



## STEPS AHEAD OF PROCRASTINATION

By Allison Wolf + Jeniene Chand  
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John is bored. His practice is in a lull, and with the big trial having settled all he has on his desk are small tasks. Though none of it is complicated, he can't get down to doing any of it and is wasting time surfing the net instead.

Terry is deadline driven. Every day is about putting out fires and meeting last-minute deadlines. He knows he should plan ahead and get his projects done before the last minute, but he has gotten used to the adrenaline rush and can only get motivated to do something with the pressure of a short deadline.

What do John and Terry have in common? They are both procrastinators.

Procrastination is not taking action when you know that inaction has potentially harmful circumstances.

If you are like John, you might be easily distracted. You find it hard to take action on things that are not inherently valuable or pleasurable to you. For instance, boring or repetitive tasks might be hard to focus on when more interesting things catch your attention.

If you are like Terry, you might be impulsive. You find it easy to focus on anything that requires immediate attention but struggle with longer timelines.

Or you may hold crushingly high expectations of yourself and procrastinate out of a pervasive fear of not measuring up.

Do any of the above scenarios sound familiar? If so, you are not alone. As coaches, a frequent question we hear from lawyers is about how to deal with procrastination.

The good news is that there are many ways to breakthrough procrastination.

To get started, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is one thing I am procrastinating about currently?
- Why am I procrastinating about this?
- How could this delay cause problems?

For example, you may be procrastinating about drafting a document because you never worked on this type of agreement before and are uncertain of how to approach it. You know that delaying getting started limits your time to work on it and means you will return it to the partner later than you had hoped. This type of procrastination is likely causing some form of stress, so it is not helping you in any way.

Next, gather the courage to take action. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the result I would like to achieve through taking action?
- What is one small next step I can take to move it forward?

Using the example above, one small step you can take is contacting a colleague or mentor for more guidance on how to draft this type of agreement.

In another case, you may be stuck with not getting some dull administrative tasks completed. Your small next step is to work on it for ten minutes each day until it is completed.

Over the next few weeks, ask yourself this question each day – where am I stuck? Then choose one small step to move the task forward.

Over time you will have the opportunity to notice any trends in your reasons for procrastinating.

As you learn about the internal and external causes of your procrastination, you can put in place some new routines, habits or processes to reduce procrastination:

- Make your workspace a zone for focused concentration. Eliminate the distractions in your office and on the computer.
- Use your computer at the office for your professional work exclusively. Do your web surfing and personal email on another device, preferably in a different space.
- Reserve your morning and mid-day peak performance hours for your most demanding tasks.
- Break up distant deadlines into a series of milestones. Schedule time for working on these milestones instead of waiting until the last minute to start on the project as a whole.
- Work in focused sessions of 30 to 90 minutes without checking email and handle emails in scheduled blocks.
- Use small blocks of 5 to 15 minutes to take small steps on tasks you are stalled on.
- Keep a to-do list and review it daily. Take just a few minutes to set your goals for the day. Choose one thing you are procrastinating about on the list and get it done, or at the very least, moving forward.
- What gets scheduled most often gets done. Schedule time for tasks you are procrastinating on.
- Establish a routine of doing specific tasks at a particular time of day. Start the day with a coffee and a review of your task list and goals for the day.

If you are someone who typically delays asking for help, consider scheduling time each week with colleagues or mentors to discuss work in progress instead of putting this off.

As you reduce procrastination by getting started on tasks sooner, you will likely experience relief and enhanced motivation. Remember: The goal is not perfection but simply reduction. Start by reducing procrastination in your personal or professional life by 10% and then build from there.

Here is our number one resource for beating procrastination:

Timothy A. Pychyl (2013). Solving the Procrastination Puzzle: A Concise Guide to Strategies for Change.

Or you can catch his top tips in this podcast:

[Podcast ADHD rewired: The Procrastination Researcher](#)

For more information and further reading on habits, visit our [online library](#).



### **ALLISON WOLF, PCC**

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Her particular strengths as a coach are business development; practice management; and career at all levels of seniority. Having worked with a wide group of clients from every area of practice she has developed a deep understanding of the national and international legal marketplace that informs her work with clients.

In addition to coaching, Allison has over twenty years of experience as an in-house legal marketing and business development professional for law firms of all sizes and scope. She began in Beijing, New York, and Washington D.C. offices of an international law firm, followed by a national Canadian firm and two large regional firms. She is a recognized expert in legal marketing and business development, frequently asked to write for U.S. and Canadian legal journals and present to professional associations and private law firms.

She is a Professional Certified Coach and member of the International Coaching Federation; a former board member with West Coast LEAF; a former President of both the LMA Vancouver Chapter and the non-profit Pacifica Family Addictions Foundation. She has a B.A. from McGill University, and conducted graduate studies in Communications and East Asian Studies at McGill University and the Beijing Film Academy. She received her Executive Coaching Certification (CEC) from Royal Roads University in 2004. The program is accredited by the International Coaching Federation which is the official international governing body of the profession. She is also a 2014 graduate of the Martha Beck Life Coach Training program.



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Janiene is a lawyer coach trained by an International Coaching Federation (ICF) accredited institution. Prior to becoming a coach, she worked in the legal field for over 12 years. Her experience as a legal assistant, paralegal, and lawyer gives her a unique understanding of the team dynamics within law firms, plus a strong skill set in practice management and career development.

As a first-generation lawyer and a young woman of colour, Janiene encountered many challenges over the course of her career in law, including facing microaggressions and a lack of confidence leading to self-doubt and a harsh inner critic. Her lived experience of meeting and overcoming these difficulties inspired her to pursue her qualification as a Certified Professional Coach. She puts her experience to work in support and guidance of other lawyers who are navigating their personal and professional lives.