

PROCRASTINATION OR, I WILL GET TO THIS PAPER LATER...

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, fellow speaker and members of the Athenaeum Society. I gladly confess being aware of the necessity of this paper since prior to Christmas. I have gone through the usual machinations in search of a topic, like Pinterest "HISTORY" page. I've had a great deal of luck there. Google searches. How might something be connected to Hopkinsville, Kentucky? By my own admission, I arrived at my topic before January 1, 2018. I was a bit sidetracked by some unexpected "pop-up" topic possibilities, but I stuck to it. I began a little research. I ordered a book. By February I was convinced, certain, that this was to be my topic. Ironically, heading home one snowy afternoon, I ended up continuing to drive, on past the house, because there it was! My topic was a dedicated segment on Ted Talks. I love Ted Talks! I downloaded the Ted Talks app on my phone, promising myself that I would listen to it again.

A brief interlude. We are talking about writing a paper and presenting it. I remember, vividly, a Circuit Court murder trial in front of a certain Judge (who will remain nameless)... Well, that's not true, he has a lot of names. Judge Atkins, in chambers, prior to closing remarks, ordered that each side would have thirty minutes for close. Now, here's the irony: There was a time in my life, my public speaking life, that I would have cringed at the thought of having to fill thirty minutes with thoughts and air. Interestingly enough, I knew at that time when he said it that this was going to

be tough, if not impossible, to cram all that I wanted to say, needed to say, into thirty minutes. I am an attorney, words are my business. I say this now, at this point, because you know what I know. Ultimately, you've got to put in the work on and for the paper, whatever your topic, and occupying a space and a time in words in speech for twenty five to thirty minutes is NOT difficult, in fact, it's relatively easy in that it's a large part of what I do.

By last week, I had my iPad handy with the book I had downloaded. I had some great ideas for internet research, and I could readily access my Ted Talks app. So here's some insight into my normal day. I drop my daughter, Chandler, at school at eight or a little before. I spend about 90% of the business day at the Courthouse. In a nutshell, if there's a court open, I am typically in it, called to it or inject myself into - Duncan. The balance of my days, whatever remains, is spent in a whirlwind at the office because people are magically aware that I am there - somehow. I go home. I do like a glass of red wine with dinner. Then, back to the office. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have my nights to catch up and get some general idea of what the next day holds. I end the night, vampire that I am, by going to the Courthouse and then going to child support to sign pleadings. My days and nights are full. I would love to impress you with stories of how productive my nights are at the office. Sometimes I sits and thinks. Sometimes I just sits. This is important for you to know because, at a minimum, I am in a productive environment. Picasso didn't paint every day, but he did walk through

his studio each day and he would touch a canvas or pick up a brush. Suffice it to say, there has been plenty of time and opportunity to work out this paper.

By late last week, my paper was on my mind – more. I knew that it would be the weekend before I could really jump in with both feet. I made it to Saturday. I got to the office by 8:30 or so on Saturday morning. I had laid out all my other work on the conference room table, just to sort it. That took a while. I'm on call at the moment, and I had one officer stop by the office and another call. Mike Foster came over and we met for thirty minutes or so. Damn, it's already 3:00 p.m. What time do the Cats play? I should grill. I need to grill. The Cats won and then we had a horrible storm. Sunday was church and then Bryleigh's birthday party in the afternoon. I knew that I could get to the office Sunday night, and I did. I neglected to mention that my oldest, Mary Thom, started watching *The Office* on Netflix. Candidly, television is something of a foreign commodity to me, but she had just started while she sat at the counter in the kitchen. By Monday night, I am on Season 3, Episode 3.

Procrastination, gentlemen, from the prefix “pro” meaning “forward”, and the suffix, “crastinus” – “until the next day”. Most succinctly stated, “ the avoidance of doing a task that needs to be accomplished”. We all do it to various degrees, for various things, at various times, for various reasons and with various outcomes. Some of us are better at it than others. Some of us thrive on it, and it affects all of us. Google it. In

.38 seconds you will get 20, 700,000 hits. Check out Amazon books. Boom! 3000 plus books on the topic.

Procrastination is not new to us. As unique as we humans are, and yes, there is theory that dates a spike in serious consideration of the topic to both the Industrial Revolution and even more recently our HTML mentality, Mental Floss Studios surmises that it's reasonable to posit that the first bout of procrastination arrived the same day as the first assigned task. Benjamin Franklin: "You may delay, but time will not, and lost time is never found again.". Martin Luther: "How soon not now becomes never.". Having been commissioned, Mozart wrote the overture for Don Giovanni the night before it premiered. Apparently, the ink was still wet on the sheet music and it was performed without rehearsal. Leonardo daVinci: "It is easier to resist at the beginning than at the end.". My research would seem to indicate that daVinci was notoriously unfocused. He shows up in numerous lists as a legendary procrastinator. The Mona Lisa took sixteen years to complete, and a number of his works, upon closer study, are technically incomplete. He was a renowned doodler. At this point in my research, I found a great article on what your pop-tart preference says about you (Cherry, by the way) and watched Episode 4 of Season 3 of The Office to reward myself. Suffice it to say that our world does not lack for distractions.

So, let me tell you a little about Tim Urban. Tim Urban was formally educated at Harvard. In 2013, he began writing, using stick figure illustrations in a blog called

Wait But Why. He has become one of the Internet's most popular writers, as well as a nationally renowned speaker with speaking credits like Google, Facebook, Uber, Zappos and schools such as MIT, Brown and the Wharton School. Wait But Why receives over 1.5 million visitors per month with some months topping ten million. His articles are on a wide range of topics, from why we procrastinate, to why artificial intelligence is scary, why we haven't seen any signs of aliens to why it's hard for him to pee when there's someone at the urinal next to him. Wait But Why, the book, was my purchase in preparation for this paper, specifically Tim Urban's Ted Talk on why we procrastinate.

Tim Urban is NOT a psychologist or a sociologist. He first begins by noting that there are pseudo procrastinators and real ones. He defines the difference as being that for a real procrastinator, procrastination isn't optional. It's something they don't know how not to do. In his illustration of a non-procrastinator's brain, which exists only in fiction, you see a stick figure behind the wheel of a ship. This is The Rational Decision Maker. The Rational Decision Maker says to himself and others that he does things that make sense. He thinks long-term. He proclaims that he is not a child. To contrast, let's take a look at the procrastinator's brain. Here again, you have the captain of the ship, the purported Rational Decision Maker. He makes all the same claims as set out in the fictional non-procrastinator's brain but there is an additional character present. He is co-existing with a pet: The Instant Gratification Monkey. The monkey's

sole job is to make it impossible for Rational Decision Maker to do his job. Try as he might, the Rational Decision Maker constantly struggles with steering the ship while the Instant Gratification Monkey distracts and wants to steer. The Rational Decision Maker says, "This is a perfect time to get some work done." The Monkey replies, "Nope." The Monkey would rather watch YouTube videos on mythical creatures that then lead to pictures of television stars of the 80's and what they look like now. The Rational Decision Maker, of course, has to look because, after all, the title of the BuzzFeed article said that you would not believe what they look like now. This is the Monkey trying to take the wheel, and he will if allowed. If he can't get you right off the bat, the Monkey oftentimes fools The Rational Decision Maker into allowing him to steer with "constructive distractions" such as re-organizing your emails or, better yet, to-do lists... Per Urban, "...the Instant Gratification Monkey is the last creature who should be in charge of decisions. He thinks only about the present, ignoring lessons from the past and disregarding the future altogether, and he concerns himself entirely with maximizing the ease and pleasure of the current moment." The Instant Gratification Monkey is a highly unqualified navigator and his only destination is what's known as The Dark Playground. This is where leisure activities happen at times when leisure activities are not supposed to be happening. Sometimes The Rational Decision Maker can get out, and sometimes he can't. There is, however, one thing that scares the hell out of The Instant Gratification Monkey; a third character.

Gentlemen, The Panic Monster is dormant most of the time, but he suddenly wakes up when a deadline gets too close or where there is danger of public embarrassment or humiliation. You know, a career disaster or some other horrible consequence. What a motivator! But how else can you explain the same person who can't or hasn't written an opening paragraph over a three month period suddenly having the ability to stay up all night and write a lengthy paper? This is the story of a boy who stayed up all night on No Doze to study for a final at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture. As he parked and ran into the building, when he sat down, his pupils were pulsing in conjunction with his heartbeat...

As evidenced previously by the enormous amount of information available, in the past twenty plus years procrastination has seen a burst of empirical interest and study. There exists a major misperception that procrastination is an innocuous habit. Mark Twain: "Never put off until tomorrow what can done the day after tomorrow just as well.". Some are of the thought that what matters is that the job gets done. Others will tell you that they work best under pressure. The book, *The Art of Procrastination* espouses that people can dawdle to their advantage by restructuring their to-do lists so that they are always accomplishing something of value. Is that self fulfilling procrastination? Psychologists take issue with this view. If progress on a task can take many forms, procrastination is the absence of progress. Maybe.... A study conducted at Case Western Reserve involved college students, academic performance,

stress, and general health. Initially, the procrastinators seemed to fair well, presumably from putting off work to pursue more pleasurable activities. In the end, it appears that the stress factors weighed more heavily on the procrastinators than the others. A study published in the *Journal of Research in Personality* took a group of students into the lab. They were all told that at the end of the session they would be engaging in a math puzzle. Some of them were told that this puzzle was a meaningful test of their cognitive abilities. Others were told that the test would be meaningless and fun. They were all provided an interim period during which they could prepare for the for the task or play video games. Interestingly, the chronic procrastinators that were told that the puzzle/task was meaningless faired just as well as those deemed non-procrastinators, but it's more than labels. In sum, the serious procrastinators only procrastinated when the test was labeled as meaningful or important.

There are so many theories about procrastination. Some simplify procrastination by basing it in time management. This is the temporal side. Other take issue with this theory because if it were that simple, then why the guilt associated the decision to delay – letting The Instant Gratification Monkey play. In addition, if it were just time management, why don't we learn from it and avoid it occurring time and again. This is the emotional side. Recently, research into procrastination has ventured beyond temporal and emotional study to neuropsychology. The frontal systems of the brain are known to be involved in a number of processes that overlap with self-regulation.

Problem solving, planning, self control are behaviors associated with this part of the brain. Subjects in this testing were first assessed for procrastination. They were then tested on nine clinical subscales of executive functioning: impulsivity, self-monitoring, planning and organization, activity shifting, task initiation, task monitoring, emotional control, working memory and general orderliness. The researchers expected to find a link between procrastination and the first four. As it happened, procrastinators showed significant associations with all nine.

Hear this psychological perspective: The pleasure principle may be responsible for procrastination; one may prefer to avoid negative emotions, and to delay stressful tasks. As the deadline for their target of their procrastination grows closer, they are more stressed and may, thus, decide to procrastinate more to avoid stress. Some psychologists cite such behavior as a mechanism for coping with the anxiety associated with starting or completing any task or decision. This is either really dirty or it means that procrastination is an endless cycle. I don't know because I was watching Season 3, Episode 5 of *The Office* while I typed it.

Let's talk about the stress. As I said, and you all know – we all procrastinate. You know, maybe procrastination can be regarded as a useful way to identify what is important. I mean, on the whole, it tends to be that we procrastinate on more important things. Procrastination has been found to be associated with health problems. Stress, depression, anxiety are but a few. Chronic procrastination may also be an indicator of

deeper seated issues, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder is but one example, and this disorder is associated with the prefrontal lobe of the brain where The Instant Gratification Monkey lives.

Distractions come in any number of forms. Many are personal. A good book or a movie may be something that feeds The Instant Gratification Monkey. In my case, most recently, *The Office*. These are there. They are always in reach. And then there are other, in your face distractions. I am not a Facebook person. I first explored this social media for the purposes of putting together our class reunion. It was incredibly helpful. I quickly learned that just as my classmates could find me, so could so, so many of the people that I prosecute. At least it was in the nature of a “friend request”. Despite my lack of full understanding, we use Facebook everyday at the office. It is amazing what people do and post everyday, obviously believing that what they are doing is private. I mention this just to reiterate the wealth of distractions which surround us all the time. This is not an Instant Gratification Monkey, it’s an Instant Gratification Gorilla.

If someone sends me a friend request, and I have 978 pending, if I don’t confirm, do they know it? Serious guilt about this. I really am not concerned that you are checking in and eating at some restaurant. You don’t have to post a picture. Geez, too personal... My wife and I were on the way to Gatlinburg and my sister-in-law was joining us there. She changed her status on Facebook to “Heading to G’burg to chill

with the fam.”. I commented on her page to please tell everyone where you hide the key to your house and where your valuable stuff is since she was broadcasting to the world she was out of town. Never have I run into such a well-stored of useless videos that drag you in on your feed. All the Fail videos. People falling, or better yet, doing things that can only be prefaced with, “Here, hold my beer.”. I bought 35.00 worth of fishing lures. I know how to catch snakes with a piece of PVC and a shoestring. You know, useful stuff like that... I take this tangent because, in some respects, with all the in-your-face distractions that surround us, we should all be proud that we get anything accomplished.

Ultimately, we are each tasked with self-assessment. Let’s take a quick look at those nine clinical subscales one more time. Impulsivity – I’ve got that covered. Self-monitoring – Hmmmm, I suppose that’s a sliding scale for each of us. Planning and organization, to a certain extent bearing in mind that I don’t create the Docket, but it drives what I do. Activity shifting would have to be a strong point for me. Squirrel! Task initiation and task monitoring would make The Panic Monster my best friend. Emotional control, well, I’ll get back to you on that one. Working memory for me is a gift. I’m like a savant, and probably so out of necessity. General orderliness makes me laugh, because, at the end of the day, I will sometimes put things on my to-do list that I did during the day that were not on my list at the beginning of the day – just to be able to mark them off. We all have our strengths AND weaknesses. Maybe it’s taxes.

Maybe it's the list of things that your wife wants you to do around the house. Ladies, if a man says he going to fix something - he will. There's no need to remind him about it every six months.

There are so, so many books on the matter with some simple and some complicated proposals on addressing procrastination. Most researchers hope to see payoff in better interventions – controlling The Instant Gratification Monkey and keeping The Panic Monster at bay, if you will. Some suggest chopping up tasks into smaller pieces making the task more manageable. Counseling in extreme circumstances to help recognize that the procrastinator is compromising long term aims for quick burst of pleasure. Deadlines and more defined structure are mainstays as solutions, but aren't they the problem, too? Countering the temptation of The Instant Gratification Monkey requires the type of self-regulation that procrastinators lack in the first place. When Victor Hugo was writing *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, he was on a strict deadline for his publisher. Procrastinator that he was, he undertook writing naked. It would prevent him from leaving the room where he wrote. At the end of the day, his staff would return his clothes. One method suggests that you have to dig a little deeper and find some personal meaning in the task. John Dumas, founder of *Entrepreneur On Fire*, when asked about dealing with procrastination responded, “We procrastinate when we don't have a strict schedule to adhere to. As Parkinson's Law states: Tasks will expand to the time allotted. Procrastination will fill in the blanks.” This is from

an article entitled “Beating Procrastination: 72 Successful People Reveal Their Most Powerful Tips”. Number One of 72 is... How about I summarize. I laughed when I read one that suggested that you motivate yourself with enjoyable activities, socializing and constructive hobbies. Well, that’s procrastination!

I have three to-do list apps on my phone. I spent two hours finding those three and sometime I will get around to looking at which one will work best for me. I do believe that as Rational Decision Makers recognizing our areas of weakness is a beginning point. Beyond that, it is truly a matter of finding what works for each of us. We are each as unique in our procrastination as we are human. How we address the issue is, ultimately, up to us individually. Sometimes we are just overwhelmed. Sometimes we may be underwhelmed. I believe, in conclusion, that we all procrastinate. It’s a sliding scale, metered to each of us. The question for me is whether or not I have learned anything from this experience. I will say again, in a technological world that has us as bombarded with distractions by a zoo of Instant Gratification Monkeys, I remain amazed that we are able to accomplish anything. I have research and a brief due tomorrow and an appointment with my Panic Monster. Thank you and goodnight.

Respectfully submitted,

John Lindsey Adams