



Slashing Procrastination

An excerpt from *Burn Wild: A Writer's Guide to Creative Breakthrough* by Christi Krug

Are you organizing a desk drawer, updating your computer, or sorting paintbrushes instead of working on the thing you should be working on? Welcome to the finger-drumming, toe-tapping, stalled-out world of procrastination.

You can't overcome procrastination by daydreaming. You can't fix it by ignoring it. Good intentions can't correct it. Sheer willpower can't break its steel grip. I have, however (grinning proudly), found an approach that works. Or maybe it just helps me feel better while I'm still procrastinating.

Here is the path:

- 1) Relax.
- 2) Call it.
- 3) Stop judging.
- 4) Seek the meaning.
- 5) Find something good.
- 6) Welcome the resistance.
- 7) Observe the consequences.
- 8) Determine what you need.
- 9) Connect with the bigger picture.

Let's take a closer look at these steps.

Relax. Remember that a creative journey begins in the Playground. Maybe you're pressing too hard. Breathe.

Call it. If you're procrastinating, be honest and admit it. You can't deal with the problem if you're pretending it's not there.

Stop judging. If you never complete your task, at least you can stop taking yourself so seriously.

Seek the meaning behind the resistance. In *Writing On Both Sides of the Brain*, Henriette Anne Klauser explains that whenever you feel resistance, there is always a message in it.

I have found many reasons for resistance, such as:

- The need for incubation. You might be dragging your heels because you need incubation time. Dream Kid requires stretches of undemanding time in order to formulate her thoughts.
- The discomfort of getting started. There is a sense of confusion that accompanies the beginning of a work of art or fiction.
- Failing. Maybe you are putting off working on a great article idea because you're worried it won't be very good.

- Emotional Pain. For a long time, getting to my autobiographical novel was high on my wish list but low on my action list. I was procrastinating because I didn't want to focus on several painful memories that were integral to the work.
- Missing Pieces. Perhaps you need more information or tools in order to complete the work. This could be as simple as needing stamps or a new sketchbook.
- Fear of Success. Maybe, deep down, you don't really want this project to succeed, because it might change your life in some way.

Identifying fears and rationale can be complicated; it takes time and self-honesty. But once you begin to see the meaning behind your procrastination, you're ready for the next step.

Find something good. Put a positive spin on your procrastination. Whether it's Dr. Codger nitpicking, or the Groke blasting you with icy hopelessness, you can reinterpret the procrastination in a positive light. Maybe your lag time has helped ideas to germinate.

If you can't bring yourself to create, find something you *can* do. Anything counts. Research your topic or visit an art gallery or talk to an artist. Most of all, stop being hard on yourself.

What do I procrastinate doing? Making submissions. I have so many different kinds of writing that I get overwhelmed; it's the same way I feel when sorting a huge load of laundry. My brain doesn't like separating socks out of one basket into different directions. I used to get down on myself for this.

Now, I just remind myself that I'm an idea person. I may not empty the basket quickly, but I fill it with ease, collecting ideas by the load.

When Dr. Codger tells me I'm stupid or indecisive, I tell him I'm gifted, and it's easier for me to act.

When you give yourself credit, you gain new confidence. You'll feel relaxed, positive and ready to move forward. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to create these positive emotions in your writing life—they make all the difference.

Welcome the resistance. Draw a picture or go for a walk and think gently about your resistance. This new outlook can take you from waging a war with yourself to feeling at peace.

Observe the consequences of your procrastination. What's the worst thing that may happen if you don't paint/create/sing/write? What is the worst price you've ever had to pay for procrastinating? On the other hand, what's the best thing that might happen if you take on the job? Visualize your success. See your completed play being performed or your song being sung. Imagine yourself autographing your book at a bookstore event.

Determine what you need to move forward. It's okay to have needs and limitations. Who wouldn't stall, needing tools, information, or a different approach?

Sitting there listening to the ongoing negative litany of your writing enemies is one way to keep you from meeting your own needs.

For my novel, I needed patience and determination to work through emotional material. I let myself talk through difficult points with a counselor and explored them in my journal. Once the healing was underway, I wrote the entire manuscript and started a second book.

Connect with the bigger why that makes you create in the first place. Remind yourself of your hope, dream and talent.

With this kind of courage, you'll never get around to organizing your desk drawer or sorting your paintbrushes. You'll be swept up in the blaze of working toward your dreams.

Spark #1: Make a list of every creative idea you're procrastinating about. Now highlight one idea that speaks to you. Take some action on this idea, however small.

Spark #2: On a sheet of paper, draw a line down the center. On the left write the possible consequences of your procrastination. On the right, list the hoped-for outcomes of taking action. Assess on paper whether it's worth it to seize the day, or whether procrastinating has a bigger payoff.