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Headline: Commentary: Why do you not feel like working from home? You're probably procrastinating more

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(Photo: Unsplash/Mimi Thian)

As raindrops fell gently against our window, the wife was drawn to the convenient placement of our king-sized bed, right next to her home workstation, a 73cm by 50cm table from the popular Swedish DIY furniture store.

She did not resist, falling into its welcoming comforts that immediately embraced the contours of her being.

“So comfortable!” she squealed, “I don’t feel like working today!”

It took some persuasion and a couple of reminders of her 8.45am meeting to crank her engine into motion.

The distance from the bed to the desk was a mere 2cm, but the struggle was very real.

MIXED FEEDBACK TO REMOTE WORKING

Not all occupations provide such a luxury of business continuity through work-from-home options. For those who can afford to, the current coronavirus pandemic has brought about a variety of reactions.

Some love the accompanying sense of freedom and independence, and the fact you do not have to face your colleagues. Others absolutely miss the social interaction and benefits of working together as a team in a physical location.

A University of Innsbruck study showed telecommuting generates higher productivity when employees work on creative projects requiring deep thinking.

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Another study from Stanford University concluded that working from home leads to a 13 per cent performance increase, greater work satisfaction and a 50 per cent drop in employee turnover.



Many companies still seem reluctant to allow their staff to travel, at least internationally. (Photo: Unsplash/Campaign Creators)

For those of us doing so while supervising our children's home-based learning, we are quite certain those researchers did not factor in employees having to multi-task childcare or even eldercare responsibilities.

Indeed, even without including such variables, there are studies that argue lower levels of productivity accompany such arrangements.

Japanese think tank, the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry, concluded employees have trouble adjusting. Remote IT software that is not user-friendly, the loss of instant face-to-face interaction resulting in longer communication times, and a poorly fitted work environment at home all contribute to lower productivity.

Closer to home, the Pulse of the Singapore WorkForce study released in June found 43 per cent of employees aged above 50 report being less productive. This figure was 32 per cent for employees aged below 30.

PROCRASTINATION A BIG CULPRIT

Procrastination may be one of the biggest contributing factors to our lack of productivity. Canadian Associate Psychology Professor Timothy Pychyl says our work behaviours have shifted due to a perceived lack of peer pressure from the rest of our colleagues and the physical absence of our supervisor.

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With such external motivation missing, and left to our own devices, procrastination, defined by the University of Pittsburg Medical Centre as the avoidance of work or necessary tasks by focusing on more satisfying activities, has risen.

While neuroscientists believe procrastination is a result of a battle between the pleasure centre and the decision-making controls of our brain, psychologists think procrastination is a response to how we cope with emotions.



(Photo: Unsplash/Austin Diestel)

At the heart of it, procrastination may be attributed to anxiety. Procrastination helps moderate our feelings of being judged by others, as well as our fear of failure and condemnation of oneself.

While others might perceive us as irresponsible because we postpone work we ought to do right away, our delay helps us avoid pain and instantly affords us relief.

In other words, instead of viewing the challenge as a time management problem, scientists think a sharper focus on how we regulate our emotions and anxieties may tackle the problem better.

PROCRASTINATING IS NOT HELPFUL

We all know procrastination is unhelpful. We might put off a task for the moment, but will eventually have to revisit it because our organisation depends on us to deliver. The increased stress from rushing at the last minute could result in mistakes and decisions made without careful consideration.

Whether physically at work or working from home, one area where we frequently procrastinate in is when having to confront a colleague. Most of us are non-confrontational by nature.

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Addressing an underperforming colleague, a supervisor who overstepped boundaries or even clarifying a misunderstanding are too often put off with the excuse we will find a better time to address the issue yet that opportune chance often never arrives. Meanwhile, the unresolved matter can blow up into our faces.

Procrastination may lead to us to miss deadlines – requiring added resources and colleagues re-deployed to help us complete our work, when many already have much on their plate.

BREAKING OUT OF THE PROCRASTINATION CYCLE

How do we help others break out of the procrastination cycle? For starters, recognise that procrastination has roots in unregulated emotions and anxiety.

Supervisors can help create smaller bite-sized goals that are easily attainable. Find out why your subordinate is procrastinating, especially if it is not typical of that person's character.

You might discover the individual has a fear of being judged, of clarifying a problem or even of being wrong, and this is especially the case in perfectionists.



Two colleagues in a discussion. (Photo: Unsplash)

Individually, one can practise positive self-talk to help clarify and process one's anxieties that lead to procrastination.

Ask yourself what the source of your fear is and if those thoughts are true. Think about whom you could seek help from to share your fears and find solutions through obtaining emotional support.

HOW NAVY SEALS OVERCOME ANXIETIES

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The United States Navy SEALs are a key special operations force in the United States Navy with exceptionally tough qualification standards averaging around a 25 per cent passing rate.

The high standards, coupled with tough training often cause anxiety in trainees, resulting in many dropping out.

Some years back, military psychologists began introducing intervention methods to help trainees overcome their anxieties. The intervention included setting very short-term achievable goals and speaking aloud positively to mitigate fear and negative thoughts.

This simple intervention method helped managed their anxieties and increased the passing rate to 33 per cent.

Some of us cannot understand the increased frequency in our procrastinating behaviour when working from home. We may have concluded our behaviour is a result of our poor work attitude but this may not be the case.

In the midst of this pandemic, it is perfectly normal to have feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. The challenge is whether we take action to tackle the source of our concerns.

After all, if Navy SEALs need help, we all could probably use a little assistance too.

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