting under the apple tree?” asks Jorge Cham, creator of “Piled Higher and Deeper,” a procrastination-themed cartoon. “He certainly wasn't in the lab working. The things you

do when you think you're procrastinating are sometimes a reflection of what you want to be doing." Clearly, Cham didn't want to be doing advanced trig—and who could blame him? The dude wanted to doodle. He took a gig instructing at Caltech to keep the lights on but still drew the popular strip in his free time. And it all happened because of his temporary willingness to trade his calculator for a sketchpad.

Thankfully, there's still hope for all you worker bees. Twenty-six percent of the public now view themselves as chronic procrastinators, according a study by the University of Calgary. "Nature's default is procrastination," says study author and associate professor Piers Steel. "It's the natural thing to do. We see it in almost all species." In other words, though it's not easy owning up to our inner slacker, we'll all be better off once we learn to accept what's natural.

Of course, many of us still might resist flirting with the consequences of tardiness. But sometimes we need the pressure cooker to reach our full potential. While turning in a project a day early might impress your boss, there's something to be said for rolling up your sleeves and pulling the kind of epic all-nighter you haven't attempted since you last donned dorm pants and shower sandals. You could be the guy who does his job quietly and without fanfare. Or you could turn everything in with seconds to go, beat the buzzer, and retire to the bar around the corner for high fives and celebratory pints. Which scenario would you remember more?

Never has it been easier to procrastinate, and for that, I'm thankful. We should embrace our creature comforts—just not all the time. After all, we still need to do our jobs, answer our mail, file our taxes, pay our heating bills, and call our mothers. In fact, I'm going to dial mine right now. It's at the top of my list. Just as soon as I read what's going on with Britney.

Sara Blask is a freelance writer based in Reykjavik, Iceland.

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