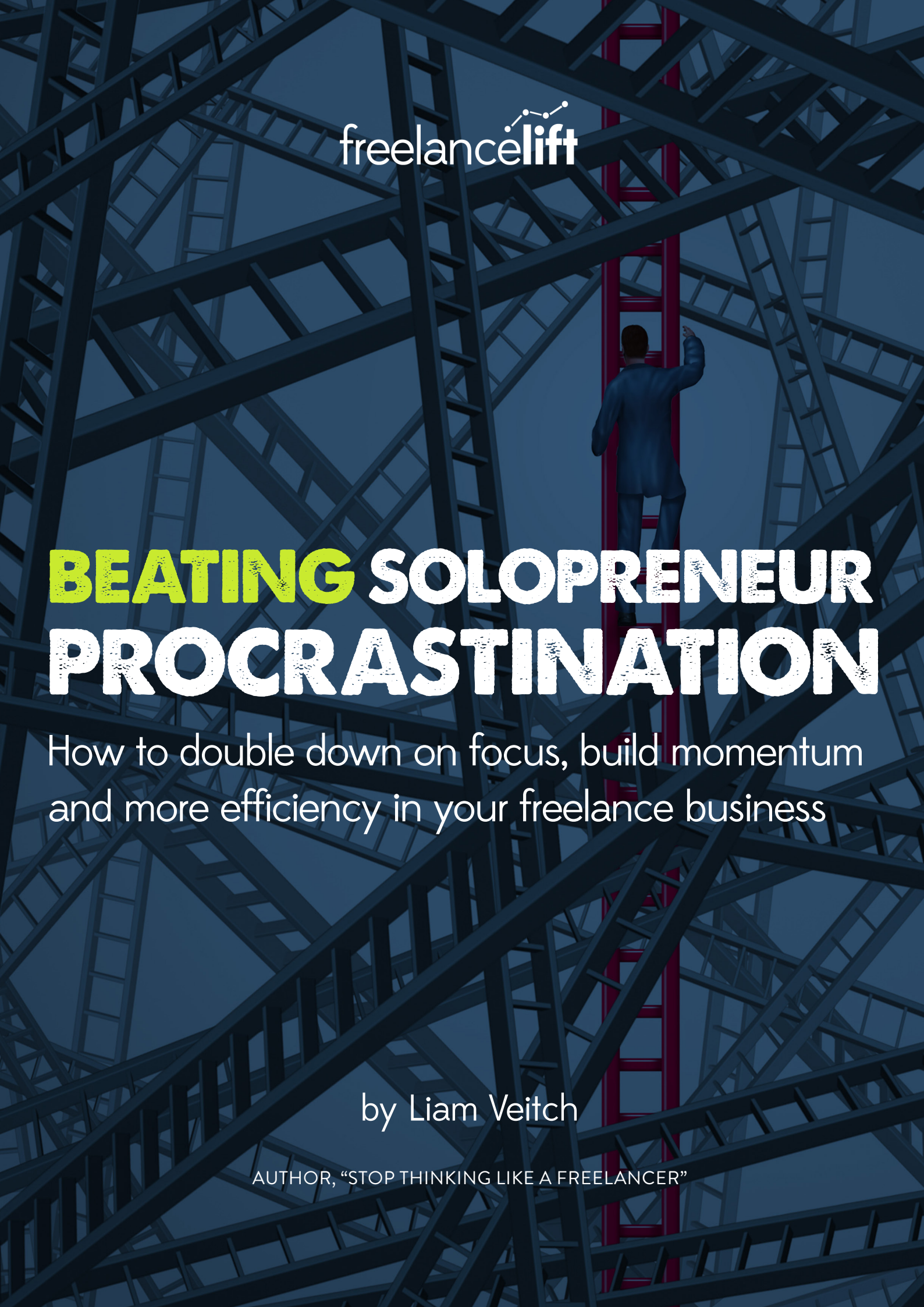




freelancelift



BEATING SOLOPRENEUR PROCRASTINATION

How to double down on focus, build momentum
and more efficiency in your freelance business

by Liam Veitch

AUTHOR, "STOP THINKING LIKE A FREELANCER"



About the author

I've grown my freelance business into something I am truly proud of, yet I know the feeling of battling as a freelancer all-to-well. Following an initial failure I tried again with a renewed mindset and I teach everything I know at freancelift.com.

It took me one failure at the freelance game and a 2 year sentence as a zombie-herd employee at a corporate to figure it out, now I want to give you the benefit of my experience as well as inviting you into the world of the people who have been there and broken the freelance boundaries themselves.

One of the most frustrating things about being a one-person business sometimes is a lack of progression. Maybe you're stuck on a plateau or feel as though you're just treading water. In this short book I wanted to lay out how to double down on focus, build momentum and efficiency by leveraging processes and systems in your freelance business. In doing so I hope to help you break through any plateau.

Whether you know it or not, you're a creature of habit. From finding new clients, to paying your bills, to managing clients you have a process. An ordered set of actions, which get you from A to B for any given task.

The problem is, we rarely appreciate that these processes exist, let alone try to do anything to make them smoother and more efficient.

One of the worst habits you can 'develop' is the tendency to procrastinate, to allow processes to stall leaving you unsure of the next step or unwilling to take it.

For general day-to-day tasks this will hurt a little, but if you're procrastinating over the evolution of your business, staying absolutely still and treading water while others are pacing forward then it will hurt a lot.

This is a position I call 'Maintenance Mode'.

One of the most highlighted passages in the Kindle version of my book '[Stop Thinking Like a Freelancer](#)' explains this phenomenon well:

If you can't immediately point to a specific action you took this week that furthered and evolved your business then you'll probably find you're in Maintenance Mode with your freelance career.

Stuck on a plateau, static financially yet furiously spinning the hamster wheel. Unclear on the most effective 'to do' action to tackle next.

Even if you are doing okay though, and you are beyond Maintenance Mode could things be more efficient in the way you run the business? Could you procrastinate less? Could you get things done more quickly or build systems for subcontractors to help carry the load?

Positive Change

Consider this the start of a positive change in this area, it's impractical to look for a full and final solution right now, you'll only tie yourself in knots.

Instead consider this as just another step in your evolution. Remember, 'getting better' never ends, you just make real impact more consistently.

So you should consider this as another weapon in your arsenal. A resource to keep to one side whenever you feel distracted, stuck on a plateau or unclear on the next best steps to take. Like everything on Freelancelift it's not a 'one-hit' resource, keep coming back to the content as you develop and you'll get more out of it each time.

What I want to show you in this book - and the course which accompanies it - is precisely how to break from the procrastination cycle, to form new habits which will enable you to:

- › Do more in less time
- › Focus on more than one thing at a time
- › Enjoy more efficiency and sow the seed for having more than 'just you' in the business
- › Lay the foundations for scaling

Efficiency and true momentum has a different allure to each of us. In my case I chose to scale my 'just me' business into something bigger and hire a team to deliver bigger and better projects with [Tone](#).

You might just choose to work less while earning more per project, or be more selective with higher paying gigs, choosing to work only on the projects you really can invest yourself in.

Whatever it means to you, having a clear vision and overcoming procrastination is the first step.



IT'S ABOUT **MOMENTUM**

What drives us to do what we do?

It's 10:07 on a Saturday morning as I write this. A pleasant summer breeze is wafting through the open window and beyond the trees I can only see blue.

Today could have quite easily turned into a BBQ, a day out or something more pleasant – on the surface at least – than padding out the bulk of this short book.

But I'm here, and I wouldn't change it.

Why? Because I'm committed to putting this together, the last few days have seen me outline the premise, lay down the design for the cover, mindmap the contents and now I'm threading the words together.

I've enabled a sense of momentum in this project and I have made it my mission (over the past 4-5 years) to understand where my own weaknesses are and put in place a way of working which overcomes them...

... It's a good job too, I mean wouldn't that be the picture of irony? Procrastinating about writing a book on procrastination?

I'm not super-human though, nor a workaholic. Tempting as it is to head out for a cold glass of beer on a sunny day rather than 'putting in the work' I have cushion which prevents it.

A set of systems and processes which protect me against procrastination, enabling me to get the work done to the perfect standard in **the quickest possible time**. So I can grab the beer and go for dinner with Michelle (Mrs V) *afterward*.

By reading this short book (and following through by completing as many actions as you can) you're making a commitment to evolving your business. To help you make this mindset shift, you should understand the science of small wins.

Teresa Amabile is a Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School. In 2011, following years of research and on-the-ground experiments she released her watershed book, 'The Progress Principle'.

In it, she outlined that **incremental progress against defined goals** was a key psychological trigger for maximizing motivation.

You don't need to be a Harvard Professor to relate to the positive mental impact momentum like this has. That new keyboard shortcut you just picked up, the piece of work you just completed in record time, the realization that you cooked that meal better than you did last time.

Every one of these 'mini fist pumps' builds happiness and motivation as each is directly related to achievement. We're programmed to take hope and happiness from every achievement almost equally, regardless of the size.

This is the same principle regardless of whether you're managing a client project, your own 'Me Project' or something like putting together this book.

This sense of momentum can help you overcome a lack of focus and beat procrastination. So onto the 'P Word' then, where does it start?



DEFINE

Procrastination is the grizzly bear stealing
our time, but what is it, really?

The Oxford English dictionary defines procrastination as:

Noun; The action of delaying or postponing something

This explanation - albeit correct - isn't very helpful. Instead, I take more inspiration from the synonyms relating to the word itself:

Dithering, delaying tactics, stalling, temporizing, hesitation.

Now we're starting to get somewhere, what we're talking about here is **the techniques we all use to justify why we haven't put in the work.** Thinly veiled excuses we're all too familiar with.

'Spinning plates' Theory

I'm no social or cognitive psychologist but here's how I break it down simply to myself. I believe that we procrastinate when we have too many plates spinning in life, work and otherwise.

Plate 1 is slowing so needs speeding up, **plate 2** is moving really quickly already on its own but I seem to be gravitating more to that one, it gets unnecessary attention.

Plate 3 is about to stop, slip and come crashing to the floor yet it feels beyond my reach so I'm going to hope it keeps going for long enough for me to reach over and fix it 'at some point.'



To develop the analogy some more lets assume it's in your interest to:

- › Avoid adding any unnecessary plates
- › Ensure the right plate is moving quickly and the non-essential ones can slow a little

Here's the problem though, for most of us the plate moving the quickest and receiving the most attention is the **least likely** to be the influential one, the game changer.

Plate 1 is loaded with client work, we're managing to keep up for the most part and get by but always feel as though we could be giving it more attention.

Plate 2 is filled with email management, social media, downtime, software upgrades and general distractions.

Plate 3 supports the tasks that really matter to the longevity and positive evolution of the most important client you'll ever have to report to, **yourself**.

In truth, each of us probably has 5-10 plates spinning at any one time when you throw 'life' into the mix.

Nobody is saying we need to stop email management, let client communications slip and fall in favor of our own personal development, or sacrifice a lifestyle for work. We just need to redress the balance, ensure priorities are put in place and that each plate spins at an optimal rate with a relaxed, but deliberate push.

Doing so will ensure we live happy, work happy and keep our accountants happy.



EXCUSES

15 ways **everybody** procrastinates

In 2008 a group of cognitive psychologists held one of the most exhaustive studies known into procrastination.

The results were very revealing and give us key insights into the rationalization techniques we all enlist to justify why a given task wasn't completed.

The study found also that while on the surface some delays may feel appropriate, we're really just showcasing procrastination behavior under a different guise.

According to Tuckman, Abry, and Smith, there are 15 key reasons for procrastination:

1. Not knowing what needs to be done
"I didn't know I was supposed to do that."
2. Not knowing how to do something
"I don't know how to do it."
3. Not wanting to do something
"I really don't want to do this."
4. Not caring if it gets done or not
"It won't make a difference whether I do this or not."
5. Not caring when something gets done
"It really doesn't make any difference if I put this off."

6. Not feeling in the mood to do it
“I need to be in the mood. I’m not.”
7. Lacking the initiative to change or get started
“But I’ve always done it this way and it’s hard to change.”
8. Being in the habit of waiting until the last minute
“I know I can pull this out at the last minute.”
9. Believing that you work better under pressure
“I work better under pressure.”
10. Feeling stuck and unable to get to the next step
“I just can’t seem to get started.”
11. Forgetting
“I just forgot.”
12. Blaming sickness or poor health
“I couldn’t do it; I was sick.”
13. Waiting for the right moment
“I’m just waiting for the best time to do it.”
14. Needing time to think about the task
“I need time to think this through.”
15. Delaying one task in favor of working on another
“This other opportunity will never come again, so I can’t pass it up.”

I found the results fascinating, and I'm sure right now you can point to several of these reasons you've used today, or this week. This information though equips us with **perspective**.

If you know what to look for, and can identify procrastination 'in progress' you start to enter the right mindset for overcoming it.

Remember, procrastination is intrinsically linked with efficiency and momentum. The less downtime you have 'on the job' the more downtime you can have outside of your work life, while completing the same amount of work (if not more).

I wanted to take this a step further though, it's great to understand what we do to procrastinate, it's equally important though to know how to change it.

So I grouped the study findings into four categories, each category comes with it's own set of systems and processes to provide the antidote, to stop procrastination in its tracks and give you the tools for overcoming it.

1. Clarity & Skillset

Not knowing what needs to be done

Not knowing how to do something

Feeling stuck and unable to get to the next step

2. Motivation & Commitment

- Not wanting to do something
- Not caring if it gets done or not
- Not caring when something gets done
- Not feeling in the mood to do it
- Lacking the initiative to get started

3. Habitual

- Being in the habit of waiting until the last minute
- Believing that you work better under pressure

4. Delaying

- Forgetting
- Blaming sickness or poor health
- Waiting for the right moment
- Needing time to think about the task
- Delaying one task in favor of working on another

Whenever you look to your 'to do' list for a task to complete and don't immediately start tackling it I want you to vocalise **why** you didn't start.

Say it out loud and cross reference it with the statements above to find a mini cure to get you moving again, what we're trying to achieve here is that sense of momentum that takes to where you need to be.

In the next section we'll break these main categories down one by one to give you clarity and a set of actions you can take right now to change that 'normal'.



THE ANTIDOTE

How to overcome each of the four areas

In the previous sections we've laid the groundwork for understanding exactly what procrastination is, and how it occurs.

We've looked what momentum and efficiency can do for you, so now it's time to figure out how we overcome it.

Remember, this is not something that'll change overnight, it'll take consistent small wins in all of these areas to change habits that will have formed over several years.

Use this book instead as a reference point, when you hear yourself saying "I work better under pressure" flick to the 'Habitual' section of this book. When you utter the dreaded words "It won't make a difference whether I do this or not." Jump to the section on 'Motivation & Commitment'.

So let's get started.

1. Clarity & Skillset

As one or two person businesses we'll rarely be at a point where every activity we carry out on a daily basis is clear to us. There will likely always be a skill gap or uncertainty as to a particular piece of the puzzle.

After all, we left the stability of a 9-5 role (where task A was ‘someone else’s job’) in favour of this reality, so we are responsible for seeing it through.

This means making the necessary adjustments when faced with a lack of clarity or potential skill deficiency so that it doesn’t derail our progress.

The good news is we don’t have to be good at *everything*, provided we understand specifically the steps in the process. What we’re talking about here is breaking down a task or project into **much smaller chunks** so we can understand where (specifically) a skill gap or lack of clarity exists.

Let’s say for example you’re procrastinating about reaching out to prospective clients with cold emails. Maybe you’re saying things like “I just can’t seem to get started” or “I just don’t know what to do”.

Since everything you do (in business as in personal life) can be broken down to a process, you can assess each link in the chain to pin down where you need support, working systematically rather than on a haphazard basis.

Using this principle we can break it out:

1. Find 10 clients who match my criteria

“Okay I think I can do this, I can go to good quality potential clients in my market and figure out what they might be missing and why we might be a good fit.”

2. Open an email client
“Check”
3. Write the copy
“Aha - I think this might be the section I’m struggling with, I don’t know what to say.”
4. Click send
“Check”

So as you can see, by breaking this simple task into four pieces we can see where the bottleneck might be.

What this does is give you **a learning objective, a small win to achieve**. Your next task then is to go and find some good resources on what to write in your email copy.

On this particular example there is lots inside Freelancelift Pro in [this book](#) and [this workshop](#) but a simple Google search for ‘**approaching freelance clients with cold email**’ will return some equally good knowledge you can crowdsource into copy that works for you.

How to approach dream clients with a cold email | Freelancelift

<https://www.freelancelift.com/.../how-to-approach-a-client-hit-list-with-a-...> ▼

In month two of Freelancelift Pro we're going to looking to pin down how specifically you will grab attention in a crowded **freelancer** space. We'll cover off how to ...

From there, the most important thing is to just get started and avoid ‘over-learning’. Fail a few times if you have to, just get some trial and error under your belt.

We'll cover more about motivation in the next section but to close off this point, my general rule of thumb for learning and testing any topic is this:

If you can explain the main principles out loud to an uninformed third party (partner, family member, co-worker) then you know enough to get started.

Most of the ultra-successful in the business world are procrastinators, it's just they built processes and systems to overcome it, looping in others to work specifically on the links in the chain they'd normally procrastinate on.

2. Motivation & Commitment

Have you ever noticed the correlation between clarity & skill level (how to do something) and motivation (wanting to do it)?

We're all hard-wired to avoid the activities we feel we're weak at, or which we feel will take a disproportionate amount of energy-to-enjoyment even when we know they **have to be done**.

You'll see this at its most common in education. Students will wait until the very last minute to do the work, simply because it'll take a huge amount of energy for very little enjoyment. The same amount of brain time is probably invested in the 'Pub Quiz' or an intense game of Twister, yet this they will voluntarily do, for fun.

Hopefully though the previous section gave you a new way to look at it, that it's likely only a small sub-section of the work you're struggling with. So by isolating that and getting engaged with the element you unlock the whole task or project.

Does it matter?

Here's something fairly contrarian, sometimes you are right to have a lack of motivation.

Let me say that again, sometimes a lack of motivation is good.

When what you're putting off really doesn't contribute to either:

- › Your wellbeing
- › Your clients' wellbeing
- › The wellbeing of your business

Then ditch it. But rather than putting it off, remove it from your objectives entirely. You'll find that when you break them down, some tasks really don't deserve your procrastination.

So the first question to ask yourself, if you're struggling for motivation and feeling a lack of commitment is does [this task] matter? Sometimes the task we're doing at that point in time is non-essential, it doesn't provide the positive impact required to justify the time you're spending on it.

In most cases however, the task **will matter**, so then what?

Work with your mood (and always have something important to work on)

We all know the feeling of working on something we're really not enjoying. For the most part, our mood can be influenced when we're engaged with something we enjoy. The reality is though when looking for motivation to start, you will need to work with your mood rather than against it.

So the trick is not to beat yourself up about your lack of 'cyborg-level' mood consistency, instead plan ahead and **always have something important to work on.**

I use a platform called [Wunderlist](#) to jot down everything that pops into my head. I have it on my phone, my iPad and as a pinned tab in my browser. Everything I think of goes in there, regardless where I am. Then when I am 'planning mode' I organize it by priority.

These aren't huge tasks either, instead smaller, bitesize pieces of various bigger projects.

This gives me the benefit of **variety**, and it's something I want to help you have too so that when you're feeling bored of a particular task or project you can switch to something that's of equal importance.

If your mind starts to wander from task A and you don't really feel like following through with it, the procrastinator in you will want to jump over to Facebook, or scan through emails, check your phone for messages or 'shuffle papers' elsewhere.

You'll feel guilty as you know it's important and 'matters' – it's just you don't feel up to it.

The day you allocated suddenly draws to a close and you barely got half the job done, the rest of the day has disappeared into the ether.

Rather than agonizing though over task A your mission should be to recognize the mood change and move to an equally important task B or C quickly.

If task B or C proves to be a little more engaging you might have the energy to go back to task A at the end of the day, regardless though you still accomplished **something** and that momentum is crucial.

You still only got 50% of task A done but you got 100% of task B done (vs 100% of nothing in the procrastinator outcome!).

So to close of this section, dips in energy and moods are okay... you just need to have in place positive habits and ways of working which ensure you can continue to something of equal importance, working **with** natural motivation rather than against it.

3. Habitual

This is one I've been looking forward to getting to. As with most negative-leaning habits, it will take a new way of thinking to change the outlook for the better.

When it comes to procrastination, we're talking primarily about **the habit of leaving important tasks until the very last point**, or falling into the habit of feeling as though we can work under pressure.

You should start by reframing why you leave tasks until the last minute. As mentioned earlier, it's likely due to the energy-to-enjoyment ratio you feel you'll get from the project, or it's a cover story for a skills gap.

We've already addressed that mapping the sub-sections of the task at hand, to unearth which one – specifically – is causing us to delay can eliminate this.

But here's another suggestion which is more a 'shock & awe' approach to overcoming habitual procrastination... **tackle the most difficult part of the task first.**

I appreciate this may feel a little 'easier said than done' but bear with me, there's a psychological grounding for that suggestion.

It's known as 'Ego Depletion', and it basically asserts that we only have a limited amount of willpower and persistence in a given day. Once this has been exhausted it's fairly difficult to give any more. That is to say, if you start with the easy part you'll always find yourself running out of steam when the tricky part comes.

You're aiming to break habits by throwing pure energy at it.

If there's something you've been putting off or a deadline looming over the next week, tackle it first thing tomorrow morning. No email, no phone, no excuses, just you vs. Task A.

By shuffling the most difficult elements to the end of the day (or until tomorrow, next week and beyond) we are adding stress into the situation. Although we're not experiencing the pain of the difficult task at that very moment the threat of the 'start' still looms.

Remember, we're looking to protect personal wellbeing and ensure efficiency here so unwanted, unnecessary stress elements must be removed.

In the previous section we looked at always having something important to work on, if you're looking to break habits then I'd advise lining up tasks in difficulty order (as well as priority of course) starting with the one you're dreading first.

Whats more, once you get the 'tough one' out of the way the rest of the day will be a cakewalk and you'll leave your workspace much happier than when you entered.

4. Delaying

The good news is, 'delaying' is the easiest form of procrastination to overcome. What we're essentially talking about is excuses, which we can tackle with a little tough love.

First, I'd like to talk about the single biggest culprit causing distractions and supporting procrastination. I call it 'empty work'.

You'll already be familiar with the term 'empty calories' as it relates to nutrition, denoting food which contributes calories but provides no nutritional value; some fats and sugars for example.

'Empty work' is the time management equivalent; the mysterious black hole stealing minutes and hours from under your nose.

Every time you hit “Send/Receive” on your e-mail client and nothing shows, each time you aimlessly refresh your Twitter or Facebook feed, every time you watch a video or read a blog post which provides more questions than answers.

There is a place for social media and industry reading of course and email is essential, it just shouldn't define your day. Taking social media as an example, if it does not contribute to the forward momentum of your business and if you struggle to recall what you actually contributed then you're guilty of doing empty work.

The rule of thumb here is whether at the end of a day you can recall what you did on social media and specifically why that mattered. If you can say, “I contributed to the LinkedIn group on XYZ, resulting in two likes and 10 visits to my site” then you can class it as useful activity, which contributes, to your goal.

If its an “ummm, ahh” then you're probably stuck doing empty work in ‘serial refresh’ mode.

Email management

Managing a healthy inbox is a skill – and probably a whole course – in itself, but I'd like to break apart the highest leverage technique I know, to help you avoid the ‘delaying’ reflex.

‘Out of office’ is your friend

The ‘out of office’ function is criminally under-used. If you're anything like most it's rarely switched on, then even when it is you're likely still checking your email.

When I talk to freelancers (and most business people actually) about their challenges with email, we tend to loop back to the same point. “But once I see an email it only takes me a minute to reply, and if I don’t it’s just on my mind anyway”.

That’s perfectly valid. I know that ‘email-anxiety’ all-too-well. A client pings you an email, and you imagine them shaking a fist at the other side of the screen, tapping their feet waiting for a response.

In truth, that’s rarely the case, especially if they receive something like this:



“Thanks for your email. Just a quick note to let you know I’m out of the studio until around 2pm today, with limited access to email. Will jump on this the second I’m back.”

Do they know that you’re actually out of the office? Do they care? Not really, they just have received some response and understand that you’ll get back to them after 2pm.

The trick is to actually still be in-the-office. With your email off, phone ‘Push’ notifications off you’ll be able to work – distraction free – on your Task A for the day.

At 2pm you can check your email, you might have 20 to go through which you’ll be able to action over a coffee and be done in 30 minutes.

I’m not suggesting you do this every day, but consider it as tactic on those days you just need to **get ‘stuff’ done**. In any case, you should make it your mission not to email first thing in the morning or last thing at night.

If you hook yourself up to the 'email drip' first thing in the morning you have the potential for an email to scramble your priorities and plans for the day (Email can wait until 10am!). Checking your email at night will provide that 'Email Anxiety' that'll keep you awake all night.

IN CLOSING

The insights in this book will equip you to see procrastination for what it is. An excuse to delay; which often isn't a valid excuse at all.

If you find yourself delaying or procrastinating on any given task I'm hoping the insights in this book will help you see more clearly which form or procrastination it is, and how you should overcome it.

Every task in your business follows a process. An ordered set of actions, which get you from A to B. I would hope that now you'll have the required perspective to change the way you work to make each process smoother and more efficient.

I want to help you avoid 'Maintenance Mode', avoid poor client relationships and avoid burnout which will help pave the way for:

- › Doing more in less time
- › Focusing on more than one thing at a time
- › Enjoying more efficiency and sow the seed for having more than 'just you' in the business
- › Laying the foundations for scaling

Remember, what we're talking about here is momentum. In my case that gave me the ability to scale to an 11 person team at [Tone](#). Whatever efficiency (and the resulting 'professional freedom') means to you, I hope you're at least one more step towards achieving it now.

BEATING SOLOPRENEUR PROCRASTINATION

Share your thoughts and progress at freelancelift.com/community

This was short book for
Freelancelift Pro members.

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