

Your Personal Coach

By
Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

It's been made clear to me that I would be in a better position and earn more money at work if I complete an advanced class and get an additional certification in my field. I've known this for almost two years but I never seem to get around to it. How do I move ahead with this? Thanks.

-- Robert D.

Dear Robert,

A Spanish proverb speaks to the universal problem of putting things off until tomorrow: "Manana is the busiest day of the week."

Procrastination is the avoidance of tasks that need to be accomplished due to a variety of reasons. You'll have to have a better understanding of why you keep putting off this certification to move ahead.

There are usually a million excuses for procrastinating. (Human beings are immensely creative about the reasons we aren't doing things we should). Most excuses fall into one of several categories. It will greatly help you to discover which ones apply to you.

- ? *The task is considered unpleasant.* During my graduate training, one of my colleague's dissertation research showed that people procrastinated more about tasks they considered to be aversive than those they liked. Duh! Isn't it just common sense that we avoid things we consider unpleasant!? Robert, do you find the idea of taking the classes for certification to be unpleasant, difficult, boring? If so, do you think you are in the right profession?
- ? *You're disorganized or believe the task to be overwhelming.* Listen carefully to the specific reasons you tell yourself why you aren't taking this class. Most of our lives are jam-packed with responsibilities and it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Look carefully at your schedule. Are you wasting time? Don't get me wrong here. Everyone's life needs balance, and time for rest and recreation. Spending time with your family or pursuing a hobby you love are not time wasters, IMHO. But watching reruns on television night after night probably is.
- ? *Lack of confidence.* Are you afraid that you won't do well in this class? Is it too far beyond your present level of competence? In other words, are you trying to learn French 501 when you've never taken French 101? From your letter, it appears this certification class is the next step in your career development, and it is expected that you should be able to do the work. If you don't believe that, honestly assess your need to take some remedial classes first so that you'll have the confidence to take on the higher level of instruction.

? *Addiction to perfection.* Many people put things off because they hold the idea that they must do everything perfectly. No one is perfect or ever will be. Do your best and strive to always improve and you will feel good about yourself and your accomplishments.

Spend some time thinking about what is keeping you from your goals. Then begin an action plan to overcome these obstacles. Even the most ambitious goals can be divided into smaller steps that feel less overwhelming.

Make a list of the things you need to do and write them down (e.g., get a course catalogue so you'll know when the class is offered, fill out a registration form, plan your schedule to be able to attend the class, etc.).

Take your list and a calendar then assign dates for the accomplishment of each of these steps. Then do them at the time you've designated. Don't forget to reward yourself when you've successfully completed each small step.

We all know the power of beginning something – and how wonderful it feels to start something we've been putting off for a long time.

We may realize that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, but we sometimes forget that the universe wants us to live up to our potential. Many wonderful things begin to support us, to help us on our way when we muster the courage to begin. A German proverb reminds us of this: "Begin to weave, and God will give the thread."

Write again in a few weeks and let me know how you are doing with this. Good luck!

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.