

# Life Training - Online

The Source for Personal Development and Excellence Training



## The Now Habit

This week, Life Training Online is reviewing [\*\*\*The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play\*\*\*](#), by Niel Fiore, the eighth of fifty-two books in the [\*\*\*52 Personal Development Books in 52 Weeks\*\*\*](#) series.

Do you struggle with procrastination? Do you continually find yourself putting off what you know you should be doing because of your fear of failure or rejection? Does fear of success scare you into inaction? **The Now Habit** claims to "offer the first comprehensive strategy to overcome the causes of procrastination and to eliminate its deleterious effects."

Originally published in 1988, **The Now Habit** is considered to be "a gem" among the books on overcoming procrastination. This newly updated edition includes a new introduction as well as a section offering strategies to successfully deal with the challenging role [technology](#) plays in procrastination.

I've wanted to read this book for a while now; however since hearing of the revised edition (which came out last week) I didn't want to order the book until the new edition came out. This week, it's my pleasure to offer you a review of the new edition and discover if it really does live up to all the hype. Let's find out this week...

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## The Now Habit: Chapters 1 - 3

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### Why We Procrastinate

The first chapter of **The Now Habit** is dedicated to discovering why you procrastinate. Here are the six warning signs that indicate that you may suffer from procrastination:

1. You seem to have a never-ending source of obligations that you cannot meet.
2. You are unrealistic about time. You're always late or have no clear sense of a schedule, goals, etc.
3. If you do set goals and values, they are vague and not specific.
4. You are unfulfilled, frustrated, or depressed because of your lack of accomplishments, unmet goals and so on.
5. You are indecisive and afraid of making commitments for fear of making a mistake.
6. Your low self-esteem and lack of assertiveness hold you back from becoming productive.

If you can relate to most of these, according to Fiore, there's a good chance you suffer from chronic procrastination.

Fiore's viewpoint on why we procrastinate is quite different from most other books that I've read on the subject. Many books seem to express that the reason we procrastinate is because we are lazy or unmotivated. They state that our natural human tendency is to be unproductive, and it's only through overcoming our human weaknesses with sheer will, that we'll be able to become productive.

**The Now Habit** counters that it's not laziness, disorganization or any other character defect that is the cause of our procrastination; It is of the schooling that humans, by nature, desire to be productive — for even procrastinators have energy and motivation in some areas of their lives, be it sports, hobbies, reading etc.

Instead, Fiore explains that procrastination is "a neurotic form of self-defensive behavior". A desire to defend ones self worth. In other words we tend to procrastinate when we feel fear of failure, fear of success, fear of being imperfect, or fear of being overwhelmed due to supposed impossible expectations. These fears keep us from fully accepting who and where we are now. We end up being our worst critic — which eventually cripples us.

### **How We Procrastinate**

Even more important than knowing why we procrastinate, knowing how we procrastinate and the patterns we follow is essential for learning to replace them with the patterns of what Fiore calls a "producer".

The first step is to become aware of how you spend your time. For a week, simply observe your patterns of behavior. What are you doing when you're very productive? Contrast that with what you're doing when you are being completely unproductive. If you notice a time-management issue, then it's important that you first learn to get control of this before you can effectively deal with procrastination.

After you've been observing where you spend your time, you're now ready to discover how you're procrastinating. You do this through a "procrastination log".

For three days record your procrastination patterns. This includes:

1. The activity that you're avoiding,
2. your thoughts and feelings about it,
3. your justification for avoiding it,
4. what you did instead, and
5. how you felt after as a result

After doing this exercise you'll be able to notice what types of thoughts and feelings help you in achieving what it is that you want to accomplish and those which hinder you. This will aid you in targeting your self-talk that needs to change, which leads us to the next section...

## How to Talk to Yourself

The primary difference between this book and others on procrastination is easily summed up in this chapter. Overcoming procrastination is not a matter of simply kicking ourselves in the duff but rather changing how we talk to ourselves. The way that you talk to yourself projects the attitudes and beliefs which ultimately determine how you act. If you can overcome and replace negative internal dialog, you'll be able to see yourself for your true abilities — independent of anything or anyone else.

Here are five self-statements that will change you from procrastinator to producer:

▶ **Change “I have to” to “I choose to”**

Instead of the victim role that procrastinators take, producers realize that they have the power and choice to freely decide what it is that they allow themselves to do.

▶ **Change “I must finish” to “When can I start?”**

By overly focusing what they don't have — the finished result — procrastinators get easily discouraged and overwhelmed. Producers focus on the next actions. Those things that they can do right now, leaving any feelings of being overwhelmed or discouraged behind.

▶ **Change “This project is so big and important” to “I can take one small step”**

The bigger, more overwhelming the project the more procrastinators tend to... well...procrastinate. Producers again focus on the small step that they can take at this moment, which will help move the project forward in any way.

▶ **Change “I must be perfect” to “I can be perfectly human”**

Procrastinators never get their foot out the door because they constantly fear looking less than perfect. They procrastinate in hope of avoiding the pain of failure and criticism. Producers however, learn to accept and work with (instead of giving up to) their natural human limitations. This allows them to move forward despite lack of skill or knowledge in an area — learning what's needed along the way.

▶ **Change “I don't have time to play” to “I must take time to play”**

It's common knowledge in the corporate world that regular time dedicated to exercise and recreation leads to improved performance. By consistently scheduling time for breaks throughout the day and vacations throughout the year, you will increase your feelings of inner worth and respect. Plus you have something to look forward to in the near future — leaving the current tasks more bearable knowing you have a break on the horizons.

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## The Now Habit: Chapters 4 - 6

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### **Guilt Free Play, Quality Work**

One interesting note that Fiore makes in this chapter is that workaholics and procrastinators share many of the same problems. For example, they both see themselves as overburdened with incomplete work. They both see human beings as inherently lazy, requiring pressure to get going. And both procrastinators and workaholics are either working or feeling guilty about not working.

Although they both go about it different ways, they both see themselves as putting their lives on hold with a hope in the future that they'll be able to organize themselves to really enjoy life. The solution to this is scheduling guilt-free play by planning your weekly recreation.

What regularly scheduled times of guilt-free play does is give you a fresh outlook on work. It also leads to higher levels of quality work because — post play — you're more willing to settle down into short periods of quality work. All of this can be achieved using [the Unschedule](#).

### **Overcoming Blocks to Action**

You might have experienced pain from others criticism of you for doing less than perfect work or because you couldn't do something that many others found easy. If it made a big enough impact on you, you may tend to avoid that kind of work or activity. Until you can effectively deal with that response, that phobia will always be a stumbling block to you taking action.

Fiore says that, "Procrastination,...is a phobic response to work that is associated

with worry, struggle, failure, and anxiety.” The anxieties and worry that ultimately block you are: The fear of being overwhelmed, the fear of failure, and the fear of not finishing. Until you can learn to cope with those fears, procrastination will be a difficult habit to break. Here are three “tools” that Fiore offers that help you to overcome those fears:

1. **3-D Thinking and the Reverse Calendar**

Both of these are tools that I’ve come across in many time management resources. 3-D thinking is essentially taking a birds-eye view of your project in order to divide it into small, manageable parts and the reverse calendar is nothing but backplanning — starting from the end goal and working your way forward to the present time to discover what action to take next.

2. **The Work of Worrying**

When we worry many, of us add undue stress in our lives. We waste energy on the worrying process and at the end nothing productive comes out of it. The Work of Worrying tool is basically using your worries in a productive way. Step back and look at what you’re worrying about and instead of focusing on the problem, discover the possible solutions through questioning. What are my alternatives? What can I do now to lessen the probability of this dreaded event? and, Is there anything that I can do now to increase my chances of achieving my goal? are some of the questions you can ask yourself.

3. **Persistent Starting**

If you’ve used the previous two tools to get started, you may now have to overcome your fear of not finishing. You can do this through persistent starting. All large tasks can be completed with a series of starts. Since you’ve broken down the large project with 3-D Thinking and the Reverse Calendar, you now just need to focus on each task as a new start. If your fears of finishing emerge, just ask yourself, “When can I start?”

### **The Unschedule**

I found this to be the gem of the entire book so far. Although not very complicated to do, it is a genius idea that I will be implementing in my life.

We all have to accept the fact that we can’t always be playing. There will come a time when we have to get to work. Escaping work by procrastination might lead to

temporary relief but, it will only eventually increase your anxiety. "Only work will diminish your anxiety," Fiore says. And what better way of learning to work than through the Unschedule. It basically uses reverse psychology to get you to find pleasure in getting to work.

Here's how you can implement the Unschedule:

1. Take out your calendar and schedule only:

- previously committed times such as meetings, meals and sleep
- free time, recreation, pleasure reading
- socializing with friends and family
- health activities such as working out, playing tennis etc.
- routine events such as commuting to/from work, classes, doctors appointments etc.

By scheduling all the non-work activities that you have you overcome the false notion that you have twenty-four hours a day to work on your projects. It also allows for the planning of guilt-free play. Make sure that you don't schedule any project activities at this time!

2. Find one (and only one) empty spot on your first day and work for a half hour on your project. *When you have finished at least a half hour* you then write that block of time down on your schedule.

3. Take credit only for periods of work where you've spent at least 30 min. of uninterrupted work.

4. Reward yourself with a break or change to a more enjoyable task after each period you've worked.

5. Keep track of the number of hours you work each day and each week.

6. Always leave at least one full day a week for recreation and any small chores you want to work on.

7. Before deciding to take part in a recreational activity or social commitment, take time out for just 30 min of work on your project.

Once you feel comfortable playing around with the Unschedule, focus on increasing the number of productive 30 min (or more) activities, but remember to always leave plenty of time for guilt-free play. This way you can continually monitor and



increase your productivity.

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## The Now Habit: Chapters 7 - 9

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### **Working in the Flow State**

This chapter's primary focus is to introduce to the reader what we today commonly call "The Zone" or "Flow State", and how you can create this state at will.

The flow state is when we are able to be completely absorbed in a challenging task, all the while maintaining an exceptionally calm state of mind. Characteristics of this state include focused energy, time expansion, ease at solving problems and enhanced concentration. Peak performers in music, sports, medicine, and business have all experienced this. In **The Now Habit** Fiore describes specific techniques one can follow to bring about this state.

The key lies in being able to temporarily suspend the critical and logical functions of your brain (generally characterized as the the left hemisphere's function) and allow the creative functions (the right hemisphere) to come to the forefront of your conscious thoughts. Then afterwards, you can allow the left side to organize and piece them together into your desired outcome.

A good example of this is with writing. For instance, you would simply begin to write down the thoughts that come to your head, not judging them or trying to organize them in any logical order. For example, you might have begun your document with what you'll eventually end up using as the conclusion. Just let the ideas flow. This is how the creative, flow state works and can be applied to many areas of your personal and business life.

### **Fine Tuning Your Progress**

Fiore admits that **The Now Habit** and its techniques aren't a one size fits all approach. You will face setbacks and obstacles along the way. As you notice what works for you and what doesn't, you can take the concepts that are contained in this book and tailor fit them to your needs.

### **The Procrastinator in Your Life**

In his final chapter, Fiore offers some suggestions on how to work with, live with, and relate to people who tend to procrastinate. Unless you have a firm grasp of [the essential causes and patterns of why people procrastinate](#), you may unknowingly reinforce those same behaviors in those that you manage, love, and counsel.

Remember that the three main reasons that people procrastinate are: they feel like a victim, they're overwhelmed, or they fear failure.

For example, if you manage people with an iron fist — forcing people to comply — you are perpetuating their need to procrastinate (they feel like a victim). Instead give them an opportunity to decide for themselves — thereby making a commitment rather than a compliance — how they are going to finish their tasks by a certain deadline.

If it's a child that you're wanting to finish cutting the lawn and trimming the bushes before the end of the week, you again may be furthering their need to procrastinate because they are feeling overwhelmed. In this case, help them to focus on starting instead of finishing, breaking down the larger task into smaller subtasks per day.

Your purpose is to first understand what is the cause of their procrastination. Then find an effective solution using the same methods you would use to overcome procrastination yourself.

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## The Now Habit: Final Thoughts

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Reviewing **The Now Habit** this week has been educational in helping me understand why I sometimes procrastinate. Although I don't think Fiore's reasons for procrastination always hold true (sometimes I really do just feel like slacking off), for the most part I do think that people will procrastinate because they feel like a victim, feel overwhelmed, or fear failure (or success).

As I mentioned in Wednesday's post, the Unschedule was for me the gem of the entire book. Since Wednesday, I've experimented with incorporating it into my own daily and weekly planning routine and with a little more tweaking I think it will find a permanent place. And I now have an accurate way of determining just how much effective and productive work I've accomplished on a daily and weekly basis, which I can then use as a benchmark for further improvements.

If you use procrastination as a tool to find temporary relief from fear or stress, you may want to check out **The Now Habit**. Even though this book has been written around twenty years ago, Neil Fiore's ideas are surprisingly unique and relevant. Definitely worth buying!

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