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You're listening to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast with Cindy Bidar. This is Episode Number 27, and today we're talking about procrastination. If you've ever put something off for later, you're going to want to listen in to find out not only why we procrastinate, and I'm calling myself out here too, but also some science back strategies you can use to get things done instead.

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business, even if you don't have a big team or a six-figure ads budget, we'll help you design smart systems, take consistent action and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

Welcome back to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast. I am your host, Cindy Bidar, and I am a professional procrastinator. I have decades of experience and I have perfected my methods. Maybe you can relate. Before we get started though, I want to let you know that you will find show notes and recommended resources for this episode at TinyCourseEmpire.com/27. I also have a Procrastination Busting Worksheet for you that you can download right on that page. If you're new to the show, welcome, I'm glad to have you here. Be sure to hit that subscribe button so you don't miss any episodes. Next week, we're going to kick off a brand new series all about building a six-figure business, and you're not going to want to miss it, but that's next week.

This week is all about procrastination, which as I said, is something I've struggled with my entire life, and it turns out that's actually part of the problem, because even though I have procrastinated and continue to procrastinate in many situations. I also rarely miss a deadline, I run a successful business and life is generally really good, so despite my procrastination tendencies, I've rarely seen any negative impact from it, other than it really frustrates my poor husband, who is the complete opposite of a procrastinator, and I've got to tell you, when you have 50-plus years of evidence that procrastination isn't hurting anything, there's very little motivation for me to change.

In fact, my friend Angela tells me all the time that it's okay to just be the way I am and that I should learn to work with my personality traits instead of trying to change them. In other words, what if I just plan to procrastinate. If I need to get this podcast episode to Igor, for example, for editing by Friday, then I should just schedule it for recording on Friday and relieve myself of the pressure. Earlier in the week, Kayti Christian writes on The Good Trade about how she uses planned

procrastination in this way to get her most important projects done. I'm going to put the link to that article in the show notes if you want to check it out, but she starts by saying that she never procrastinates accidentally. It's always purposeful, which means that she chooses the projects to procrastinate on and she makes sure that she gives herself enough time to do good work anyway. It's limited time, but it's enough for her, and I'm going to admit that kind of sounds like a really good plan at first, I mean, it's probably the easiest approach, but on another level, it really doesn't work for me. Now I get Angela's point about not being too hard on myself, and there's even some logic to Kayti Christian's plan, but the result of that kind of scheduling is just too stressful for me.

I worry about an emergency. For example, say I do schedule my podcast recording for Friday, I know it takes me about an hour or so to record, so I can easily get that done first thing in the morning, but what if something happens and I can't record on Friday morning, what if the dog gets sick and I have to take him to the vet, what if I get sick and I lose my voice, What if my laptop crashes. Isn't it better to have it finished ahead of time so that no matter what happens, I'm not trying to record a podcast on a borrowed computer at 9PM on a Friday night. Now you might be saying, Okay, but the mind candy... So what... Aren't there worse things to worry about, the world is not going to end if the podcast doesn't publish right on time, so you're right, of course. But there's a snowball effect that happens when my schedule is that tight. If I get behind on the podcast recording, that means I have to fit it in somewhere else, which might push back my schedule for emails or for course creation. The downstream effects are much bigger hassles and I don't want to have to deal with them.

Another reason I prefer not to procrastinate is because I know I don't turn in my best work when I wait until the last minute. Procrastinating means I don't have time to really edit and review my show notes or whatever resource I've created, and I don't like that, I don't like that feeling. We're going to dig into that a little bit more later, because I know that there are some of you out there listening right now who are saying to yourself, but I work best under pressure. I'm going to tell you that you don't, but I'm going to save that for later in the show, so stick with me. Anyway, for me, working with my procrastination is not something I want to do. I'd much rather build a habit of getting things done ahead of time instead, so this week, I took a deep dive into the research about procrastination, what causes it? And how to eliminate it, or at least reduce it.

I don't think it's something that can be completely eliminated. In fact, studies have shown that most of us admit to procrastinating, at least sometimes, even my husband who gets so frustrated with me is guilty of procrastinating on things like bookkeeping or other tasks that he really doesn't want to do. College students

seem to be the biggest procrastinators. They report up to 90% procrastination, but even CEOs of billion-dollar corporations admit to procrastinating at least some of the time, so if you have a tendency to procrastinate on important stuff like I sometimes do, you're definitely not alone. The question is, what can we both do to decrease the amount of time we spend procrastinating.

So in my research this week, I started out by asking why do we procrastinate in the first place, and I came up with a lot of reasons, and some of them really make a lot of sense to me, Anne-Laure Le Cunff lists eight reasons why people procrastinate, and she says that the more of these triggers that exist for a given task, the more likely we are to put that task off, so the triggers are boredom, frustration, difficulty, stress, ambiguous-ness, lack of structure, lack of reward, and lack of meaning. Let's look at each one and talk about what that might look like in your life and what looks like in my life.

Boredom is those tedious tasks like laundry or bookkeeping or washing windows that just drag on and just have no redeeming qualities whatsoever. I've been procrastinating on washing windows for five years since we've lived in this house, I don't think I've ever done it, so... Boredom is definitely a factor for me. I don't want to do things that are boring, and you probably don't either.

Frustration is another big one. Years ago, I worked for a client who had purchased a new page builder that was just in beta, and I was supposed to make sales pages for her, and this page builder was just buggy. It was just not ready for prime time. And it was a struggle, and it was very frustrating to use, and you can believe that I put off building those sales pages for as long as possible because I just didn't want to deal with that buggy software. So, if you are frustrated with something, you're much less likely to prioritize doing it, that's going to be the thing that you keep pushing back on your schedule because you know that it's going to be frustrating and you just don't want to face that.

Difficulty is another reason you might be procrastinating, some things are just harder to do, and if you're faced with something that you don't think you're up to, then you're definitely not going to want to dig in and get started on it. That's for sure. I think there's a sweet spot there where something is just challenging enough to be engaging. In other words, it doesn't fall into the boredom category, but it's not so challenging that it's difficult, because if you get past that difficulty point and you're not going to want to do it either so you've got to find that sweet spot, I guess.

Stress is another reason why, and Laura says that we procrastinate. When I was freelancing, I bumped into this quite a bit, especially when I was working for a

particularly picky client. I used to design landing pages for one client, and I never was able to nail her branding, now I'm not a designer for one thing, so that was part of the problem. But her branding just didn't resonate with me, I didn't get it. I understand really the look that she was going for, so she would ask me to design these landing pages and I would finally get it done and she would go behind me and change the whole thing, which made me feel like a complete and utter failure. So that was not something that I was really up for, I didn't really want to put myself in that position. So those were the kinds of projects that I most procrastinated on because I found them stressful.

Ambiguousness, that's when you really don't know what the goal is that you're even trying to achieve. When you don't have a very clearly defined project, it's really difficult to motivate yourself to get started on it.

Lack of structure is when you know the goal, but you don't know what the steps are to get there, so that might mean that you are trying to do something new in your business. Maybe you are trying to start a blog, or you're trying to launch an affiliate program and you don't really know even what needs to go into it, you know what your goal is, you know what you're going after. You don't know the steps to get there, so that lack of structure can cause you to procrastinate.

Lack of reward. The thing that comes to mind with lack of reward is doing taxes. How many people procrastinate on doing their taxes. I have definitely done this, and I'm full on going to blame lack of reward, I have no logical reason why I want to sit down and do my taxes when I know I'm going to have to pay them money, there is no reward in that for me. So what is there to motivate me to sit down and do my taxes... Absolutely none. So if you're not finding a reward in that project, then you might be procrastinating on it.

And finally, lack of meaning and according to And lower over at NLA, and I'm going to link to this article in the show notes for you, but according to her, this lack of meaning is really personal and that makes sense to me. What's meaningful to you might not be meaningful to someone else. I run into this with my poor suffering husband, who is not the procrastinator when he has a project that he's working on that requires my input, it doesn't have any meaning for me, I didn't initiate the project, I'm not maybe all in on it, but he needs some input for me to finish the project that he has started. And he has to wait on me a lot because I procrastinate doing it because it doesn't have that intrinsic meaning for me.

Now, I also have some other reasons that I found for procrastinating, and these make a lot of sense too, maybe you feel overwhelmed if you have too much to do, then you can end up procrastinating. This for me, usually ends up with, I think I'm

going to go take a nap, and that's my preferred procrastination method when I'm feeling overwhelmed, when my to-do list gets too long. I talked about this in a previous episode about getting past your overwhelm, and I will link to that in the show notes so you can go back and listen to that.

If you like perfectionism, which we talked about last week, is also a reason to procrastinate. What if this project that you're working on doesn't turn out the way you wanted it to turn out. What if you just can't get it right? There's no motivation there. If you think that you're not going to be able to live up to your own standards and a fear of criticism. What if you put yourself out there and you launch that product, or you publish that blog post, or you start your YouTube channel and somebody criticizes you. What if somebody comes along and says, You're not good enough, or that they don't like what you've done, or they buy your program and they want a refund, that fear of criticism can hold you back from even wanting to start.

So I want to walk through an example here because if you tend to procrastinate, there are some ways that you can begin to change that habit, so let's look at an example of something you might be procrastinating on, something I've procrastinated on in the past, for sure. And we'll see how we can work with these procrastination triggers to actually get past it and get the project done.

So imagine you have this project that you're procrastinating on, maybe it's starting your mailing list, I procrastinated on this for years, and maybe you are listening and you're thinking, Oh yeah, I should probably do that too. So if that's you, this is for you. If not, imagine a situation where you are procrastinating on a particular project. Let's look at the triggers that might be causing that, so if we go through the list of triggers that we just talked about, you're probably feeling frustration. You're working with new software, maybe you don't understand how it works, maybe you are testing different softwares and you're getting confused between which one does what. Absolutely, frustration is absolutely coming into play if you are procrastinating on starting a new mailing list or starting a new blog or building a new website. Maybe difficulty is coming into play, you've never done this before, you don't understand how the software works, it's definitely difficult.

It's a skill that you don't yet have. You might be stressed out if you're worried that you're going to do it wrong, or if you're anxious because it's not done yet. It might be a lack of structure, when you're brand new, you don't have all the steps to get there, you don't know what needs to happen, you don't fully understand the pathway to get from where you're at to the goal that you have. So that lack of structure comes into play, you literally don't know what to do next. So you're frustrated, it's hard to do, you're stressed out and you don't really know what steps

take or in what order, that's a pretty good recipe for procrastination. I think I would definitely be putting that project on hold in favor of something else. So what can you do about it, how can you get past that procrastination.

Well, first, you have to be able to recognize when you're actually procrastinating, this was a real light bulb moment for me not too long ago. We all have particular things that we do to avoid getting the work done, and it's important that you're able to identify that moment that you wander into procrastination territory, so when I figured this out, it was like a light bulb went off, like I said. It was really kind of that moment where I thought, Oh, now I get it, now I understand what's happening in my brain. And now that I can recognize it. Now that I see it, I can't unsee it. So I recognize when I'm doing it. For me, procrastination looks like organizing, if I'm putting off a difficult project or something that I'm otherwise avoiding, you're going to find me cleaning up my Evernote account or rebuilding my to-do list or completely restructuring my Dropbox folders, that kind of work. That's my brain off the hook because it feels productive, even though it's not what I intended to do or what I plan to do, and it's probably the least important thing I could be doing at that very moment. So when I find myself doing those things, I'm able to stop and think, Should I really be doing this right now, or am I procrastinating on something else, I'm able to re-direct my energies.

It also helps to know your own rhythms, and I have talked about this many times before, I talk about this a lot in Practical Productivity for Online Entrepreneurs, we all have certain times of the day when we are more creative or better able to focus. For me, that's first thing in the morning, you will most often find me writing or recording a course or a podcast in the early morning hours, because if I try to do it later in the day, I am just not as focused. That means that if I know I have to write an email, for example, or create a workbook for a new course, I had better do it first thing in the morning. If I wait until later in the day, it's not going to happen. So ask yourself, when are you most likely to be able to focus on the important projects in your business, be aware of those hours and make sure that you're not spending those on other activities instead of the real work. Save your procrastination, save those other activities for later when you are less able to focus.

One thing that works really well for me too is to commit to just five minutes, I've talked about this with friends of mine before, if I'm procrastinating writing a blog post, for example, or creating a sales page or even folding my laundry, I can just tell myself that I only have to do it for five minutes. That's it. That's all I'm committing to. And this works because chances are really good that once I start on the Task, I'm going to keep going. Getting started is hard. That's what I'm avoiding. But keeping going, once I'm past that hurdle is pretty easy. Once I open up my Word document, once I open up that sales page, once I get the laundry out of the dryer,

it's easy to keep going. It's that first step that stalls me out, so if I commit to just five minutes, I'm usually good to go.

Something else I like to do is make it a game. If you're even just a little bit competitive, and if you're in business, you probably are a little bit competitive, then this might work for you too. Here's how it works, pick a project or a task that you've been procrastinating on and then set a timer and see how much you can get done in 30 minutes or before your next meeting, or will you wait for dinner to finish cooking? I do this with small tasks I'm putting off, like responding to emails or entering sales stats into a spreadsheet. It works really well with repetitive work, too. In fact, that's how I learned this process for myself way back when, when I spent my days doing mind-numbing tasks in a hot factory. I was a box maker before moving up to purchasing, by the way, I used to challenge myself to see how many boxes I could make before lunch or in five minutes, it really did make the time go by faster if you are routinely putting off those mindless repetitive tasks. Then use them to challenge your brain. I think it'll help you too.

And finally, you can plan for your procrastination triggers ahead of time. What I mean by that is, let's use an example from a few minutes ago of procrastinating on starting an email list. We said that the main causes for procrastinating on that particular project might be frustration, difficulty and lack of structure, so knowing that it's pretty easy to re-organize the project to eliminate all of those things. So for example, if you're frustrated about a project, that frustration is coming from having to use unfamiliar software like a new landing page builder or a new email platform, then you can take the time to learn that first. All software vendors, at least the good ones, have tutorials you can watch or you can go over to YouTube and do a search for how to use Thrive Architect or how to set up an auto-responder in Convert Kit or whatever you're frustrated about, I guarantee you will find videos that will help, so that's going to eliminate the frustration or at least reduce it.

Lack of structure is probably the biggest trigger in this particular project because when you don't even know what steps to take, it's pretty hard to not get overwhelmed about it, a little. Research is going to go a long way here. Make sure you're really clear on what steps you need to take before you dive in and try to get started. Once you have the steps and you know exactly what you need to do, you won't be so quick to put it off for later.

And finally, difficulty. If you've never set up a lead magnet before, it's definitely going to feel hard for you, and that's going to make it even more likely that you'll put it off, but the only way to make it easier is to just do it. So cut yourself a little slack here and schedule some quiet time when you can just sit down and commit

to learning it, and that five-minute rule might help here, just commit to spending five minutes on the project, and that's going to help you get past that difficulty piece.

And one more thing, I want to come back to this I work best under pressure thing that we talked about in the beginning of this episode. I think we've all claimed this at some point, I know I have, but it's a myth, no one works better under pressure. Pressure adds stress, which causes you to make more mistakes and not perform as well as you would have if you were given more time. Now, there's a reason that we think we perform better under pressure, and that's because of something called cognitive dissonance. Here's what that means. Cognitive dissonance happens when your reality doesn't match what you want or believe to be true. When you know you're supposed to be working on a project, when you committed to working on that project, but instead you're doing something else. In other words, you're procrastinating. Your brain doesn't like that, it creates a feeling of dissonance or incongruity in your mind, your actions don't match up with your plans, and that's not a thing your brain can deal with. So it offers up a justification, it tells you that you work best under pressure anyway, and not only that, but your brain will very conveniently forget all the times this last minute work didn't turn out so well, and instead it will remind you of the two or three times that it did. Again, because of that cognitive dissonance, it simply you can't deal with the reality being different from your belief, so offers a different reality, one that does match and it lets you think that you work best under pressure.

But here's the thing, there is no scientific evidence that anyone actually does better Work under pressure, at least not under pressure of procrastination. While it's true that all kinds of people perform well under pressure, we have Olympic athletes and brand surgeons and hostage negotiators, and they all do well in high pressure situations, but that's not the same thing as procrastination-driven pressure. The pressure we create when we procrastinate instead causes stress and anxiety, rather than drive and determination. According to Psychology Professor Bill Knaus, who has written more than 20 books on this subject, this is destructive stress versus the productive stress the Olympic athlete and the brain surgeon feel, and it's this destructive stress of procrastinating on a project that leads to doing work that just is not as good as it could have been. So if you are telling yourself that you work best under pressure anyway and using that to justify procrastinating on a project, just be aware that it's not true, it's your brain changing your thoughts to match the reality. In other words, your brain is lying to you, which it does a lot, it turns out.

Okay, so let's recap. If you find that you have a tendency to procrastinate on those important projects that would move your business forward, then be aware that

there are 11 reasons, 11 triggers that you may be doing that. Those triggers are boredom, frustration, difficulty, stress, ambiguousness, lack of structure, lack of reward, lack of meaning, a feeling of overwhelm, perfectionism or a fear of criticism. There may be more, there may be more that are unique to you, but those are the big ones, those are the big 11. When you are aware of those and can identify those ahead of time, then you can plan for them. Plan for how you're going to eliminate that boredom from a task, plan for how you are going to reduce the stress of working on a particular project and you will be much less likely to procrastinate on it. Also, make sure that you structure your days so that you are doing your most important work when you have the most ability to focus. And finally, don't let your brain tell you that You work better under pressure anyway, because we know that that is not the truth. That's your brain just trying to protect you, it's doing its job, but don't buy into it, don't let it tell you that you work best under pressure because you don't.

And now I would love to hear from you, head over to TinyCourseEmpire.com/27 to find the show notes and all of the articles and research and resources that I talked about in this episode, and while you're there, leave me a comment. I would love to know if you are a procrastinator, do you procrastinate or are you one of those people like my husband who gets things off of your plate very, very quickly, the minute something is assigned, you are on it. If so, I'm jealous and I want to know your secrets, so I share them with me or share what you have learned about procrastination over at TinyCourseEmpire.com/27. And if you have a friend or a colleague who could use this advice today, please be sure to share it with them as well, and, oh, by the way, if you are wondering, I recorded this on Thursday, I will mark that down as a point for anti-procrastination.

Have a terrific day everyone, and I will talk to you again next week.

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