

Episode 6 – Procrastination

John: We want to welcome you to Episode 6 of MindSolvers, where, if we're lucky, we might, just maybe, get around to discussing today's confusing and universal topic of ... procrastination!

Verl: John, are you sure? I don't know... maybe if we wait until next episode?

John: Actually, Verl, this topic is a perfect next-step segue from what we've been discussing over the last couple of episodes, and it's the very reason we ended up our last episode asking for the subconscious to help in preparing us for today's discussion.

Verl: Exactly, and podcast listeners, as you probably suspect, we don't just sit down and record our conversation about a topic (as natural as it may sound). It takes some planning, discussion, reflection, and editing. And because we are practicing social distancing because of COVID-19 restrictions, we're in our own homes, working separately, together, if that makes any sense. Anyway, as part of all that, I became aware that I was procrastinating my portion of the process, so we weren't making progress. And I didn't know why. Well, it occurred to me that there might be something deeper in my own subconscious that was holding me back. To make a very long story shorter, John brought out the idea of the mental firewall and its connection to the subconscious, which was clearly a good idea for the last episode. And since it seems most people have some problem with procrastination, we decided to look specifically at its connection to the subconscious.

John: We did, because procrastination is more about emotions, instead of productivity. When we procrastinate, we're not only aware that we're avoiding the job in question, but also that doing it is a bad idea! And yet, we do it anyway!

Verl: Yeah! As a serial procrastinator, I really wanted to find out if there was something in my early childhood that could have led to this all these years. So John, remotely, using videoconferencing, took me on a session, very similar to the ones we've had in every episode of this podcast. What I learned was very surprising yet made perfect sense once my subconscious showed it to me. But I'll describe more about that later in this podcast. First, I think it's worthwhile to point out some of the reasons for procrastination.

John: Absolutely! Procrastination has been linked to a number of negative symptoms of stress; remember the list? Depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, guilt, but can also be linked to the fear of failure, excessive perfectionism, lack of focus, instruction uncertainty, distractions... the list goes on and on. So the subconscious can not only help us discover why we do it but also help us find ways around it and ultimately overcome it.

Verl: And I certainly got some clarity about it in my case.

John: It usually happens when we fear, or dread, or have anxiety about whatever the job is. To get rid of this negative feeling, we procrastinate — we open up a video game or Pinterest or anything else instead of what we're supposed to be doing. That seems to make us feel better, at least temporarily, but unfortunately, reality comes back to bite us in the end.

Verl: Exactly. It's really a temporary reprieve that ends up giving us more stress in the end. So that's a lot of stress for a lot of people.

John: In fact, statistics indicate that at least 95% of people (just about every one of us), is currently procrastinating something.

Verl: Yep, in working on this episode, I made a list of several projects that I've been avoiding. And if those 95% are like me, they often chalk it up to laziness, or some personal fault of character, which of course adds more guilt—along with the stress.

John: Well, if you think about it, procrastination is an active process – you choose to do something else instead of the job or assignment that you know you should be doing. Laziness, on the other hand, suggests apathy, inactivity, and an unwillingness to act. Procrastination usually involves ignoring an unpleasant, but likely more important task, in favor of one that is more enjoyable or easier. **I think our listeners would be interested to know that today’s episode was originally planned for the last episode, but it was put off. As I started to record this, it dawned on me that we had actually done it to ourselves!**

Verl: Well, not to nitpick, but I see a difference between what most people think of as procrastination. You remember, I had some concerns about jumping into the topic of procrastination until we helped our listeners have a deeper understanding of the subconscious, and after discussing it, we decided to do another episode on the subconscious. I wouldn’t call that procrastination, as we’re talking about it today—more of part of the ongoing process of creativity.

John: Yeah, I know, but I thought it was hilarious that we'd literally postponed the very episode where we were going to talk about procrastination!

Verl: Oh, I get the irony. But for me procrastination means I often totally avoid even looking at something, or give up immediately. If I actually start the task, even a little, usually I get past that block and can get something done.

John: Ok, back on topic, once we understand the reasons why we procrastinate, then we can begin to tackle it. For instance, do we avoid a particular job because we find it boring or unpleasant? If so, we can take steps to get it out of the way quickly, so that we can focus on the aspects of the job that we find more enjoyable.

Verl: I can relate to that.

John: Poor organization can also lead to procrastination. Organized people successfully overcome it because they use prioritized To-Do Lists and create effective schedules. These tools help to organize tasks by priority and by making a target date or a deadline.

Verl: Well, you know, I make to do lists, and when I follow them it works great. Unless I procrastinate making them! Kind of related to that, I put off tasks that have deadlines longer than I should—unlike people who jump on a task and finish it right away, like my wife—but I generally get them done by the deadline, which I can live with—although it’s not ideal. Could have more to do with personal style or approach to things. But John, you’re a Project Manager by your profession, right? Didn’t you ever have this problem?

John: Oh, you bet, even if you get paid to organize huge projects, you can still feel overwhelmed by certain aspects of the project. Perhaps you have doubts about your ability and are worried about failing, so you put it off and seek whatever comfort there is in doing other work that you know that you're capable of completing, and you either delegate it to someone else or you eventually face your fears and just do it.

Verl: I can relate to fears of failure. But sometimes even fears of success, I suspect.

John: Yes, some people fear success as much as failure. Deep down, they believe that success will lead to them being swamped with requests to take on even more tasks.

Verl: I get that, but do you think success could also threaten the Critical Conscious—that firewall of the mind—which tends to maintain the status quo—as being a procrastinator, and being not all that successful?

John: Oh, yes, absolutely! Remember, it’s the part that makes those very judgement calls.

Verl: You also mentioned perfectionists. Seems like that could also lead to this problem.

John: Surprisingly, perfectionists are often procrastinators, too. More often than not, they'd rather avoid doing a task that they don't feel they have the skills to do, than to do it imperfectly.

Verl: Is that pretty much the list of what causes us to procrastinate?

John: You'd think so, but still another major cause of procrastination is poor decision-making, or maybe a lack of trust in our own decision-making process. If you can't decide what to do, you'll likely put off taking action in case you do the wrong thing.

Whichever the type, there are big costs to procrastination: It's internally troubling, potentially leading to problems such as insomnia, the immune system, gastrointestinal disturbances, and it erodes personal relationships and teamwork in the workplace.

Verl: Yes, and that's why I wanted to dig deeper into why I tend to do it. I actually felt I was sabotaging the work we're doing together. In fact, the worst procrastination I have is towards things or projects which are not immediately required, but which could help me or other people in our lives—business ideas that take some effort but little expense and could pay off a lot, household and garden projects which I get personal satisfaction from but seem never to really happen, keeping my space tidy and organized, contacting people and serving them as I should. These are things that really keep me from excelling in my life.

John: Really! I had no idea.

Verl: Yep. So—there must be a way to overcome it or we wouldn't be here, right?

John: Right! First, we need to get to the root cause, to understand and identify what we're trying to do and what's holding us back and with the subconscious' help, we can change our way of thinking about it...we can reframe it. BTW, this can also be applied to just about any of the negative symptoms of stress that we've mentioned on these episodes, not just procrastination.

Verl: Sounds reasonable, but what does it mean to reframe it?

John: It's a specific way of working with the subconscious to discover the “secondary gain” of a consciously undesirable behavior and to induce an agreeable, positive change in that behavior.

Verl: Can you explain this “secondary gain.”

John: Well, we have to start off with the assumption that this unwelcome pattern of behavior is the most appropriate response the subconscious has for the particular situation and find out the intended benefit behind it...the “secondary gain.” Once we reach the understanding between the conscious and the subconscious, we negotiate positive alternatives that will satisfy that original intention and then ask the subconscious if it will be willing to use one of them that the conscious feels is socially acceptable, and be responsible for making it stick. And that's essentially how our session the other day went...do you feel like you can describe the experience to our listeners?

Verl: Well, the experience was much different than I expected. Ever since we started talking about procrastination—which I brought up, BTW—I've had a sense that there was something deeper in me that kept me putting off things that could be beneficial in my life and the lives of those I am serving or working with, and I wanted to find that out. The relaxation narrative you used was very good. The image of descending steps to reach a deeper level of relaxation that we had used years ago was very effective, and in my mind combining that to go down a cliff to the ocean worked well, The images of stretching up and interacting with different parts of nature was new, and transforming into various animals and even the ocean was interesting enough to keep my conscious mind occupied and let the subconscious bring things forward.

John: Good, thank you, Verl. I'll do my best to incorporate those sensations in today's relaxation session.

Verl: Yes it was helpful. I can't describe everything I experienced—because it turned out to be intensely personal—but as my conscious mind was experiencing the images of floating in or

being the ocean and enjoying the colors and sea life there, the subconscious was bringing up images as you suggested, starting at that time we talked about in the last episode before I was five years old. And quickly brought up intense emotion, even before those experiences were brought to my memory. From your promptings, a series of events were brought forward clearly from my subconscious, which each had associated emotions, and which seemed all disconnected, and it was unclear how they were connected. You even suggested that my subconscious make a connection among them and nothing came out for a while—and you even started moving on to another prompting. Then it suddenly all came together and hit me. It had to do with the feeling of being helpless and not being able to control certain events that had happened in those early years, and feeling like a cluttered or messy person, or mostly inadequate, as a result. The other events later in my life that were presented to me simply reinforced that early decision about myself.

John: So since you've had a little time to think about our session the other day, have you gained any insights that can help you understand what triggers your procrastination?

Verl: As a matter of fact, I have. It hit me that those early experiences had made me think of myself as somewhat helpless and inadequate, unable to cope with what had happened to me, even burying those feelings that were associated with the events, and over the years, although I've been very successful in many areas of my life, times of failure or stress will bring out those helpless feelings. And looking back at that week when I was procrastinating my work on our podcast, and other things I needed to be doing, I recognized that I was going through a lot of stress that week.

John: And you now believe the culmination of all these things led to the procrastination?

Verl: Yes, the things we're going through with the pandemic, stress of teaching my university classes online, for the first time, and a medical emergency a family member had, kind of piled up. Mind you, over the years I've learned to cope with those kinds of things, but once in a while it builds up and I think my Critical Conscious keeps reinforcing that early self-image of helplessness, and I react by putting off things once again.

John: And do you feel that the subconscious will now be able to help you with alternative ways of coping since our session together?

Verl: Yes, in fact it already has. Over a couple of days, the experience was on mind, and I think my subconscious was working on it in the background, because I felt more relaxed, and I been able to attack things that I was feeling overwhelmed by before. I can't help but think, John, that you may have suggested some things to help my subconscious that I don't even recall consciously.

John: I believe it's much more effective whenever the conscious can be off somewhere so amazing that it's not involved beyond knowing the initial intention behind the behavior. Creating the new alternative ways of coping I leave up to the subconscious and let it be responsible for generating those new ways and then let the conscious be surprised when it all comes together successfully.

Verl: So, John, as planned, you're going to take us on another relation experience, that I think can be very pleasant and helpful to our podcast listeners. I do want to point out something, however. In the session that you took with me, there was a point when you called my subconscious forward to discuss my habit of procrastination, that there was a sudden, surprising surge of emotion that surfaced. In fact, it was so unexpected and strong that I began weeping. If you hadn't been there to help me moderate that feeling, it might not have been a pleasant experience. As it was, it was intense, but very enlightening, and it was good to have your help.

So to our podcast listeners I want to give the caution I always give before these sessions. Before you listen to John's narrative, be sure you're in a place where you can close your eyes, sitting or lying down in a comfortable position. Another thing—I mentioned that John's session with me brought out some unexpected emotions. In these podcast sessions, John deals with relaxation only, so you can expect a very pleasant, soothing experience. But if you feel that there are deeper issues, like ones I suspected I had, you can set up a chat with John, at our website, Mindsolvers.com, where you can discuss having a session that digs a little deeper.

John: And now, once again, we're going to take advantage of the word or phrase that we have been using to relax over the past two episodes. And if you haven't already, let your eyes gently close as you take in a few deep, cleansing breaths and say the word or phrase to yourself or speak it aloud. As you do, you already begin to feel a calming, soothing sense of relaxation slowly, gradually sweeping over your entire body, physically, while at the same time you find your mind emptying itself of all worldly cares, leaving a pure void of thoughts and ideas.

As the word or phrase is repeated a second time, the now emptied mind begins to fill with beautifully subtle memories of past scenes and visions of this special place at the warm, sunny beach as you start to re-experience the associated feelings and sensations, even now.

And as you say or think the word or phrase a third time, you find yourself actually there once again, experiencing the cool ocean breeze against your sunbaked skin and breath into your nostrils the salty, briny aroma from off the surface of the blue, green sea and hear the sounds of the ocean waves running onto the shore and splashing against the rocks. And you feel so deeply relaxed, mentally and physically.

Before you even begin to realize it happening, you find your body and limbs gradually stretching up, up, up into the sky towering over the miniaturized beach below you, high above the tallest of the surrounding peaks. You can hear the sounds of squawking sea birds and see them flying effortlessly around you at almost your chest height. You reach your hand out slowly in front of you in a cupping shape and find that one of those noisy birds has landed there, nestling in the palm of your hand...and you suddenly and unexpectedly become the bird and find yourself floating freely on the same air streams as the other birds like you.

You flap your powerful wings and climb higher and higher into the sky, far above the rest. You fold your wings tightly against your body and begin a free fall toward the distant blue ocean below you. Faster and faster you fall...the sensation of speed you experience is beyond anything you've ever felt before...and just above the surface of the water, you unfold your powerful wings and swoop upward, soaring back into the sky, higher and higher until you reach the pinnacle of your flight. And once again, tucking your wings tightly against your body, begin falling back toward the vast blue ocean beneath. Except this time, you aim directly for the water anticipating as your beak touches the ocean's surface that yet another transformation will occur as you find yourself plunging deep, deep down into the ocean's depths and find that you have become a sleek, beautiful fish probing the darkness of the cold ocean floor. The experience is incredible and so deeply relaxing. Momentarily, a low, vibrating sensation overshadows you as you completely lose all awareness of being a solid form and you realize that you have become the very ocean itself, vast, fluid, all encompassing! And you reach the very depths of relaxation. Allow yourself to enjoy this very unique experience fully and completely and for as long as you desire, which may feel to you like hours or days or even longer just taking in all the incredible sensations of being the vast body of water we call the ocean, but to the outside world only moments have passed. And whenever you feel you're ready to come back to the here and now,

I'd like to suggest that the subconscious help you make one last transformation to find yourself once again sun bathing on the warm, sandy beach.

Verl: And just as you have enjoyed these sensations, we want you to return to your conscious state feeling alert and refreshed, and to find joy in something every day until you join us in the next episode of MindSolvers. We wish you a gift of energy and confidence in taking on all your responsibilities, and the realization that you will can help from your subconscious mind to solve issues facing you, and finding happiness and pleasure in the positive things in your life.

John: And only when you're ready, simply open your eyes...