



Episode 21 - Procrastination Part 2

Welcome to this episode of the managing your smart mind podcast with Master Certified Coach Else Kramer, a.k.a. Coach Kramer.

Hello smart human!

Welcome to part 2 of this series on procrastination.

Here's a quick recap of what we covered in the first part.

1. What procrastination is;
2. What happens when you procrastinate;
3. When it becomes a problem;
4. Whether everyone procrastinates;
5. Why smart humans have a higher risk of procrastination;
6. How you can start overcoming procrastination.

In this second part, I will take a look at two important procrastination triggers: thoughts and feelings.

The third part will be dedicated to things you can change in your environment or in your behaviour, and is loaded with even more practical tricks and tips.

Feelings - the root cause of our procrastination

But our thoughts and feelings are usually at the core of procrastination - so the sooner we tackle those the better.

Last week, I gave you an assignment (*if you haven't listened to Episode 20 yet I strongly recommend that you do that first because then this episode and the next build on it.*)

I asked you to start noticing *how* you procrastinate; to identify your favourite modes of procrastination.

And then to become aware of the *feelings* you're trying to avoid when you're indulging in procrastination.

If you did this exercise you've probably learned that procrastination is a successful strategy to avoid discomfort.

Our brain notices that we're feeling something unpleasant in the moment, and it sets about fixing that.

And it works - but at the cost of your long term goals.

Like keeping a clean house, getting healthy, avoiding incurring late fees on payments, building a business.

If you allow your brain to 'help' you avoid the work you need to do to achieve these goals, then you exchange short-term gain for long-term pain.

So what exactly are these emotions our brain helps us avoid?

Here's a non-comprehensive list:

Dread.
Incompetence.
Confusion.
Overwhelm.
Uncertainty.
Insecurity.
Fear.
Anxiety.
Resistance.

Note that these can all be classified as negative, but many people, including myself, also want to avoid more positive emotions like excitement.

Now, knowing that your brain uses procrastination as a kind of coping mechanism to avoid emotions you don't like, the next question is:

How do you fix that?

Here's the simplest AND hardest solution:

by allowing the feelings instead of trying to get away from them

How do you do that?

I did an entire Podcast on this before, it's Episode 16, check it out if you'd like more in-depth info on this. Here's the executive summary.

First of all, it helps to be prepared.

Expect to feel sucky when doing something you don't really look forward to.

And then when the feeling comes up, when you feel that dread, or overwhelm, or incompetence, you can tell your brain: of course I'm feeling this way, I expected to. No need to fix it with procrastination.

Next, simply stay where you are and allow the feeling to move through you.

You can even move towards it, lean into it. If you have a martial arts background it's very similar to moving towards the pain instead of away from it. Sounds counterintuitive but is incredibly effective.

If you've never done this before, this can be difficult.

Every fiber of your being may scream "NO, I don't want to feel like this, let's get away from it".

That's OK. Just stay with the feeling for as long as you can.

Feel the anxiety, uncertainty, fear, confusion, whatever it is - and get to work.

This is both the hardest AND the best thing: if you can get good at this, you can pretty much achieve anything.

But it takes practice, grit, and determination.

Don't give up if you don't succeed at staying with the feelings all the time. It's a process, and the more you practice, the better you'll get at it.

Now, as said, feelings are our first prong of attack - but we need to look at more aspects if we want to battle procrastination.

Those uncomfortable feelings that cause procrastination may be triggered or amplified by...thoughts

And those thoughts play another important role in your procrastination patterns.

As an example, let's look at some thoughts I have about unpacking the last five boxes still left unopened in our attic since we moved house more than 26 months ago:

- Whatever is in there is not important
- I don't want to go through that old stuff
- I have no idea what to do with whatever is in there
- I feel exhausted just thinking about it
- It's not worth investing time and energy in
- I have a million more interesting things to do

Now just looking at that list makes me incredibly resistant to opening up the boxes. It creates so many uncomfortable feelings that, of course, those boxes are still up there.

Or let's say I want to write a book and I have thoughts like

- I'll never get this done
- I'm such a bad writer
- I never finished the last book I started
- I can't even sit still for long enough to write a chapter, let alone an entire book
- I have nothing original to say
- I don't have time to write

Not. Helping. At all. I've basically talked myself out of writing a book.

And yes, I could totally try and move through all the feelings these thoughts produce, as we talked about earlier, but that takes *a lot* of strength and energy.

So in this case I may want to start by **changing the way I *think*** about these projects.

Now I don't mean swapping your thoughts with perfectionist fantasies like 'I am an amazing best-selling author' that your smart mind will simply laugh at sarcastically.

I mean challenging them, and slightly adjusting them into thoughts that you can actually still buy into - but that create WAY less resistance or energy loss.

For the book project this could look like:

- I'll never get this done => I'm committed to keep going until this is done
- I'm such a bad writer => I'm becoming a better writer with every paragraph I write
- I never finished the last book I started (this is actually true) => I now have all the knowledge and tools I need to finish this book
- I can't even sit still long enough => sitting still isn't required to write a book
- I have nothing original to say => There are people out there who need my help
- I don't have time to write => I can easily carve out 45 minutes five days a week to write

Notice that I don't just change these thoughts to their opposites.

I don't replace 'I have only original things to say' - that would be too much of a stretch. My smart mind wouldn't buy into that at all.

Instead, I **tap into my why**, and my whole thought about originality becomes irrelevant.

And, great news: this is where you get to use the power of your smart mind and get to be creative.

So get to work.

When you get stuck on a project, uncover the thoughts that are causing you to procrastinate and get crafty at finding suitable replacements.

Standard Saboteurs

But you don't even need to wait until you get stuck.

Not all crappy thoughts are created equal - some are just so universally crappy that you can work ahead to circumvent them.

Here's a list of the standard saboteurs we all have in our head from time to time:

- I don't know how to do this.
- I'm not ready to do this.
- It's too much/too big/etc.
- This is too hard/difficult/complicated.
- This is too boring/dumb/stupid.

Most thoughts that cause us to procrastinate actually boil down to one of these.

Which is good to know - this means any work you do on this then easily translates to all the other projects you procrastinate on.

Let's try it.

Think about a project or task you're currently procrastinating on.

Are you thinking any of the standard saboteur thoughts above?

If so, how can you modify them to make it less hard to get started, and to keep going?

Here are some suggestions:

- I don't know how to do this => I can figure this out
- I'm not ready to do this. => I'm
- It's too much/too big/etc. => I am going to break this up into bite-sized chunks
- This is too hard/difficult/complicated. => I can break this down and simplify

- This is too boring/dumb/stupid. => I'd rather spend my time just getting this done than thinking about how stupid it is.

Feel free of course to craft your own - this works best if you adjust the words until the new thought feels believable to YOU. You want it to be acceptable to your smart mind, and you want it to create a shift in energy. From massive 'meh' to at least a curious 'maybe'.

OK, that's quite enough for today - I don't want to create overwhelm that then causes you to procrastinate on overcoming your procrastination.

Let's do a quick recap:

Procrastination is a coping mechanism to avoid sucky feelings.

Expect it - and then move towards the feelings instead of away from them.

Then we looked at thoughts, and how they can amplify those sucky feelings that make you want to procrastinate.

First step is to become aware of them, second is to morph them into something that alleviates, rather than reinforces your desire to procrastinate.

And last we looked at the standard saboteurs: thoughts we all tend to have, which makes them much easier to catch and circumvent.

Give these strategies a try over the next seven days, and let me know how it goes!

And get ready for the next Episode in this series, where we'll look at the third prong: changing things, not in your mind or body, but in the world, to help you overcome procrastination.

Until then, have an amazing week!

Else

Do you want to get a handle on procrastination so you can start doing fulfilling, meaningful work again? Then work with me one-on-one. DM me on [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#) to learn how, or send me an email via podcast@elsekramer.com.

Thank you for listening to the Managing the Smart Mind Podcast, I love that at the time of recording this there are listeners in 59 countries! I am waving at all of you!