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By Jenny May

Find ways to fight the procrastinator who lives inside you

Ray Somich knows there's a procrastinator inside him.

The Willoughby Hills City Councilman and radio station president said keeping his Franklin planner by his side at all times prevents that pesky proloner from emerging.

"I've been using my Franklin planner for about 10 years, and that's one of the reasons I got it," Somich said. "I'm involved in so many activities, and the more you do, the easier it is to set aside the tough things."

This is National Procrastination Week, a time for procrastinators everywhere to start fresh.

Work place productivity expert Bob Kustka, chief executive officer of The Fusion Factor, a human resources strategy consulting firm in Norwell, Mass., said there is a procrastinator in each of us.

Some people procrastinate because they dislike working on a specific task, while others feel overwhelmed by the incredible amount of work they have to do and don't know where to begin, he said.

"We all procrastinate to varying degrees," said Kustka, who spent 25 years as a human resources executive for the Gillette Co. "When faced with an overflowing inbox, looming projects, and a phone that rings off the hook, some people freeze. Not knowing where to start or how they can make a dent in their seemingly unending workload, they do nothing.

"Sometimes people put things off due to fear. In larger organizations, people sometimes procrastinate doing something because they aren't sure it's their responsibility."

When you start to feel overwhelmed by a task, Kustka suggests choosing one of the "five D's" to avoid procrastination:

n Decide: When faced with a daily to-do list, first decide the priority of each task.

n Designate: When a task cannot be completed quickly, set a time for it later in the day or week, and then write it on a calendar to ensure accountability.

n Delegate: When faced with too much work and not enough time, see who else in the office is carrying a lighter load, and use teamwork to help everyone get through the day more productively.

n Do it: Complete the task yourself.

n Dump it: If it's not a necessary task, take it off your list.

The five D's are part of Kustka's "right here, right now" approach.

"The first thing people need to do is look at their behavior and why they are not making the changes," he said. Somich, who is president of WELW-AM 1330 in Willoughby and sits on the boards of several community organizations, said sometimes people just need to be more realistic about how many activities they can handle.

"I've come to realize that I can't possibly do everything I want," Somich said. "There have been times where I'll just

Bob Kustka

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have to face the fact that there is just not enough time in the week to do, say, some volunteer work I wanted to do. So I have to cross it off and put it on the list of things I plan to do in the future, when I get the time.”

For most people, Kustka points out, less procrastination would equal less stress. “The No. 1 negative outcome of doing nothing is clutter,” Kustka said.

Mayfield Heights resident Betty Wood, an admitted procrastinator, knows how stressful clutter can be. “I tend to save newspapers with the intention of clipping out certain articles and sending them to people,” Wood said. “But half the time I never get around to doing it, so I have stacks of newspapers around the house. I also save old clothes. I put off going through them, telling myself that they may fit again one day.”

Somich admits his life was cluttered and more stressful before he got his planner and stopped putting things off. “Before I started using my planner, I was writing things on Post-it notes and on scraps of paper in my pants pockets,” he said. “There were notes everywhere.”

While some people, like Somich, realize they simply need to stay organized to avoid procrastination, for others, it’s not that clear cut.

Kustka said people typically stop procrastinating for two reasons - crisis management or desire. “If the doctor tells you that you’re going to die if you don’t lose 50 pounds, that would likely be enough for you to do it,” Kustka said. “That would be crisis management.” Desire would be getting something for your efforts, such as achieving a better body from exercising, he said.

Wood has found that enlisting a friend to help with a task can make it more fun and easier to tackle. “I finally had someone sit down with me and go through the old clothes, and help me decide what was really worth keeping,” she said. “Have someone help you, it makes it much easier.”

Whatever tasks you’re putting off, Kustka said this week can be the start of a new you. “National Procrastination Week is a great time for everyone to assess their productivity and workplace habits,” he said. If you get around to it, of course.