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Today vs. Tomorrow

By Quentin R. Johnson, Ph.D.

A popular adage advises, “Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.” Mangled comic versions go something like this: “Never put off till tomorrow what may be put off until the day after tomorrow.”

Procrastination seems to touch many of us, at least occasionally. We embrace distractions, avoid doing what ought to be done, and trust future luck to meet needs, oftentimes at the adrenaline-filled last minute.

There is even a holiday recognizing this tendency, National Procrastination Week. In keeping with its theme of putting off tasks, the week can be observed during the first two weeks of March, or at another more convenient time.

I have personal experience with procrastination. I tend to procrastinate when it’s time to shop for Christmas gifts. I convince myself that I might catch the best deals by shopping on Christmas Eve. You can guess how it goes. Items are often sold out, prices are rarely good deals, and lines are long.

I also tend to procrastinate when it’s time to cut the grass. I figure the task can wait. The grass will still be there when I get around to it. Unfortunately, when I succumb to this type of thinking the grass keeps growing. It grows so tall I need to take two or three passes just to get rid of all the clumps.

People procrastinate for many reasons. They put off doing tasks they think they will dislike or that will require more effort than they want to expend at a particular moment. They overestimate the likelihood of feeling more motivated in the future. And, some people avoid attempting anything that may yield imperfect results because they fear failure.

James Clear, author of the bestseller *Atomic Habits*, offers several tips for overcoming procrastination. One is to make tasks more achievable by breaking them down into small steps, and then taking the first tiny step. He writes, “Once you start doing something, it’s easier to continue doing it.”

At Southside Virginia Community College, many of our students make a similar discovery when they take the first step in pursuit of postsecondary education goals by registering for classes. A current student who is on track to graduate this December explains her own journey: “Even

though I attended college right after high school, I never obtained a degree.” She goes on to say, “That started to bother me after a while, but by that time it seemed too difficult to do.”

It wasn’t until her children were grown and her youngest child was attending college that she resolved to stop procrastinating. “I decided it was time. SVCC sounded like the best approach, so I applied, registered, filled out the FAFSA, and requested transcripts.”

At first, she first feared the road ahead. She says she “thought I might not be able to get it all done, but here I am. Everyone at SVCC has been so kind, patient, helpful, and encouraging, and I am so grateful.”

If your education goals include obtaining a college degree, industry-recognized credentials, or other certifications, it’s time to take your first step. Registration for summer classes begins on March 15, and FastForward Credential Programs are available with upcoming start dates. Scholarships are available, and many of the FastForward Credential Programs are “Tuition Free”! So, don’t procrastinate. Visit southside.edu for more information.

Dr. Quentin R. Johnson is president of Southside Virginia Community College, an institution of higher learning that provides a wide variety of education opportunities to a diverse student population within a service area that spans ten counties and the City of Emporia. He can be reached via email at quentin.johnson@southside.edu.

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