

59. why we procrastinate and how to stop

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Welcome to coaching for Latina leaders, the only podcast dedicated to the advancement of Latinas at every level of life with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Latina with over 20 years of leadership experience, Harvard grad physician, and mother of two.

Hey, cuties Welcome back. We are talking about procrastination today. The reason why is because we all do it. In fact, a few weeks ago, I caught myself procrastinating. And the funny thing is, you know, I consider myself to be a very committed and disciplined person, I can make a to-do list and go down and knock everything off and celebrate myself for being very productive. And a few weeks ago, I noticed that on my to-do list, there was an action item, which was updating my LinkedIn profile. And at the end of every day, I had somehow not had enough time to do it. And so it kept getting moved to the following day. And finally, at the end of the week, I looked back and said, Hmm, interesting. Why didn't I get, why didn't I get to this, there's something else going on here. Clearly, I'm procrastinating. So what am I avoiding? And what I realized was that attached to updating my LinkedIn profile, is this thought of me being more present on LinkedIn, I want to have more of a virtual presence there. And I haven't done it before. So I feel like there's a lot to learn when I get on there. And that those thoughts were causing me to feel subconsciously pretty overwhelmed. And so to avoid feeling of overwhelm, I just kept procrastinating and avoiding creating my link like going and updating my LinkedIn profile.

And that is an example of why we procrastinate because we see that our brains are wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain at all costs. seeking pleasure and having pleasurable experiences releases dopamine in our brains, and that feels really good in our bodies. But the idea of anything that can bring pain causes more of a restrictive feeling in our body or a negative somatic response. A somatic response is just what happens to your body when you have a thought.

So I want you to think right now, if something negative when you feel frustrated or humiliated or bored, how does that feel in your body? For me, it feels really restrictive or constructive. And this is an evolutionary adaptation. You know, it's the reason why a lot of us, you know, delay gratification or find it difficult to delay gratification. We don't want to delay gratification, because that's not very pleasurable. And it's also the reason why we procrastinate on doing the things we want to do, including achieving our goals. Now setting a goal that's akin to seeking pleasure, because when we set a goal, we're using that part of our brain that releases dopamine. So it feels really good to set a goal feels motivating and exciting for most people. But doing the work to achieve the goal that can feel really uncomfortable. And that discomfort is similar to pain, which is why our brain does everything it can to avoid it, including procrastination.

But here's the thing. When we're procrastinating, we're not just avoiding taking an action. On a much deeper level, what we're actually avoiding is the feeling associated with the action. So for example, in the example that I gave you, I was avoiding feeling overwhelmed. That's what I was actually avoiding. I

was avoiding feeling overwhelmed. Because for me when I'm going to do something new, and I'm not exactly sure how to do it. My you know, one of my pattern habits, my unintentional thoughts is to start thinking that I don't know what to do. And then I start feeling overwhelmed. And that feeling of overwhelm doesn't feel good, it doesn't feel pleasurable, so I do whatever I can to avoid it. And usually, when we're avoiding these things, they're super subconscious. We're not totally aware of the feeling that we're avoiding some other common feelings that we avoid when we procrastinate or feel frustrated, feeling disappointed, feeling bored, feeling humiliated, feeling afraid. So I want you to take a second right now. And I want you to think for yourself. What are the feelings that you are avoiding when you procrastinate? I know I have a client who hates feeling bored. So she avoids a lot of tedious tasks and then leaves them to the last minute and she procrastinates on them a lot. What is it for you?

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So now that you know that feeling for you what it is that you're avoiding, the next thing is that when we start procrastinating, we tend to take the same habitual actions. Humans are, you know, species of habit. And we tend to take habitual actions when we procrastinate, it means we do pretty much the same sets of things when we're going to avoid a task. So maybe like me, for example, when I want to avoid something, I'll start an entirely new task. Like, I'll go and just dive into my emails or start a new project or look at what's next on my to-do list. And I'll make an excuse that that's just more important, or that'll just be really quick. I'll just get it done really quick.

Maybe for you, you're someone that cleans your entire house, you know, you go clean your bathroom, and then you go clean your kitchen when you want to avoid something. Or maybe you're someone that goes in you go to the kitchen, you go into the pantry, and you get a snack when you want to avoid or you start scrolling through social media. What is it that you do I want you to take a second to think about it right now? What do you do when you procrastinate? And the thing is this that we have two types of procrastination, okay, we have functional procrastination, that kind of feels good. And it's kind of like us trying to be really sneaky to ourselves and say, it can't be bad because I'm being productive. For me, for example, that's when I go to my emails or start a new project. For you could be when you clean your entire house, you know, when you're procrastinating, you clean your entire house. That's functional procrastination. Or you can have non-functioning procrastination, like a habit that actually doesn't serve you. And it's sort of this negative. You're not just avoiding accomplishing something. You're also going and snacking on something that's unhealthy that's going to make you feel bad about yourself later. Or you're scrolling through social media.

And now you're comparing yourself to all these people on social media, which is going to make you feel bad about yourself later. So what is it that you do when you procrastinate? If you're a functional procrastinator like me, you are still procrastinating, I have to remind myself of that all the time. Just because it feels good. Just because it feels productive doesn't mean I'm not procrastinating. So next time you catch yourself procrastinating because now you know the feeling that you avoid. And now you know what you tend to do. Next time you catch yourself procrastinating, I'm going to give you a few things that you can do.

Number one, be honest with yourself. If you're catching yourself procrastinating, have that level of awareness and just say it out loud. Okay? I'm doing these emails because I'm avoiding that task, or am

cleaning this bathroom because I'm avoiding that task. And then you want to ask yourself, What am I actually avoiding? It's not the task. So you ask yourself, What feeling am I avoiding? That is going to give you so much awareness. What feeling Am I avoiding?

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And then be honest with yourself, you can choose to keep procrastinating you can choose to keep cleaning the bathroom and then go to the kitchen. I mean you only have certain a number of bathrooms in your house or a certain number of kitchens, right? You can't procrastinate forever. So you can be honest with yourself, you can say, Okay, I'm just going to finish on my emails. And then when I'm done, I'm going to go back to this task, I'm going to clean my whole house and then go back to my task. Sometimes when you create that level of awareness, and you're honest with yourself, you realize that actually, okay, I don't actually want to clean these bathrooms right now, I just want to finish my task once you're able to create that level of awareness. Or you can say I can keep procrastinating or I can be in integrity with myself and just start the task and do it anyway. Okay. And then something else you might want to consider is if there's anything that you can do to alleviate those fears, that you have those negative emotions that are coming up for you. For me, for example, when I think about overwhelm, as soon as I brought awareness to what I was avoiding, which was overwhelmed, I just broke it up in chunks. I said, Okay, so I'm avoiding feeling overwhelmed. What can I do to alleviate some of that overwhelm, I can break it up in chunks, I can start reading this XYZ, I can do this just today and do this tomorrow. So see if there's anything you can do to alleviate that feeling.

And the other thing you might want to do is you might want to remind yourself that all of this is difficult now, although you're avoiding this because there's pain associated with it now, the pleasure of how it would feel when you finish is what you want to focus on. I do that a lot when I'm avoiding something. When I'm training for a half marathon for example, and I don't want to get up to train I remind myself how good I'm going to feel when I PR when I do another personal record. You know, when I run really fast right choose another goal. I remind myself of how good that will feel and then I use that emotion to drive me forward.

The last thing I will remind you is one of the most important things one of the most important skills that we can cultivate with anything but especially with procrastinating is creating space for that feeling to be there. Yes, I'm going to feel overwhelmed, and I'm going to create space to feel overwhelmed I'm gonna give myself grace. And I'm just going to take my time and love myself along the way. That's a huge one for me, especially with you know how much self-compassion I've been practicing. And that's something I want to offer to you. The most important thing you can always do is create space for that discomfort, those feelings that are coming up for you that don't feel good. Create space, which means allowing them to be there. Give yourself some grace and love yourself along the way.

Alright, so let's review. So we procrastinate because the human brain is wired to seek pleasure and avoid pain. And actually taking the action to achieve the goal doesn't feel pleasurable, it can feel painful, which is why we procrastinate we avoid, what we're actually avoiding isn't the action itself. It's the thoughts and feelings associated with the action. It's for me, for example, feeling overwhelmed for you might be feeling bored or disappointed, okay? And when you know that when you do that you take consistent habitual actions or patterns. And when you take those actions next and mutate them, you

can be onto yourself and say, Okay, I'm avoiding something, and ask yourself, not just what am I avoiding, but what feeling Am I avoiding? And then beyond to yourself and be honest, you can keep procrastinating or you can choose to be integrity with yourself and achieve your goal.

Alright, cutties, I hope this was helpful. Hasta la proxima. Adios!

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Hey, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to check out my free Ultimate Guide to stop people-pleasing, where I teach you a simple five-step process to stop saying yes. When you really want to say No, you'll be so glad that you did. There's a link to the guide in the show notes. I'll see you next time.