

## Pulse



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# How To Make Yourself Work When You're Not In The Mood

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Procrastination affects everyone. It sneaks up on most people when they're tired or bored, but for some, procrastination can be a full-fledged addiction. They avoid all day the work that is right in front of them, only to go home and toil late into the night, frantically trying to finish what they could have easily completed before dinner.

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*“Procrastination is the thief of time, collar him.” –Charles Dickens*

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With the holidays approaching, the high season for procrastination is upon us. It's even more difficult to get work done when you're stuck at the office, wishing

you were enjoying time with family and friends.

Still, the procrastination cycle can become crippling at any time of the year, which is troubling, because recent studies show that procrastination magnifies stress, reduces performance, and leads to poor health.

Psychologists at Case Western Reserve University conducted an interesting experiment where they offered college students a date range instead of a single due date for their papers. The researchers tracked the date that students turned in their papers and compared this to their stress levels and overall health. Students who waited until the last minute to turn in their papers had greater stress and more health issues than others did. They also received worse grades on their papers and in the class overall than students who turned their papers in earlier.

A study published earlier this year by Bishop's University explored the link between chronic procrastination and stress-related health issues. The researchers found a strong link between procrastination and hypertension and heart disease, as procrastinators experienced greater amounts of stress and were more likely to

delay healthy activities, such as proper diet and exercise.

Procrastination is fueled by excuses. We cannot expect to overcome procrastination and improve our health and productivity until we're able to overcome the negative mental habits that lead us to procrastinate in the first place.

What follows are the most troubling excuses we use to help us procrastinate. They're troubling because they're the most difficult excuses to conquer. For each, I offer preventative strategies so you can overcome procrastination and get productive, even when you don't feel like working.

### **“I don't know where to begin.”**

Paradoxically, we often find ourselves frozen like a deer in headlights when confronted with a difficult task. As well, much like deer, the best thing we can do is move in any direction, fast. When a task is particularly difficult, you need all the time you are given to complete it. There's no sense in wasting valuable time by

allowing yourself to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the task.

The key here is to not allow fear of the whole to stop you from engaging in the parts. When something looks too difficult, simply break it down. What can you accomplish in 60 minutes that will help you slay the beast? Then, what can you do in 60 more minutes?

Breaking your task into shorter periods (where effort is guaranteed) allows you to move out of the “deer in headlights” frame of mind. Before you know it, you’ve accomplished something, and the task goes from way too hard to absolutely doable. When it comes to challenging tasks, inactivity is the enemy.

**“There are too many distractions.”**

For most of us, getting started on a large project is a challenge. We stumble over all sorts of smaller, irrelevant tasks that distract us from the real assignment. We answer emails, make calls, check the news online...anything to avoid the elephant in the room.

Being busy is not the same as being productive. When you find yourself avoiding a particularly sizeable task, slow down and visualize what will happen if you continue to put off the task. Distractions numb you by shifting your attention away from these consequences (a.k.a., away from reality). Reminding yourself of what will happen if you continue procrastinating is a great way to make distractions less enchanting so that you can focus on your work.

### **“It’s too easy.”**

Tasks that are too easy can be surprisingly dangerous, because when you put them off, it’s easy to underestimate how much time they’ll take to complete. Once you finally sit down to work on them, you discover you have not given yourself enough time to complete the task (or at least to complete it well).

If a task is too easy, draw connections to the bigger picture, because these connections turn mundane tasks into a fundamental (and *do it now*) part of your job. For example, you might hate data entry, but when you think about the role the data plays in the strategic objectives of your department, the task becomes

worthwhile. When the smaller, seemingly insignificant things don't get done or get done poorly, it has a ripple effect that's felt for miles.

## **“I don't like it.”**

Procrastination isn't always about a task being too easy or too hard. Sometimes, you just don't want to do it. It can be very hard to get moving on a task in which you're disinterested, much less despise.

Unfortunately, there's no foolproof way to teach yourself to find something interesting, because certain things will never draw your attention. Rather than pushing these tasks to the back of your plate, make it a rule that you cannot touch any other project or task until you've finished the dreaded one. In this way, you are policing yourself by forcing yourself to “eat your vegetables before you can have dessert.”

When you do get started, you can always turn the task into a game. How can you achieve your task more efficiently? How can you change the steps of the process and still produce the same result? Bringing mindfulness to a dreaded task gives

you a fresh perspective. The task itself might not be fun, but the game can be.

## **“I don’t think I can do it.”**

You are assigned a new project by your supervisor. In fact, it’s one you’ve wished he or she would give you for a while. However, now that it’s in your lap, you simply cannot get started. You cannot get past thoughts of failure. *What’s going to happen if I blow it? How am I going to do this? Could I be fired over this?* It can reach a point where avoiding failure seems like the best possible option. After all, if you never engage in a project, you’ll never fail. Right?

Wrong. Procrastination itself is failure—failure to utilize your innate talents and abilities. When you procrastinate, you’re failing to believe in yourself.

Remember when you were learning to drive and you could only look straight ahead, because if you looked at something off the road, you’d unwittingly turn the wheel in that direction? Worrying about everything that might go wrong if you fail has the same effect. It pulls you toward failure.



You must shift your mind in a confident direction by focusing on all the positive things that are going to happen when you succeed. When you believe you can do something—and you visualize the positive things that will come from doing well—you equip yourself to succeed. This thought process gets your mind headed in the right direction. Worrying about everything that could go wrong only binds your hands. Break the chains and get started!

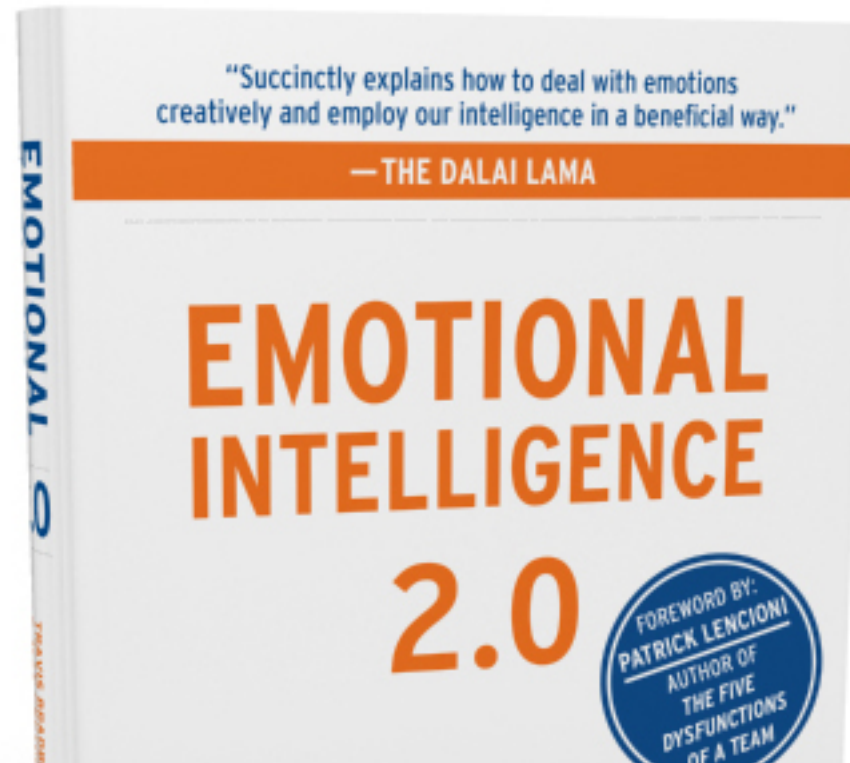
## **Bringing It All Together**

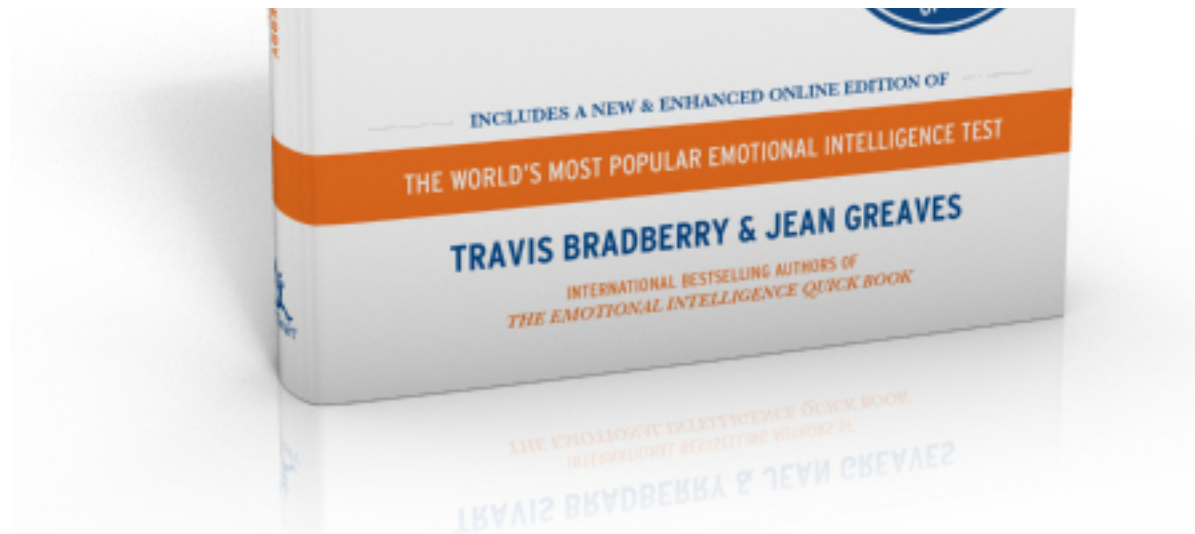
Fighting procrastination teaches us to fully engage in our work, get more creative with it, and, ultimately, get more done.

*How do you fight procrastination? Please share your thoughts in the comments section below as I learn just as much from you as you do from me.*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

**Dr. Travis Bradberry** is the award-winning co-author of the #1 bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and the cofounder of **TalentSmart**, the world's leading provider of **emotional intelligence tests** and **training**, serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. Dr. Bradberry has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek*, *TIME*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company, Inc.*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Harvard Business Review*.





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