

PETR LUDWIG
ADELA SCHICKER

THE
END
OF
**PRO
CRASTI
NATION**

PROCRASTINATION =
PUTTING THINGS OFF
INTENTIONALLY OR
HABITUALLY



HOW TO STOP POSTPONING AND LIVE A FULFILLED LIFE

"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something has meaning, regardless of how it turns out."

– V. Havel

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS PROCRASTINATION AND WHY FIGHT IT?

PRO-CRASTINUS

= (LAT.) BELONGING TO TOMORROW

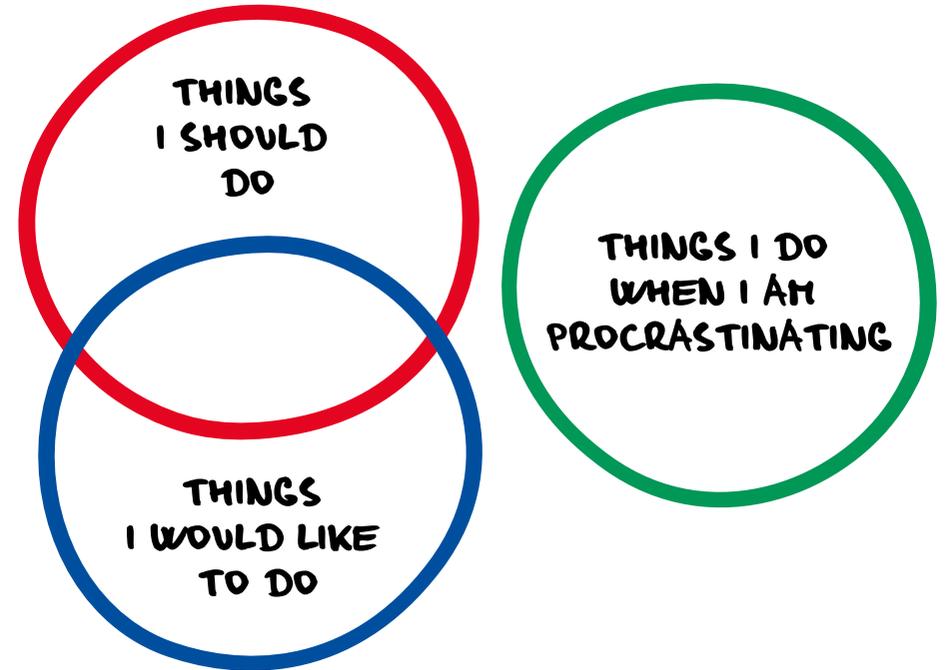
PROCRASTINATION

= PUTTING THINGS OFF INTENTIONALLY OR HABITUALLY

If you have ever had trouble persuading yourself to do things you should do or would like to do, you have experienced procrastination. When you procrastinate, instead of working on important meaningful tasks, you find yourself performing trivial activities.

If you are a typical procrastinator, perhaps you spend an excessive amount of time hitting the snooze button, watching TV, playing video games, checking Facebook, eating (even when you are not hungry), obsessively cleaning, pacing back and forth through the office, or maybe just sitting and staring at a wall. Afterwards, you feel powerless and are overcome with feelings of guilt and frustration. Once again, you end up doing nothing. Sound familiar?

But careful now. Procrastination isn't pure **laziness**. Lazy people simply don't do anything and are just fine with it. Procrastinators, however, have the desire to actually do something but can't force themselves to start. They truly want to fulfill their obligations but just can't figure out how.



Don't confuse procrastination with **relaxation** either. Relaxing recharges you with energy. In stark contrast, procrastinating drains it from you. The less energy you have, the greater the chances of you putting off your responsibilities are, and, once more, you will accomplish nothing.

People often love leaving things to the last minute too. They justify their actions by claiming that they work better under pressure. However, the opposite is true.^[1] Putting things off until the very last moment creates fertile ground for stress, guilt, and ineffectiveness. The old saying “Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today” really hits the nail on the head.

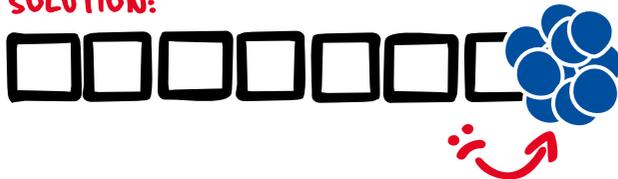
TASKS:



TIME:



SOLUTION:



A History of Putting Things Off

Since the dawn of time, people have suffered from procrastination. As the classic Greek poet Hesiod commented on this problem in his poem *Works and Days*:^[2]

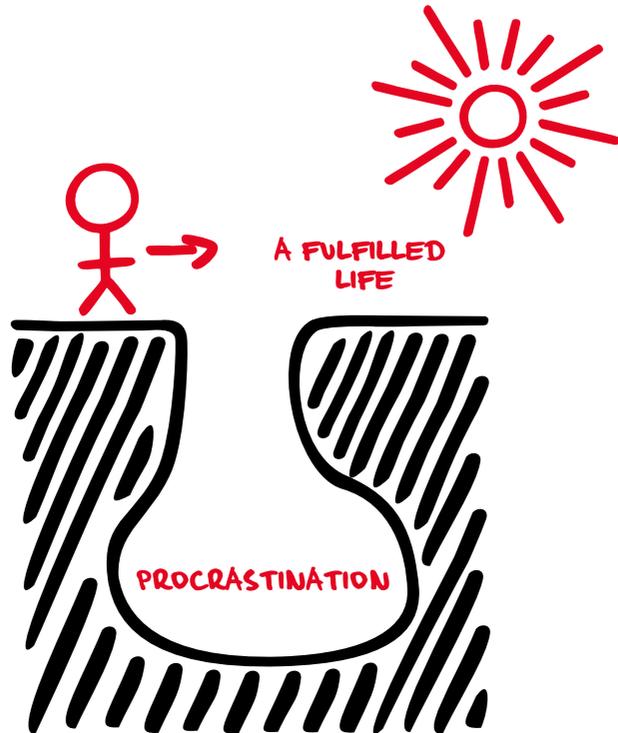
*Do not postpone for tomorrow
or the day after tomorrow;
barns are not filled by those who postpone
and waste time in aimlessness.
Work prospers with care;
he who postpones wrestles with ruin.*

Those who postpone and waste time in aimlessness—this is how you could describe today's *procrastinator*.

Seneca, the Roman philosopher, also warned: “*While we waste our time hesitating and postponing, life is slipping away.*” This quotation reveals the main reason why learning to overcome procrastination is so important.

Procrastination is one of the main barriers blocking you from living life to its fullest. Recent studies have shown that people don't regret the things they have done but the things they haven't done.^[3] Feelings of regret and guilt resulting from missed opportunities tend to stay with people much longer.

When you procrastinate, you waste time that you could be investing into something meaningful. If you can overcome this fierce enemy, you will be able to accomplish more and in doing so better utilize potential life offers.



Today's Age of Decision Paralysis

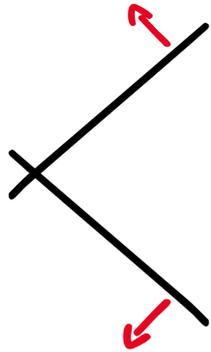
So what's the situation with procrastination like today? Today's world plays into the hands of procrastinating. And learning how to overcome it is therefore one of the most important skills you can learn in this day and age.

In the last one hundred years the average human lifespan has more than doubled.^[4] Infant mortality is a tenth of what it was a century ago.^[5] Every morning, we wake up in a world where there is less violence and military conflict than in any other time in history.^[6] Thanks to the Internet, almost all human knowledge is available to us with just a few clicks. There are practically no limits on travel; you can go nearly anywhere in the world. Knowing another language enables people to understand and be understood in foreign countries. The cell phone you carry around in your pocket is more powerful than the best supercomputers were twenty years ago.^[7]

The amount of opportunities that today's world offers is staggering. Imagine the extent of these opportunities as if it was the space in between an open pair of scissors. The more opportunities you have, the wider this imaginary pair of scissors—the *scissors of potential*—opens. Today, they are open wider than they have ever been in history.

Modern society idolizes individual liberty and the belief that the freer people are, the happier they will be. According to this theory, every time the scissors of potential open a bit further, you should be happier

and happier. So then why aren't people today significantly happier than in the past?^[8] Why is it so problematic that the scissors of potential are constantly opening wider?



1. THERE IS A VAST AMOUNT OF CHOICE AVAILABLE TODAY. THE SCISSORS OF POTENTIAL KEEP OPENING WIDER AND WIDER.

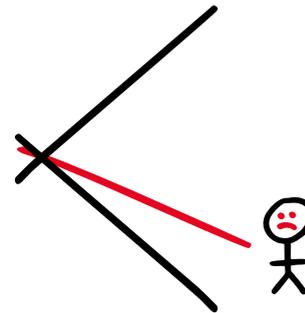
More opportunities make for more choices—and an unexpected problem: the more choices there are, the harder it is to make a decision.^[9] *Decision paralysis* sets in. Considering each and every option available to you consumes so much energy that you may find yourself unable to make any decision at all.^[10] When this happens, you postpone making decisions and subsequently end up putting off actions. You are procrastinating.

The more complicated comparing the options is, the greater is our tendency to put off making a decision.^[11] Moreover, if you have many choices available, it is likely that even if you do pick one, you will end up

regretting your decision.^[12] You might imagine what it would have been like if you had chosen the other way around. You will easily see the shortcomings of what you have chosen.

Do you know that feeling when you have something to do, but you don't do it anyway? Can you recall the last time you put off doing something or making a decision? Have you ever been unable to choose from the choices before you? What kind of feelings did you have in these situations?

When decision paralysis increases, it lends itself to increasing procrastination.^[13] Putting things off can then lower your productivity to the point that it is only a fraction of what it could be. Realizing that you are not living up to your potential can lead to guilt and frustration.

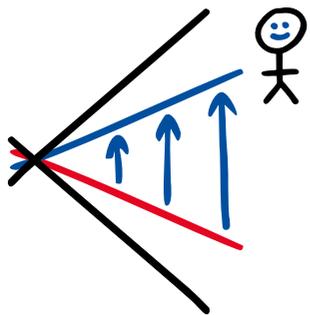


2. BEING PRESENTED WITH TOO MANY CHOICES LEADS TO DECISION PARALYSIS. IT BECOMES A SOURCE OF PROCRASTINATION AND FRUSTRATION THAT PREVENTS YOU FROM LIVING UP TO YOUR POTENTIAL.

At its core, this book is a set of simple tools that will help you utilize your potential much better on a daily basis. Using them requires a few minutes out of a day, but in the end, you will gain several extra hours of productive time.

With our tools, you can overcome the imperfections that have evolved in the human brain. They will help you overcome both inherent and learned tendencies to be ineffective. One side effect of battling procrastination is that the reward center of the brain will be more frequently activated.^[14] This means you will experience more positive emotions.

How did you feel the last time you really lived a day to the fullest? When was that? In this book, you will find out why living up to your potential on a daily basis is the most effective path to long-term happiness.



3. SIMPLE TOOLS CAN BOOST YOUR EFFECTIVENESS. LIVING UP TO YOUR POTENTIAL LEADS TO HAPPINESS.

What Is the Most Effective Way to Get Information?

Not only does this book reveal the reasons why people procrastinate, but it will also arm you with the weapons to help defeat this powerful foe. But upon what foundation should we build our knowledge about personal development?

Today, there are ten times more scientific studies on procrastination than there were a decade ago.^[15] But in today's world, valuable facts are often washed away in a flood of poor-quality information. It is becoming more and more important to know your way around in today's information age. Will Rogers once said: *“Our problem isn't that we know too little. Our problem is that much of what we do know isn't true.”*

There are thousands of personal development how-to guides, articles, and books out there today. Not long ago, I counted three hundred such titles at just one tiny bookstore. And there are thousands more available online. The mass availability of information has many risks.

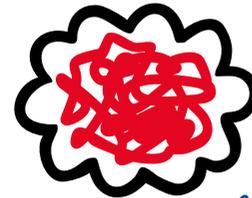
The first problem is that **the information available is highly chaotic** and frequently of poor quality. Different books advise you to take contrasting approaches. Some recommend you reward yourself every time you accomplish a task; others advise you not to reward yourself under any circumstance. Some guides are based on unconfirmed claims or on the experience of just one individual, which can hardly be applied to everyone's situation. Many books contain myths and half-truths that have been passed on from author to author.

Perhaps you've heard this statement before: *University researchers conducted a study of the relationship between people's goals and their accomplishments. They asked their subjects if they were able to write down specific goals they have in life, and, if in the future, they would be willing to share information about their income. Only 3 percent of participants were able to write down their goals. Several years later, the researchers tracked down the participants and discovered that the 3 percent of participants that had been capable of writing down their goals had made more money than the remaining 97 percent of study participants combined.* The problem with this claim is that no such research has ever been done.^[16] It is the product of someone's imagination, an urban legend. Personal development books are full of myths just like this.

The sheer volume of information available causes another problem: **it amplifies decision paralysis.** The more sources of information you have, the harder it is to pick just one and trust it. What information should you base important life decisions on? How do you know what you can really trust?

In recent years, many studies have been conducted at top universities around the world focusing on motivation, decision-making, and effectiveness. The findings of these studies, however, often get lost in today's information chaos. And this is where the third problem comes in: **there is a gap between what science knows and what people do.**

AVAILABLE INFORMATION:



1. IT'S **CHAOTIC** AND FULL OF MYTHS AND HALF-TRUTHS.

2. **DECISION PARALYSIS HAS SET IN.** YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE OR WHAT TO BASE YOUR DECISIONS ON.

3. **THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN WHAT SCIENCE KNOWS AND WHAT PEOPLE DO.**

The goal of this book is to help bridge this information gap. To help you save time, we have processed the latest research and connected the dots between key findings. Finally, using all of this information, we have created a set of *illustrated models*. They are simple diagrams that will help you quickly understand how things work.

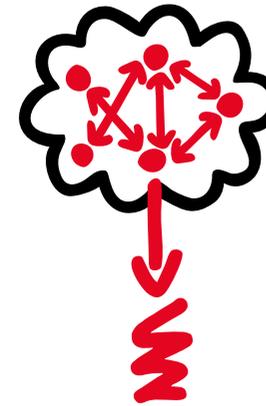
Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer once said: “*Nothing is more difficult than to express important ideas so that everyone understands them.*” Therefore, to improve understanding we use these illustrated models.

The part of the brain which processes images and visual information is called the *visual cortex*. Since it is one of the most developed parts of the human brain,^[17] one diagram can tell you more than several pages of text. It can also better describe complex relationships and connections. You can also refer to the illustrations when you forget what a certain concept is all about and need to quickly jog your memory.

Thanks to this, illustrated models are much more effective for transferring information than plain linear text. We call this method of working with information *know-how design*; for us it is an easy way to transfer core knowledge to you.

Sometimes we intentionally redefine *terms* so that readers are sure what we mean by the words we use. It’s a good idea to start using the word **procrastination** instead of the terms laziness or putting things off. It provides a much more accurate description of your situation. By giving the right name to your problem it’s easier to find the solution.

KNOW-HOW DESIGN:



1. IN TODAY'S AGE OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD, WE HAVE PICKED OUT THE BEST INFORMATION AVAILABLE.

2. WE HAVE CONNECTED THE DOTS BETWEEN FINDINGS.

3. FINALLY, WE HAVE CREATED SIMPLE MODELS CAPABLE OF QUICKLY EXPLAINING HOW THINGS WORK.

Since many important ideas have been eloquently formulated by people before us, we also make use of quotes. They are simple, to-the-point, and capable of providing elegant summaries.

So let's get going. How do motivation, effectiveness, and happiness really work? How can you overcome procrastination? How can you make long-term, measurable changes in your life?

A System of Personal Development

Besides the introduction and conclusion, this book is divided into four relatively independent sections.

The first section explains how **motivation** works and contains a toolkit that can help you create a *Personal vision*. This is a tool that will help you find and maintain long-term intrinsic motivation.

The second section focuses on **discipline**, or the skill of effectively living up to your vision through performing certain key activities and sticking to daily habits. It contains clear methods for fighting procrastination, tools for task and time management, and tools for learning positive habits and getting rid of negative ones.

The third section is focused on the **outcomes** of your actions and describes methods for maintaining happiness. Practical tools will help you gain greater emotional stability; you will learn how to become more resistant to failures and negative external influences.

The fourth and final topic this book covers is **objectivity**—the ability to see through the false perceptions you have of both the world around you and of yourself. Only once you identify your flaws can you begin fixing them.

**PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT**



- 1. MOTIVATION**
- 2. DISCIPLINE**
- 3. OUTCOMES**
- 4. OBJECTIVITY**

Motivation

We were all born and unfortunately at some point will all die too. The time we spend on Earth is both limited and finite. In light of these facts, **time** is the most valuable commodity you have in life. It's not money; unlike time, you can borrow it, save, or earn more. You can't do that with time. Every single second you waste is gone forever.



In a commencement speech given to students at Stanford University, Steve Jobs eloquently expressed the finality of life: *“Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything—all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure—these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose.”*

The mere realization that life is finite leads people to begin managing their time more carefully. It makes you start thinking about how you would ideally like to spend your time on Earth. It makes you start looking for a **personal vision**.



Your vision, once established, will become the most effective motivation imaginable and will pull you forward in life like a strong magnet. It will help you do things you see as being truly meaningful today, and at the same time draw you towards your ideal future.

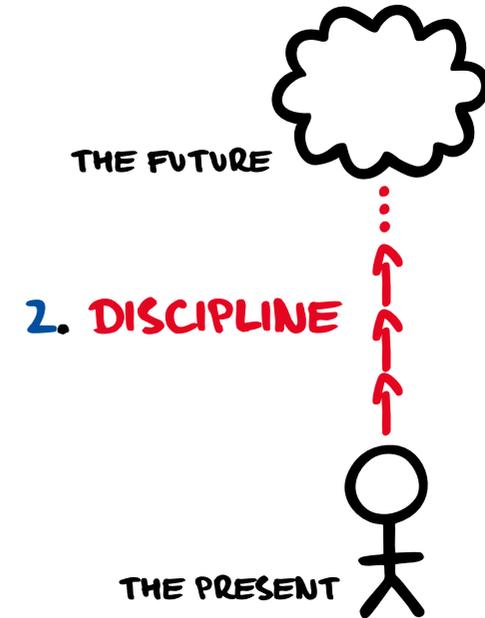
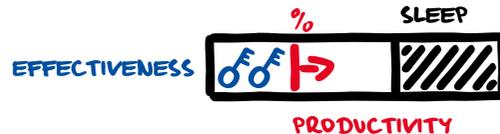
Discipline

There are two sides to everyday discipline: *productivity* and *effectiveness*. There are only 24 hours in a day—no more, no less. Subtract the time you spend sleeping, and what you have left is potential productive time.

Productivity is an expression of how what percent of your waking time you spend doing meaningful things, being the activities that contribute to fulfilling your personal vision. Regular rest, time management, and positive habits can significantly boost your productivity.

Effectiveness determines whether the things you spend your time doing are key activities or not, those being if they move you forward as quickly as possible in life. Being able to determine priorities, split up tasks, and delegate responsibilities is crucial for improving personal effectiveness.

ONE DAY (24 HRS):



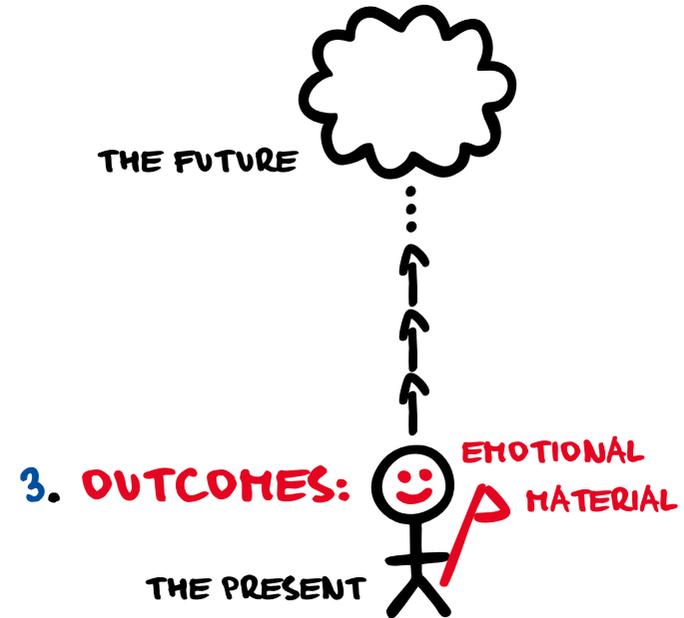
Imagine your vision as a path. Productivity is an expression of how long you spend travelling on this path per day. Effectiveness determines whether you are taking the biggest steps you can. **Discipline** is therefore your overall ability to take specific actions that lead to the fulfillment of your personal vision.

Outcomes

As the old Japanese proverb goes: “*Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.*” This saying addresses two major problems people have in life. Many people have ideas about what they would like to do, yet don’t act on them. On the other hand, there are those who do things, yet see no purpose in their actions. Ideally, you need both; vision and action. When you successfully combine the two, you will get the *emotional* and *material* outcomes.

Emotional outcomes are related to the flooding of your brain with *dopamine*^[18], a neurotransmitter that, when released, makes you happy.

Material outcomes are the concrete results of your actions—the fruits of your labor.

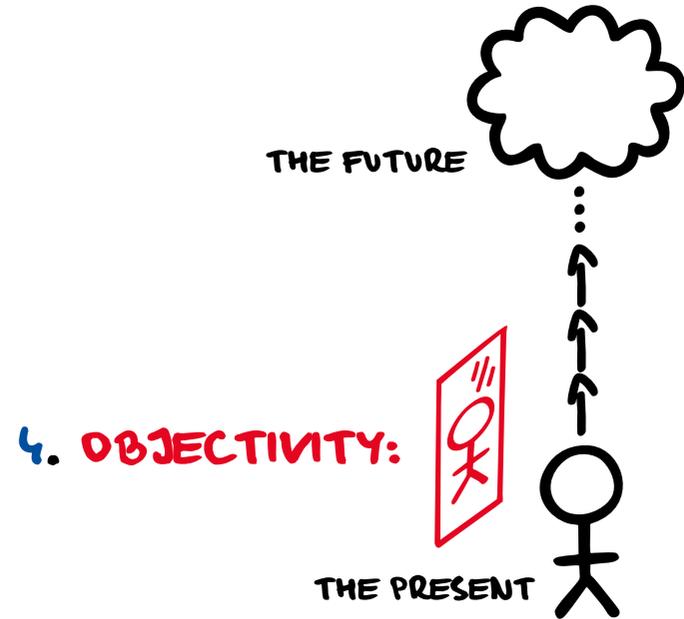


Objectivity

The last important piece of our personal development system is improving objectivity. Anders Breivik, who shot 69 people to death on the Norwegian island of Utøya, was most likely very highly motivated and disciplined; his actions even resulted in emotional and material outcomes. This extreme case however demonstrates the lengths things can go to when someone does not have their objectivity under control.

The ability to increase your objectivity is an important tool you can use to counter your intuition when it fails you. By reducing your biases, you will be able to see how things work in reality more clearly. In order to increase your objectivity, you need to get feedback on your behavior, ideas, and actions. As our brains often have the tendency to believe things that are not true in reality, you need to constantly search out areas in your thinking that lack objectivity.

As Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell, one of the most important mathematicians and philosophers of the twentieth century, once stated: *“The fundamental cause of the trouble is that in the modern world the stupid are cocksure while the intelligent are full of doubt.”*



Chapter Recap: Introduction

Procrastination is not pure laziness; it is the inability to persuade yourself to do the things you should or would like to do.

If we look back into history, we find that people have been putting off their responsibilities since the dawn of time.

Today's world plays into the hands of procrastinating more and more, and therefore you need to begin learning how to fight it.

The extent of opportunities available to you today is unlike anything that has ever existed in the past. **The scissors of potential** are open as wide as they have ever been.

Greater choice does not necessarily mean more happiness. Just the opposite is often true, as it is the cause of **decision paralysis**.

When you are paralyzed, you hesitate and put things off even more. You end up wasting time and as a result experience unpleasant emotions.

Simple tools exist that can help you overcome paralysis and procrastination.

When you live up to your potential, the reward center of your brain is more frequently activated, releasing **dopamine** and resulting in the experience of positive emotions.

Long-term happiness can be achieved by learning how to live every day meaningfully and to the fullest.

Procrastination can be overcome once you improve your **motivation, discipline, outcomes, and objectivity**.

This text is a freely distributable excerpt from the book **The End of Procrastination** by Petr Ludwig and Adela Schicker, published by the Macmillan/St. Martin's press publishing house in 2018.
All rights reserved.

YOU CAN ORDER
THE WHOLE BOOK HERE.