

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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WHEN faced with an unpleasant task do you procrastinate, secretly hoping it will go away, or tackle it head on?

You probably already know that tackling a tough task head on makes the most sense and procrastinating only puts off the inevitable. But you might not realise that crossing a dreaded task off your list early in the day makes moving through the remainder of your to-do list easier and faster.

Studies show that confidence and enthusiasm are generated by completing difficult tasks.

New York Times bestselling author Gretchen Rubin says that "without delay is the easiest way" when a tough task looms.

However, diving right in may not be the most effective approach since the barrier to completing the task may simply be not knowing how to go about it. Jumping in may simply lead to frustration.

In this situation, building a plan and breaking the task down into smaller, achievable pieces may be the most effective approach.

But how do you get that plan?

One approach is to use the buddy system. During a recent project, a colleague and I found ourselves deferring the activities which we were less sure of or found challenging in favour of the things we enjoyed doing or found easy to do.

Avoiding the things that were not enjoyable ended up causing significant delays as those tasks became more and more critical.

By working together, the both of us recognised the stuff we didn't want to tackle (usually



EXPAT EYE by HUGH UJHAZY

The right approach to tough tasks

Planning ahead is better than diving right into them without knowing how to tackle the issues

through lack of confidence or lack of an approach to the problem).

Talking the challenging areas over, using a whiteboard and lots of arm waving, we came up with an approach that was effective and enjoyed the process of building the approach. We created the 'ah-ha!' moment that allowed us to see a path to the result.

The most ineffective plan is "Ignore it and hope it goes away". Ignoring tough tasks usually means they either get added to someone else's workload (which leads to resentment) or become an urgent item on the critical path.

Another effective approach (especially when it's only you doing the task) is motivating yourself to dive in with a reward once the job is done – a cup of coffee when the task is finished, a good meal after exercise, the chance to do something you enjoy after getting the monthly report out.

A good friend looking to exercise more and balance her diet used this simple technique of rewarding herself with things she enjoyed after doing the exercise she wanted to do, but didn't necessarily enjoy.

A 30-minute brisk walk was rewarded with a good glass of wine, running up the hill with a good dinner out. By pairing the good things and the not-so-good things together, a dreaded task became a stepping stone to an enjoyable and fun thing.

Looking forward to the reward activity (something you enjoy) can overcome the hesitation in the face of something that is not so much fun.

Who doesn't enjoy that sense of satisfaction when the apparently insurmountable task gets knocked on the head, when the presentation that just wouldn't come together is sitting there done and looking good?

Anticipating those moments are

the things that can haul us over the lip of procrastination into the flow of getting things done.

A final technique is tackling tough things in the morning. It may seem counter-intuitive but we're generally in a more positive mood and better able to tackle tough things early in the day.

An approach that has worked many times is breaking the day into three chunks – in the morning: Get Stuff Done, after lunch: Talk About Stuff and in the evening: Think About Stuff which needs to be done the next day. The day starts with achievement or ticking things off the list.

The early afternoon is spent talking and making plans and collaborating with colleagues. The combination of stuff that's been done and planning for future stuff makes planning for the next day start on a positive note.

Overall, getting started is the hardest part of any tough task. Commit to the outcome, break



Be ready: When faced with difficult tasks, coming up with a plan helps.

the tough task down into smaller chunks, sit down with a buddy and talk the process through, reward yourself with something you enjoy doing – these are all techniques that can help you move forward from avoiding the tough stuff to seeing those things done, basking in the warm afterglow of a job well done.

Opinion