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Can Procrastination Actually Boost Your Productivity and Creativity?

An article in *Success*, written by Kris Ann Valdez, notes that “cultural strategist Margaret Ricci says she was born with the ‘procrastination gene.’ But through trial and error, she’s learned to use procrastination as a tool. By setting herself a ‘drop-dead date,’ she knows she’ll conquer a task on schedule. However, the time she spends incubating her ideas before her deep work begins ultimately benefits her outcome.”

Timothy Pychyl, author of *Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*, who calls Ricci’s method “purposeful delay,” argues that delaying a task isn’t necessarily the same as procrastination. For example, a writer isn’t writing only when they’re at their keyboard. “Writing involves thinking. Writing involves having conversations with people [and] talking about what I would write,” he explains.

Rici, says Valdez, adds that procrastination pushes her into a “flow state.” This state occurs when the brain hits a sweet spot between challenge and ability – it’s stretched but not overwhelmed.

In Ricci’s case, Valdez adds, “she’s propelled by the external pressure of a deadline, which psychologist Own Fitzpatrick calls ‘procrastination-driven hyperfocus.’ This hyperfocus mimics the intense focus of a flow state and is triggered by the brain releasing noradrenaline to sharpen attention and prioritize the task. Dopamine is also involved, igniting motivation and urgency and propelling the brain into action.”

For many procrastinators, she notes, “the pressure of the task they put off becomes too great, causing their brain to shift into stress mode and cortisol to rise. This, Fitzpatrick warns, can cloud the brain and cripple performance.”

During the “forming stage” of a team, Ricci advises, team members should discuss if they are prone to procrastinate and, if yes, explore why. She suggests asking questions like the following:

- Are they disinterested or ill-prepared in their work?
- Are they operating outside their comfort zones or afraid to ask for help?
- Do they use purposeful delay to compress time and accelerate activity?

“Once you understand the DNA of the people inside the team,” Ricci says, “then you can say, ‘OK, how can we work with your procrastination to make this a better team?’”

Fitzpatrick agrees that structure is necessary for optimal focus. “When things feel open-ended or chaotic,” he says, “we lose access to the very cognitive systems we need most to stay organized, evaluate options and follow through.”

But this structure doesn’t have to be rigid. He adds that a short deadline, specific goal or focused work sprint can allow the brain to shift into a functional, creative state and mimic the feel of the urgency that procrastinators crave without the guilt spiral. For neurodivergent minds, Fitzpatrick recommends time-blocking, visual timers and coworking sessions to create external boundaries.

Valdez notes that executive coach Kristina Proctor finds that structure is especially essential in meetings. “An agenda should include the order of operations, who is responsible for what, and the ultimate goal to help individuals mentally prepare and avoid dysregulation.”

According to Pychyl, says Valdez, “we tend to procrastinate because we want short-term rewards or to have fun now rather than later. This often makes procrastination an emotional regulation problem instead of an issue of time management. But what if there was a way to make our tasks more fun?”

Valdez says that, according to Fitzpatrick, “incorporating play can be especially helpful for individuals with ADHD, whose brains struggle to generate enough dopamine to engage in tasks that lack novelty, urgency or high emotional relevance. This can explain the common ‘I know I need to do it, but I can’t make myself start’ feeling, which stems not from laziness but from a neurochemical mismatch that triggers stress and guilt.”

One of Proctor’s clients says that she was most energized by a midday workout class. Initially, she felt guilty for sneaking in this activity during her workday, but she soon realized that carving out time for that class increased her stamina and productivity levels. “That time went from a ‘This is] nice to have if I have time’ to a ‘This is a strategic need for me to keep moving my business forward,’” Proctor shares.

There’s still much research needed on the correlation between procrastination and flow state, Fitzpatrick says. But as we understand more, we’ll hopefully be able to “design environments and workflows that lean into the natural rhythms of the brain.”

Learn more at [Is Procrastination Your New Productivity Hack? | SUCCESS.](#)