

order. balance. beauty.

Still flaking out? Start shaping up.

How to stop unreliable behavior and procrastination

Marin Rose

“I won’t think about that today,” infamously declared Scarlett O’Hara, “I’ll think about that tomorrow.”

More than one of my clients has jokingly referred to themselves as “Scarlett” for the very reason, that they prefer to put things off rather than handle them now. They make light of their tendency to procrastinate, even knowing that the ramifications of such behavior affect not just themselves but those around them.

According to Carlin Flora’s 2007 Psychology Today article, which also makes reference to the “Gone with the Wind” quote, procrastination is “the root of flakiness.” Like my clients who are self-proclaimed procrastinators, American society tends to make light of flakiness despite its potentially disastrous effects. If you’re feeling the burn, it’s time to consider making a change.

It’s easy for Type-A personalities to hit a point of impatience with more spontaneous types because being organized comes naturally to us. But the solutions we rely upon to ensure that we’re prompt and prepared — lists, calendars and other strictly linear tools — won’t work for our flaky counterparts. As a professional organizer who works largely with this type of individual, I’ve had to develop alternative methods. So for the “Scarletts” who are tired of the chaos and no longer wish to be known as the “flaky” one, here are a few key tips for making a change.

Own up

The first step in tackling the problem is admitting that it is a problem, as opposed to just a quirky, charming aspect of your personality. Humor and spontaneity is attractive but chronic disorganization gets old fast. Focus on the benefits of changing your habits, which may include saving time and money, reducing stress, gaining professional respect and improving personal relationships.

Get honest

Part of owning up is being brutally honest with yourself about why you’re avoiding a task. Often it’s not simple laziness but an underlying fear or anxiety that keeps us from making that call or starting that project. If you can identify exactly what’s holding you back, there’s a good chance you can override those emotions. The resulting satisfaction is powerful and can lead to longer-term change.

Take a new view

It’s important, too, to take a fresh perspective on your behavior. Instead of making excuses for yourself, try seeing it the way others might.

For example, chronic tardiness is a common problem that’s easily addressed if you make it a priority. Do you constantly find yourself blaming traffic for your lateness? Your friends and colleagues should forgive the occasional delay but if they’re regularly kept waiting, they’ll resent it and rightly so. The message you are sending is that your needs and your time are more important to you than their needs or their time. Being late all the time is ultimately the result of, not disorganization, but selfishness.

Are you unrealistic about how long it takes to prepare to leave the house? Do you underestimate driving time? Start implementing better planning by timing out exactly how long things will take you, building in a few minutes buffer.

Are you always trying to fit in one last task on your way to the appointment? While you’re trying to be productive, you are actually being selfish. Think of those who are waiting for you and put them first.

Start small

Forming new habits takes time so start small, celebrate the early achievements and then gradually take on more. Make your bed every morning as soon as you get up. Create a single, comprehensive to-do list and tackle the easiest items first. Rather than trying to become a super-achiever overnight, set short work sessions for yourself. Set aside just two minutes to make the phone call you’ve been putting off or 10 minutes to fold the laundry piled on your bed.

Get help

Recruiting a friend for moral support can help kick start a new habit. Ask your sister or neighbor to join you while you run this week’s errands. Having a partner will keep you focused and make your chores more pleasant. If you’re uncomfortable asking a friend or family member, a professional organizer is a neutral alternative.

It takes all types in this world. Certainly order and reliability aren’t everything but they are necessary, to a degree, in order to be a successful person in today’s hectic society. If you start by being considerate, being productive is just a step away, along with a bit more peace in your daily life.

Column suggestions for Marin? Send topic requests to info@libraorganizing.com



Marin Rose owns *Libra Organizing*, an Augusta-based organizing, decorating and home staging business. Marin serves clients throughout the CSRA, as well as in her hometown of Washington, D.C., New York and beyond. For more information, including notices of free seminars and community events, visit libraorganizing.com.