

# Help Clients Do What They Don't Want to Do

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA

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**Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA**

West Chester, PA

[Ari@TuckmanPsych.com](mailto:Ari@TuckmanPsych.com)

[adultADHDbook.com](http://adultADHDbook.com)

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“Alarms don't work for me, because I just turn them off and then don't do it.”

Or to do list, schedule, fancy app, whiteboard. . .

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## Knowing Is Always Easier

- Listing strategies is easy
  - And kind of insulting
- But people are complicated
  - A lot can happen between the intention and the action
  - Or the knowing and the doing
  - Our minds can be messy

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A problem well defined is a problem half-solved.

What, *exactly*, is the problem here?

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## Work It From Every Angle

- Performance is multi-determined
  - What exactly is getting in your way—in *this* situation?
  - Pull as many levers as you can—it all adds up
  - Some improvement is probably helpful, but how much do you need?
- Manage the social impacts of whatever remains
  - How much of the problem is others' expectations or interpretations?
- Goal is to strengthen agency and self-esteem

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NO, THAT'S FAKE  
PRODUCTIVITY

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### Is That Actually Worth Doing Now?

- **Procrastivity**—doing marginally productive tasks as a justification for procrastinating on more cognitively or emotionally demanding tasks (Russ Ramsay, PhD)
  - See, I'm getting stuff done here!
- What are your favorite procrastivity tasks?
  - Checking email, news, Slack, social media
  - Putting some things away
  - Loading the dishwasher

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### Be on the Lookout

- Look for the times when you feel yourself sliding into procrastivity
  - Is this really what I should be doing now?
  - Am I doing *this* or not doing *something else*?
  - Am I going *towards* something or *away* from something?
- Accept and tolerate the discomfort of the harder task
  - Remind yourself of the benefits
  - Can you talk yourself into at least starting?

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### Put It to Work

- Identify your favorite procrastivity tasks and when you're most likely to use them.
- Identify the tasks that you're most tempted to avoid with procrastivity tasks.
- Notice those times that you're tempted to slide off onto a procrastivity task—what can you tell yourself to resist?

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## JUST BITE THE BULLET ON THINGS YOU HATE

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### Do What You Hate

- It's tempting to conveniently avoid what you don't want to do
  - ADHD, anxiety, depression make the boring stuff even more painful
  - This tempts trouble—and guarantees a guilty conscience
- Make it a regular habit to do these dreaded tasks—actually plan where and when
  - It's more likely to happen if you plan it for earlier in the day
  - What small reward might tilt the odds?
  - Take a moment to give yourself credit—and counteract the old guilt

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### It Gets Subtle

- If ambivalent (or worse) about a task, we may not put it in our schedule or set an alarm in the first place
  - Motivated forgetfulness?
  - Avoidance masquerading as procrastination?
  - Not actually a time management or memory problem
- Accept the fact that people with interesting lives need to sometimes do the boring stuff
  - Remind yourself of all the benefits (not just the removal of negatives)

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### Don't Suffer More Than You Have To

- Don't burn extra mental energy (and make it feel worse) by complaining about how boring it is
  - Doing it may not be optional, but suffering is
  - Remind yourself of how good it will feel to know you did it
- Break up the task by time or by accomplishment
- Add other fun things
  - Music, podcast, videos, call a friend, new location, some variation

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### Put It to Work

- What boring tasks are you kind of avoiding? What price are you paying for that?
- Write out how your life is better when these dreaded tasks are done. Remind yourself of this when you don't want to do them.
- Identify how you can set yourself up to get to those dreaded tasks.

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### HOW PRODUCTIVE DO YOU REALLY NEED TO BE?

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### What do you want? And what are you willing to do to get it?

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### Let's Think About It

- Greater productivity is a worthy goal
  - Perhaps more for some than others
  - But we could all finetune our methods
- There are various benefits that come from being more productive
  - Tangible, financial, social, personal. . .
  - But also nothing is free

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### The Good Enough Threshold

- Sometimes even partial objective progress creates a significant subjective improvement:
  - Less late, less often → fewer issues with boss
  - Even if a system only works half the time, it's still half better than none
- An achievable goal is much more motivating
  - Understanding and managing your ADHD makes much more seem achievable

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## How Much Should Others Get to Vote?

- Everyone has opinions, but who should be allowed to vote on your level of productivity?
  - To what extent does your productivity have a direct impact on them?
  - Are you equals or do they have more power (votes)?
- Equals need to negotiate in a way that balances productivity and the relationship
  - That balances generosity and assertiveness
  - Or is intentional about imbalanced situations

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## People Pleasing Won't Please You

- Pinning your happiness or self-esteem to others' opinions is costly
  - And disempowering
- Does this person's opinion have tangible effects?
  - Take it seriously but not personally
- Are you (overly) responsible for their happiness here?
  - And what is their agency?

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## Put It to Work

- Identify where your ideas about productivity come from. Do they still serve you well?
- Identify a goal where good enough is good enough.
- Identify a situation where it might be helpful to talk to someone else about their expectations for you.

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BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

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Every intervention is diagnostic.

It's a process.

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Actively look for your successes and good moves.

And make a point of celebrating them. (Seriously.)

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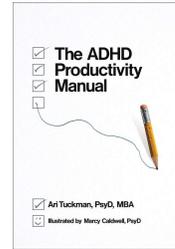
Just keep showing up.

Make today a good day, regardless of what happened yesterday.

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