

success



ENDING SELF-SABOTAGE

by Dr. Larina Kase

HOW TO GET FROM WHERE YOU ARE NOW, TO WHERE YOU WANT TO BE

Do you ever wonder why, despite your best intentions, you just aren't getting the results you want in life? Maybe you've been trying to boost your career; improve your relationship; get in shape; gain more self-confidence; save more money; be more organized; or a hundred other worthwhile self-improvements. You've put energy into making these important changes, but you just aren't seeing positive results.

What's holding you back? You're a good person and a hard worker. In general, you're doing ok in life. But there always seems to be something standing between you and your desired achievements. So, what's keeping you from getting where you want to be? It's probably not a lack of desire, effort, skill or knowledge that's holding you back. You may be sabotaging your own efforts, without even realizing it.

We all sabotage ourselves to some degree. Even the most successful, happy, well-balanced person will still get in their own way occasionally. Self-sabotaging behavior is when there is no logical or rational explanation for why you can't do the things you want to do or have the things you want to have. It's when there is something inside you that's stronger than

your desire to reach your goal, and holds you back from getting where you want to be.

Self-sabotage behavior occurs when one part of you wants to accomplish your goal and another (hidden) part doesn't - due to fear, or other reasons. You may be secretly holding yourself back, without even being aware of it.

There are dozens of factors that can hold you back from success. Here are seven of the most common, self-sabotaging behaviors that may be holding you back. As you read through these items, take an honest inventory of your beliefs and behaviors to see if you're engaging in any of them. Then, carefully consider the solutions to ending these behaviors, and start working towards your goals today.

You're holding yourself back if you are:

- 1- Frozen by the fear of failure
- 2- Unable to sustain self-motivation
- 3- Not really ready for change
- 4- Procrastinating and engaging in analysis paralysis
- 5- Expecting perfection
- 6- Experiencing distraction and difficulty focusing
- 7- Making excuses about time and money

FROZEN BY THE FEAR OF FAILURE

One of the most common types of thinking which holds us back is the fear of failure. We doubt ourselves and our abilities. Before plunging into something important, we hesitate and think about all the things that can go wrong. While it's smart to anticipate and plan for obstacles, it's not helpful to get stuck and preoccupied with thinking about them.

Here are some of the common fears - do you have any of these?

- ✓ Fear of losing esteem and being embarrassed that you couldn't cut it
- ✓ Fear of letting yourself down and being disappointed
- ✓ Fear of the unknown and unfamiliar
- ✓ Fear of change- either positive (success) or negative (failure)
- ✓ Fear of no-change or remaining "ordinary"

The biggest problem with the fear of failure is that it holds us back from pushing ourselves beyond our comfort zone and growing.

Solution

The best way to manage the fear of failure is to take risks. Ask yourself, "What is one thing that makes me uncomfortable, but could lead to an important outcome if I tried it?" Then identify a series of three action steps to help you accomplish that goal. Begin with the step that is easiest or must come

first. If you're able to complete your action step successfully, you'll learn that the fear was unfounded and gain greater confidence. If you do fail, you'll learn that you can handle the failure and it's probably not as bad as you thought. This will also help you have more courage and self-assurance in the future.

UNABLE TO SUSTAIN SELF MOTIVATION

You approach a new project with energy and motivation. But then what happens? That motivation fades like sunlight in the evening. Why? It can be the fear of failure as we've discussed. Or it may be that you're unsure how to keep yourself motivated.

We tend to make assumptions about what will motivate us. For instance, it's easy to think that factors like salary and work conditions will motivate us to perform better on our jobs, but research shows those things only prevent job dissatisfaction, but do not motivate us. What truly motivates us, in all areas of our life, is achievement, recognition, advancement, responsibility and growth.

Solution

We usually learn how to become self-motivated from a young age. Children take positive feedback from parents, teachers, and other people and learn how to internalize a reward system. If you don't have great self-motivation you can develop it by recognizing and rewarding desirable actions you take.

NOT REALLY READY TO CHANGE

We often make the inaccurate assumption that we are ready to change. Just because something sounds like an important idea does not mean that we are ready to do it today. Resolving our ambivalence about change is the key to long term goal achievement. There are specific stages of change that we go through. When you know the stage of change you are currently in, you can

propel yourself forward towards the next stage. Think about one of your major goals and consider which stage of change you are really in:

The Stages of Change

- 1- "**Pre-Contemplation.**" You are not yet thinking about making a change. This may be because you have not thought about doing something new or because you have already thought things through and decided not to make a change.
- 2- "**Contemplation.**" You have probably begun to think about changing, but are not sure what to do. You can think of the good and not-so-good aspects of change.
- 3- "**Preparation Stage.**" When you feel that the reasons to change outweigh the reasons not to change, you become determined to do something. You start to plan how you can make the change.
- 4- "**Action.**" You are ready to initiate something new right now and implement the plans that you created in the previous step. At this point, you may publicly announce your commitment to others in your life.
- 5- "**Maintenance.**" At this point, your goal is to sustain the progress that has been made. It is common to have some "slips" where your old habits briefly return. This is fine as long as you identify the problems and keep up with your progress.

Solution

Know your current stage of change, and consciously work towards the next stage. Be sure to choose goals and activities that are consistent with your stage of change, otherwise your motivation will quickly dwindle.

PROCRASTINATING AND ENGAGING IN ANALYSIS PARALYSIS

One of the main reasons that you don't accomplish all that you want is that you don't start or that you start too late. Procrastination is a type of

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avoidance. When something makes us nervous or uncomfortable so we avoid it.

Avoidance may decrease fearful thoughts initially, but over time it actually increases your anxiety. The more you avoid something, the harder it becomes, and the less confidence you have in yourself.

Solution

Just do it! Always confront that which makes you anxious, and stay in the situation long enough that your negative reaction subsides. Next time you have negative feelings about a task, push through those feelings and get yourself to do it anyway. Chances are that after your initial reaction, you will have a positive experience, which makes it much easier and more enjoyable the next time, which reduces your procrastination and avoidance. The key to successfully ending procrastination is to keep doing the activity that you wanted to avoid, until a positive result occurs.

EXPECTING PERFECTIONISM

When you feel like something has to be perfect, how do you feel? Calm, tranquil, and relaxed? Probably not. The idea that you need to make something perfect puts a lot of pressure on you. Perfection makes it difficult for you to begin something and finish it. It destroys confidence because you will never feel good enough.

Solution

To get past perfectionism, you will need to do something radical and purposely do a task imperfectly. This

sounds crazy but when you do this, you learn that you can mess something up a bit and not suffer any major negative consequences. You can complete something only 85% perfectly and the world will not come crashing down, and in fact, you may find you get even better results.

EXPERIENCING DISTRACTION AND DIFFICULTY FOCUSING

Focusing your attention like a laser beam on a target is a key to success. Scattering your attention onto various tasks, projects and situations is a road to self-sabotage. First, determine whether you are primarily distracted by internal or external distractions.

An internal source of distraction can include:

- ✓ A thought
- ✓ A physical sensation, such as hunger or thirst, physical pain or discomfort
- ✓ A feeling of tiredness, fatigue or lack of energy
- ✓ A lack of interest in what you are doing
- ✓ A frustration or irritation
- ✓ A sense of guilt (that you should be doing something else) or boredom

An external source of distraction can include:

- ✓ The phone ringing
- ✓ Someone asking you a question or knocking on your door
- ✓ A television or radio program

- ✓ People talking nearby
- ✓ A pop-up on your computer screen
- ✓ A book sitting on your desk that looks interesting
- ✓ A smell in the room where you are working
- ✓ A too-hot or too-cold environment

Solution

It is important to identify whether you get distracted on purpose. You may actually choose to get distracted because you want a mental break or you want to look something up on the internet or because you are bored. The more you practice identifying your internal distractions, the more quickly you will begin to be able to catch and manage them.

The best process for dealing with internal distractions:

- 1- First, acknowledge the thought coming in. Make yourself aware of it by making a mental note or writing it down.
- 2- Second, decide not to let that thought penetrate your shield of concentration. Do not actively try to push the thought away because it will fight back. Instead, let it roll off you as if your mind is a Teflon pan.
- 3- Third, plan to come back to the thought at a later time when you can focus your energy productively on it.
- 4- Fourth, immediately redirect your mental energy towards your project.

You have two options for handling external distractions:

- 1- The first is to control your environment so these types of interruptions

are reduced.

- 2- The second is to learn how to tune out external distractions.

In psychology, the strategy of changing your environment to improve your performance or reduce temptations that will bring you off track is called “stimulus control.” This is an extremely effective strategy that works for many situations, such as weight loss, anger management and substance abuse. It can also help you to improve your attention.

The key is to remove distracting objects from your environment. For example, one thing that distracts me while I am writing is checking my email. For stimulus control, I need to not have my emails open or better yet, I would not even be connected to the internet when I need to concentrate on my writing.

If you cannot change your environment, learn how to focus despite external distractions. Begin by working on something that is very engaging and enjoyable. Then work on doing more mundane tasks in a distracting environment. You can practice by going to cafes and trying to work on your laptop or working with distracting background noise like a television or radio on.

Finally, schedule breaks in attention. It is impossible to focus on one thing for longer than about 60 minutes. Strategically used, breaks in your attention can help you to refocus. Therefore, schedule rewarding breaks that serve the purpose of helping you stay focused while you are working, and increase the likelihood that you will continue to work towards your goals.

MAKING EXCUSES ABOUT TIME AND MONEY

We’ve all said to ourselves, “I’d definitely do that if only I had the time or money.” We could survey a thousand people and approximately nine hundred and ninety-five would say that they don’t have all of the time and money that they need to do what they want to do in life. This is a fact of life:

valuable resources always feel like they are in short supply.

Solution

Set goals to improve your use of time. There is a great deal of evidence which shows that we tend to accomplish that which is:

- 1- Written down
- 2- Put into our schedule at a specific point in time
- 3- Measurable and in very specific terms
- 4- Designed with some degree of flexibility built in

Break up and prioritize your tasks. If you are someone who has many things on your plate, you know the importance of prioritizing your activities. You have constant activities competing for your limited time and attention. By creating a mental priority of your activities, you will make decisions more quickly and easily. You won’t waste time contemplating whether you will do something and when. You’ll know that only a legitimate emergency will interfere with your prioritized activities.

Here are some questions to ask yourself in determining your list of top priorities:

- ✓ Is this task very significant and meaningful to me?
- ✓ Will I feel a significant sense of accomplishment if I worked on this?
Is there a time deadline for this

activity (either an outside deadline or a self-imposed one)?

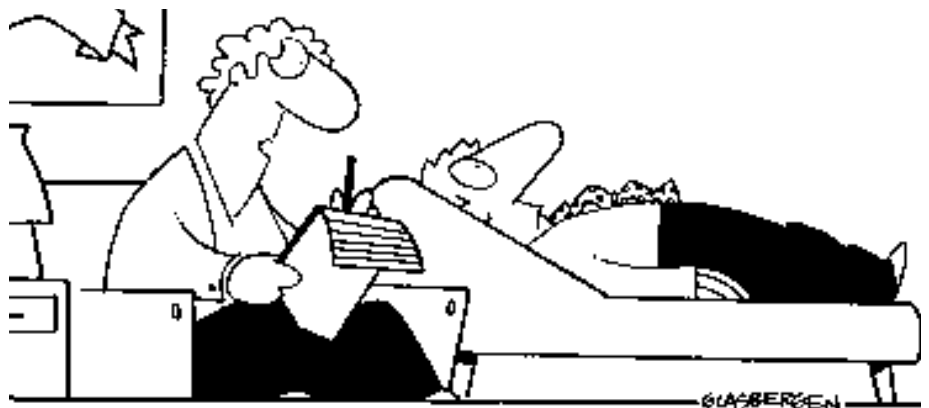
- ✓ Will there be an important benefit (to me or others) when I finish this?
- ✓ If I were not able to work on this, would there be some negative consequences?

Prioritizing tasks will help you to determine the order in which you will work on them. Once you know the order of your projects, it is important to break up large tasks into smaller tasks. This idea is particularly true for people who have attention difficulties. Create a list of several steps that go into finishing something. Take small breaks in between the steps to give you time to regain your focus and motivation.

It’s helpful to write down the steps of your project and then check them off as you go. This process motivates you and makes the steps very clear. You will know exactly what you need to get done and when. CB

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is the president of the international consultancy Performance & Success Coaching, and the author of *Anxious 9 to 5*. She’s regularly seen in media such as The New York Times, SELF, and Inc. Get many free resources including the e-course *7 Steps to Career Success* at www.PAScoaching.com.



“Look at it this way. If your problem belonged to someone else, it wouldn’t seem like any big deal at all!”