

Procrastination: Why do we do it?

By Michael A. Grant, J.D.
Special to the Sentinel-Voice

It may be ironic, but I have procrastinated over writing this article, more than any other in my series on the mind and motivation.

A plausible explanation for the postponement may well have been the number of times my subconscious mind heard the word: procrastination. Being the genius servant that it is, the subconscious mind may well have taken my obsessing over the article, that, I seemed at least temporarily, incapable of writing, as an order to — you got it — procrastinate.

So, for a few weeks, I knew that I had to eventually put pen to paper and try to communicate with you, on a topic that robs millions of people of their peace of mind. Most of us are not aware of why we procrastinate or the price that we pay for doing so.

Why do we procrastinate? I believe for a number of different reasons. The following is probably only a partial listing:

- We have not decided that we are going to undertake the task at hand;
- We have not chosen to make the task a priority;
- We honestly don't know how to get started;
- We're stuck in some comfort zone from which the beckoning task would jar us;
- We already have too much on our plates;
- We have not given ourselves a reason why the task is sufficiently important;
- We did not examine the effort that the task would require before agreeing to ourselves or others that we would perform it;
- We don't have a clear picture of the benefits of getting the task completed and
- We genuinely do not want to do the work necessary to complete the task.

Businessman H.L. Hunt once stated: "Decide what you want. Decide what you are willing to exchange for it. Establish your priorities."

It is all about choices. I had to give myself a good reason why I should choose to write an article about procrastination. The compelling reason that surfaced was this: I believe that procrastination not only robs millions of people of countless hours of peace of mind, it also lowers our self-esteem, shakes our self-confidence, and postpones the achievement of goals or dreams that live only in the murky inner recesses of our daily reveries.

Some brilliant mind once wrote, "In the end we either have excuses or experiences; reasons or results; butts or brilliance." How insightful!

If we think through our choices, guard against the human proclivity for wasting

our precious moments, and accept only those tasks that we sincerely believe ought to be done and done in a timely fashion, we will find that hours of restless procrastination will be replaced with a life filled with more inner peace.

But if it is a job-related, school-related, family-related or an otherwise mandatory task that looks too big to tackle, apply the wisdom of the great thinker who reminded us: "It's hard by the yard but it's a cinch by the inch." Break the work down into manageable pieces. The greatest challenge is getting started. The German poet Goethe advised in his couplet: "If you can do a thing or think you can, begin it; boldness has genius and magic in it."

It is important, however, to think through your strategy. It is also wise to take your own counsel when you feel that your knowledge base is inadequate to commence your project. But for the vast majority of the time, procrastination is just a bad habit, causing us to act contrary to our own best interest. Procrastination is subtle, but its impact on our lives, our careers, and our overall sense of well-being can be absolutely devastating.

In addition, inactivity where activity is required, taking the path of least resistance, or having to rush to get a job done at the last minute, are the behavior patterns of losers. Winners know that decisiveness and prompt action are the routes taken by all the great achievers. They also know that when we do what we need to do when we need to do it, in the future we will be able to do what we really want when we really want to do it.

It's about winning in a struggle with self in a life-long battle that none of us should want to lose.

So, are there times when inactivity is appropriate? Absolutely. Rest and relaxation are critical to the formula for successful living. And patiently awaiting the harvests of one's labors is often the approach taken by the wise. A heightened sense of self will help you to determine when your inactivity is bonafide procrastination.

Lastly, confront procrastination at its incipency. Nip it in the bud. Decide as soon as possible that you will not allow an unconscious urge to fail or sabotage you. If you have decided that a pending task is important, tackle at least a part of it today (now, if possible).

I'll leave you with the wisdom of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He summarizes the message of this essay with sheer elegance:

"Let us, then, be up and doing with a heart for any fate; still achieving, still pursuing learn to labor and to wait."

CHILDWATCH

Parents need sensible TV ratings

By Marian Wright Edelman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What kind of TV shows do your children look at?

Do you worry if their favorite shows contain violence, sex, or inappropriate language? If your children are like most children, they spend an average of four hours a day in front of the tube.

One recent study found that children are bombarded with more than 2,000 television messages a day. And black children watch more TV than other children. Two-thirds of black fourth-graders watch four or more hours of TV a day, compared with one-third of white fourth-graders and a half of Hispanic fourth-graders. On average, a black household watches 72 hours of TV per week, 49 percent more than other households.

With hundreds of channels to choose from, I think parents need help to make good choices about what their children should and shouldn't watch. And parents need to stop using TV as a baby-sitter.

Earlier this year, the Implementation Group for TV Ratings, headed by Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti, introduced a rating system based on age, just like the movie system, that consists of six broad ratings. The ratings provide no information for parents about the content of television programs—no hints whether a show has a lot of violence, or sexual content, or both.

Under the industry's rating system, Y represents programs suitable for children two to six year old, Y7 programs are for children seven and older, G programs are suitable for all ages, PG suggests parental guidance, 14 means unsuitable for children under 14, and M programs are for mature audiences only.

I agree with the dozens of academic experts, child advocates, members of Congress, and parent, health, religious, and education groups across the country that parents would be better off with a rating system that describes content by using symbols such as "V" for violence, "L" for language, and "S" for sex. A similar system has been used by Home Box Office and other premium cable television channels for the past decade, and we ought to have it on every channel.

"It is important to know what exactly is in the shows children are planning to watch," says psychologist Dale Kunkel, a leading researcher on the media's effect on

children. "Research has shown that children learn behaviors by watching others, and TV presents a huge range of behaviors to learn from, including violence."

Violence in our communities and in our nation is caused by a combination of factors, including easy availability of guns, poverty, and violence in the home. But TV violence increases children's risk of becoming violent, overly fearful, or numb to victims.

Parents say they want all the help they can get. A recent poll sponsored by the PTA found that four out of five parents polled preferred a rating system based on content and using letters to warn parents when violence, coarse language, and sexual content appear in programs, rather than a rating system based only on age.

Of course, no rating system can replace parental responsibility. In addition to being careful about the messages we allow into our homes, we should limit the amount of television our children watch. We need to

read more to our children, to encourage them to read on their own, and to spend more time sharing our proud history and culture with them. And sometimes we need to watch television with our children.

Television can be educational as well as entertaining, and we need to seek out and support positive programs.

You have until April 8 to urge the FCC to approve a ratings system that provides necessary information about the programs your children may watch.

Make your opinion heard by calling the FCC toll-free at 1-888-CALL-FCC, or by sending an e-mail to vchip@fcc.gov.

Black professionals to honor students of African heritage

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The UNLV Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage will host its 12th Student Awards Banquet April 6, at 6 p.m. at the Artemis W. Ham Concert Hall on the school's campus.

The event will honor African and African-American students for academic excellence and outstanding community service at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Tickets are \$10 per person.

Clark County Commission Chairwoman Yvonne Atkinson Gates will be the keynote speaker. KVBC-TV 3 Anchorwoman Rikki Cheese will serve as master of ceremonies.

Two students will receive the Roosevelt Fitzgerald Outstanding Student Award for academic achievement.

Eight Thomas Wilson Community Citizenship Awards will go to students positively impacting the community.

In addition, undergraduate students with a 3.0-or-better grade point average and graduate students posting a 3.5 GPA or better, will be recognized.

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