

Procrastinatory Doom Loops

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I do tasks on three timescales: they either get done immediately, after a shamefully massive delay, or not at all. There's little in-between.

The latter cases are some of my biggest sources of shame in life. I pride myself on being as reliable and honest a person as possible, so it eats me up to betray someone's trust for week after week after month... what does it say about me when I'm being trusted and completely fail to deliver, despite many promises?

Ironically, this instinct and identity are what *cause* those massive failures: when I've been procrastinating on something, I can hardly bear to think about it—and so it's excruciating to *stop* procrastinating long enough to deal with it. It's a tragic positive feedback loop: the more I slack, the harder it is to stop.

I call this phenomenon the "Procrastinatory Doom Loop (PDL)"™:

1. I commit to someone that I'll do something "soon," or by a deadline.
2. I don't promptly follow through; instead, I do other things with my time.
3. As time drags on, the task pops into my head. But I've been procrastinating on it, so thinking about it brings to mind my irresponsibility, and makes me feel bad! So, to avoid cognitive dissonance, I push the thought away.
4. The deadline passes; I haven't followed through. The person that's waiting texts me, asking what happened. I, awash with shame, reply something vague about how it's "taking longer than expected," and promptly shunt thought of the painful topic back to my deepest mental recesses.
5. More time passes; it still isn't done. When I think about the task, I feel a wave of self-revulsion, and move on quickly. (If completing the task would require

focus, I'd need to confront this failure with my full mind for hours at a time: *unbearable!* So the bigger the task, the more it slips.)

6. Repeat.

PDLs can end in two different ways: on an energetic day, I muster up the courage to face my fears... or I quietly abandon any hope of following through and gradually forget my commitment.

The former is usually helped along by credible threat of severe downside if I keep procrastinating (hi, IRS!). The latter is much more common in personal affairs.

(I'm not very good at avoiding them yet, but at least the problem is clear!)