

Attack The 15-Letter Word With Take-15¹

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Several years ago, in my first year of graduate school, I had a professor named Paul Secord, who was a very well known social psychologist. He was a prolific writer. He had written many articles—and he and a colleague wrote a social psychology text that became *the* social psychology text.²

I met Dr. Secord at his house one morning (he worked at home in the mornings) to deliver the results of a research study. Over a cup of coffee, as we talked about the psychology department's social psychology program, I told him that I admired his writing. I asked him how he was able to write so much. I'll never forget his answer.

He said: "In the beginning, I procrastinated. I had a hard time disciplining myself to sit down and write.



And then one day, I decided on a strategy. During the first two hours after getting up every morning during the week, I would sit down at my desk to write. I would sit for two hours, even if I wasn't able to write a word."

"At first," he continued, "I wasn't able to write more than a few sentences. But I had pledged myself to spend those two hours every day and so I did that. Even if I didn't write a word, I just sat at my desk. As the days went by, I began to write more and more during those first two hours. Today, I still devote the two hours every day. And, now, the words just keep pouring out of me—nonstop!"

Years later, I thought about Dr. Secord. My wife and I had moved into a new home in the San Fernando Valley near Los Angeles. It was a very nice ranch style house with a separate garage. But, the house wasn't large enough for me to move in all of the boxes of books, files, tools, etc. that I had collected over the years. (Yes, I tend to be a collector.) So, I simply stored everything in the garage, which quickly filled up so much that we couldn't get our cars into it.



I told my wife that once we settled in, I would systematically go through the contents of the garage and get rid of things I didn't really need. But then—you guessed it—I procrastinated!

I procrastinated and procrastinated.

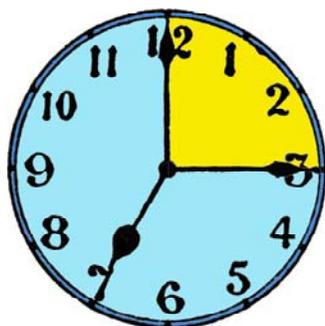
And, procrastinated!

1 Take a moment and explore some of my other Timely Tips: <http://www.arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm>

2 Secord, Paul F, and Backman, Carl W. (1964), *Social Psychology*, (New York: McGraw-Hill).

Then one day, I found out how to stop procrastinating. I was talking to a friend of mine about my garage. He said to me, “I think you should use the Take-15 technique.” I asked him what it was and he said: “It’s simple. Pick a specific time of the day that you know you will be able to devote 15 minutes to a task every day until it is completed. And then religiously work on your task, every day at the same time, for at least 15 minutes, until it is finished.”

“Hmmm,” I thought. “That’s worth a try.” Since I get up around seven in the morning, I decided to make that my 15 minute session every day.



I began the next morning with a strong commitment to spend at least 15 minutes every day (more if I was in the mood) cleaning the garage. I would do this until I had it all done. Recalling my discussion with Dr. Second, I decided to follow his example—I would spend at least that much time every day without fail, even if I didn’t accomplish much.

Further, I decided to start with the corner of the garage, near the side-door, where I had a built-in tool bench. I figured I would systematically work my way around the garage. Some days I spent more than 15 minutes. But, I always spent *at least* 15 minutes.

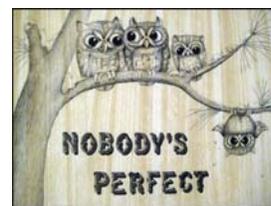
Guess what? After 43 days, the garage was sparkling clean. We could even put both of our cars in it!

Many times since that successful Take-15, I’ve applied the same technique in my office. And, you know what? It works! I’ve been able to accomplish more tasks quickly and efficiently than I ever did in the past. I even designated time to write articles and a couple of books—something I’ve always wanted to do.

Overcome Procrastination Obstacles With Take-15

Meanwhile, there are many obstacles to getting things done that lead people to procrastinate. Here are some suggestions for dealing with three of the most typical:

- ◆ It is hard to avoid procrastination when what you have to accomplish is very boring, repetitive, or downright uninteresting. Those are the kinds of things that people keep putting off. But, if you apply Take-15 and delight yourself with a self-pat on the back for every 15-minute success each day, it’s amazing how systematically you will get it done.
- ◆ It’s also hard to avoid procrastinating when you have a very large and complex task. The trick here is to break it into pieces, sort them from urgent to not so urgent, and then attack each piece with Take-15, one piece at a time. Additionally, if you are a manager, you could delegate some pieces to staff members and have each of them Take-15 on a piece of the task.
- ◆ Finally, it’s really hard to avoid procrastinating when you are a perfectionist! You just know in advance that whatever you do won’t be perfect enough! So, you are reluctant to even try, because you don’t want it to be *imperfect*. Well, get over it! Take-15 and simply start doing what you are avoiding. Hang a big sign above your desk that says “Nobody’s Perfect!”



Attack Procrastination With Take-15!

