

## **Need permission to procrastinate? Here you go.**

**Gregory Caswell, AEF Executive Director**

### **I should start with a disclaimer...**

Procrastination and avoidance are two different things. Procrastination in the instance of this post is related to the creative process. It's knowing you have something to do, not being able to figure out how to execute it quite yet, feeling a large amount of anxiety, shame, stress and/or guilt around it (which we all need to stop; see below), and occupying yourself with something completely different hoping the solution will surface. Avoidance, on the other hand, is knowing something needs to be done and actively ignoring or refusing to do it. I do not promote the latter.

### **But procrastination may serve a purpose if we are able to change our relationship with it.**

Earlier in my career as a playwright, I would experience guilt, stress, shame, and anxiety if I wasn't actively writing, as in sitting at my laptop writing words. It's likely that I was having these negative feelings because procrastination inherently has a negative connotation. Honestly, I think I've heard it mostly as a punishment: "Stop procrastinating!" Translation: "Do something immediately!"

### **But what if you don't know what that "something" is? Is it really going to come to you easier if you're sitting in agony?**

A play that I recently finished writing haunted me for three years. Every day, out of the blue, it would pop into my mind with new ideas of how the plot would unfold. I would feel the horrible feelings described above because I wasn't technically writing. I'd declare "That's it, I'm done with this play!" And then right after think "Oh, but then this happens to this character..."

Finally, I decided I was going to take a week of vacation and focus my energy on the actual act of writing. I made my lifelong dream of sitting in a café with my laptop a reality and wrote. And by the end of the fifth day of vacation, I had written the play in its entirety.

I also learned an important lesson about procrastination.





I realized in hindsight that the three years prior to that week I was in fact writing even though I was nowhere near my laptop. Every time I drove to work and thought about it, or as I brushed my teeth, or talked about it with a friend, I was engaged in the creative process. And by the time I sat down with my laptop three years later I was ready.

And so, based on that experience, and many others in my career, I encourage anyone engaged in a creative process to walk away for a bit, do something completely different, and know that you're still working. You may be surprised how quickly the inspiration, or the "Aha!" moment hits.

## Maybe we need to define *procrastination* in a positive light?

### Procrastination

*noun*

The period of time in the creative process in which you are doing just that, processing.

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