



by Mark Gorkin L.I.C.S.W.

Productively managing your time is critical in an always on-anytime-anywhere world that is forever cycling between upgrading and downsizing (or, reorganizing), or when there's serious blurring of the boundary between your work and home lives. When under the gun or with deadlines looming, sometimes the best thing to do is **PANIC!** Just consider this acronym for surviving the time crunch and for helping you declare your "Emancipation Procrastination."

- P** = *Priorities and Perfection*
- A** = *Avoidance and Advance*
- N** = *"No" and Negotiate and Designated Nagger*
- I** = *Initiation and Incubation Vacation*
- C** = *Compartmentalize and Creative Space*

The following techniques and tips can help you manage time and to focus and free up your mind.

P = Priorities and Perfection

Priorities — "I can't do it all!" According to the often cited Pareto Principle (propounded by a 20th century Italian sociologist), 80 percent of your results are achieved by 20 percent of your activities. Another way of envisioning this concept: for a restaurant, 20 percent of the items on the menu account for 80 percent of the orders. So, unless you run a restaurant, the nice thing about this principle is you can drop 4/5 of your activities without feeling guilty.

Another key component of priorities is the criticality of the task, request or demand. Remember, only "urgent" must get done NOW! "Important" allows for response time options and can be prioritized. However, it is often critical to let others know of your priority list or of changing priorities. Especially when the other is significant, and you have a question about what and how to prioritize, discern what tasks or results are essential for the other party.

Perfection — Actually, rigid perfectionism can block an ability to delegate. The perfectionist often has an inordinate need for control and a fear that others will not live up to his or her expectations. Remember, complaining that no one works to your standard may eventually evoke agreement and a self-fulfilling prophecy: "You're right, no one can do things like you. Go ahead and do it yourself!"

And perfectionist tendencies can induce paralysis — a fear of getting started as well as a fear of completion. The dysfunctional inner mantra: "If you don't try, you can't fail." And in a society where winning is everything, who wants to risk being a "loser." Time to attack this disease of procrastination.

A = Avoidance and Advance

Avoidance — Why do we start cleaning the living room when we should be working on that important report with a looming deadline? Here are several factors contributing to delay, dalliance and denial:

- 1) Fear of failure — not live up to expectations of significant others or of your own hypercritical standards.
- 2) Fear of success — what will others expect of you the next time; can you live up to your own benchmark?
- 3) Smoldering anger — you resent having to do the task; perhaps you believe the project was assigned without clear or sufficient instructions or was delegated unfairly.
- 4) Time disorientation — you convince yourself that there's no rush, you have plenty of time; another rationalization is that you do your best work at the eleventh hour. And even when the last minute does motivate the procrastinator, it rarely encourages his or her best effort.
- 5) Insufficient resources — sometimes there is a logical (as opposed to a psychological) reason for procrastination: you do not have the proper supplies or tools to successfully and/or safely meet the demand. It is time to express your frustration and concerns with your manager. However, if you are reluctant to take a stand, then avoidance issues may be at play.

Advance — The only folks who might be able to write a quality report before the clock strikes midnight are people who have been mentally rehearsing or writing the report in their head over a period of time. However, most people want to do quality work that also is original or displays some imagination, then you need to sleep on the job. That is, you need to hit that problem-solving wall, sleep on the issue and then bring a fresh set of eyes to the project — this problem solving process should be oft repeated to maximize the creative effect. Clearly, for this multi-step procedure you need to give yourself sufficient lead-time.

N = "No" and Negotiate" and Designated Nagger

"No" and Negotiate" (N & N) — In light of our 24/7, always on world, "N & N" is as vital as "R & R" (Rest & Recreation) for managing stress as well as organizing a schedule. And, there's an art to saying "No" and "Negotiating." Consider these steps below:

- 1) Be Decisive. When someone makes a request (and the person does not have demand power, e.g., disciplinary or firing authority) give a quick and clear "No" — not a slam the door "No." A more tactful initial reply might be, "Based on my existing schedule, I have a problem meeting your request as presented."
- 2) Clarify Your "No." Paraphrase the request; the other party needs to hear that you understand the importance of the request. Then state what you cannot do at this moment, while also sharing how you can be of assistance.

