

By Laura Stack, MBA, CSP

It's 2013 and Time to Get Started Already

No matter how grandiose your plans or how carefully laid your schemes, they're worthless if you never shift gears from meditation into motion. You may have heard the old platitude "Dreams are just goals without deadlines." Yes, it's true. We all need to keep ourselves motivated as we work our way through life, but eventually, you've got to get off your duff and get moving.

I'm not telling you to leap immediately into action without considering the consequences. I like to say: "Thoughtless action will benefit you no more than action-less thought." But once you've gathered your resources, considered each of your options from all the obvious angles and formulated a basic battle plan, why would you pick procrastination over forward motion?

The FLIP Factors

I am not a psychologist, but after 20 years in the trenches teaching personal productivity, I believe that procrastination — like all human behavior — arises from very primitive roots. To drum up the gumption to take action, you have to flip an ancient, hardwired motivational switch...and that means overcoming obstacles. I call them the "FLIP" factors:

Fear. As one of the most basic human motivators, fear isn't all bad. If not for fear, we wouldn't be here today, because fear made our ancestors run away from threats like fires and sabertooths. But irrational fear can drive you to ill-considered action...or no action at all. It need not appear at an unconscious level. So instead of standing there undecided, ask yourself if fear — especially fear of failure — stands in your way. If so, what steps should you take to conquer it?

Laziness. Sometimes you just don't wanna. Well, hey, reality calling! You and your family need to eat, and you need to do something to stave off boredom. As long as you don't overdo it, work keeps your mind nimble, helps level out your emotions and enhances your self-esteem. So get off the fence. Too much laziness just dulls your edge.

Inertia. In scientific parlance, inertia represents an object's resistance to a change in speed and direction. The same goes for human behavior. "We've always done it this way." "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." "If it was good enough for Grandpa..." We've all heard these excuses for not changing. You may be dragging your heels because deep down you feel this way, too. Successful companies and successful people often resist change, because what got them there worked well. Well, reconsider your reasoning. What got you *here* won't necessarily get you *there*, so don't let your natural conservatism get in the way.

Perfectionism. If allowed free rein, perfectionism can kill a project as surely as budget cuts. Contingency plans beget more contingency plans, one draft leads to another, and suddenly time's up — and you've hardly moved beyond your starting point. Rather than waste time overthinking or falling prey to analysis paralysis, rough out the basics, break the project/task into workable chunks, put your head down and start moving. You can always make course corrections as you go. Exercise flexibility and agility, handling the hurdles as you come to them, and you'll eventually reach the finish line.

This Means You!

Some of us find it easier to flip procrasti-

nation into action than others. But no matter how hesitant you are about something, you can learn to stop dragging your heels in the productivity arena. Buckle down and get over the FLIP factors, so you can flip your action switch and get started!

Ring in the New Year

The future represents the original "undiscovered country," and one should be well prepared before blazing new trails. Take some time to consider and evaluate what you learned in 2012 and use that knowledge as you move forward. Not only will this exercise help in avoiding more procrastination, it also will help you avoid the stumbles of previous forays, and it will prove useful in defining new strategies and goals. So take the time to ponder this set of questions. It's also a good idea to write down your answers to the following set of questions so you can refer to them as you move into the exciting new year of 2013.

- What accomplishment(s) would make me happiest next year?
- What do I look forward to the most?

- What things (or people) should I avoid?
- What should I improve about myself?
- What can I do to enhance my professional value?
- How can I improve my financial position?
- What external changes are likely to affect me?
- Does my current professional path take me where I really want to go? If not, how can I start changing that?
- Should I make more of an effort to indulge myself in any particular areas...or did I overdo it last year?
- What do I most want to learn this year?
- What do I expect to be my biggest risk?
- What's my one-word theme for 2013?

The Bottom Line

Viewed objectively, these questions have no right or wrong answers; the only answers that matter are those that feel right to you. My list of answers may not resemble yours. The point of this exercise is to learn from the recent past, so you have the proper ammunition and attitude as you charge forward into the future. Happy New Year! *C&IT*

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has consulted with Fortune 500 corporations for more than 20 years in the field of employee productivity. She advises leaders, teams and professionals on developing high-performance cultures and creating Maximum Results in Minimum Time. She is the president of The Productivity Pro Inc., which specializes in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. An author and dynamic speaker, Stack's keynotes and seminars focus on increasing profitability by improving output, reducing inefficiency and saving time in today's workplaces. www.theproductivitypro.com © 2013 Laura Stack