

“Getting Started Blues” Report



The *Real* Story Behind **ADHD** and **PROCRASTINATION**

thrive
with **ADD**  **ADHD**

Bonnie Mincu, MA, MBA



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The Surprising Truth about ADD / ADHD and Procrastination

Introduction

I'm Bonnie Mincu, Senior Certified ADHD Coach and founder of Thrive with ADD.

When ADD / ADHD Adults are asked about the biggest problem tendency or habit that they have, they're likely to say "procrastination."

After a few years of coaching and training ADD / ADHD Adults, I came to realize that people use the word "procrastinate" to describe any kind of not getting started. However, I knew that in many cases their difficulty starting was not because they didn't *want* to, but because they actually weren't *able* to.

I had a theory that the majority of ADD / ADHD procrastination and avoidance— especially in the workplace — was actually due to an individual feeling stuck, mentally unable to begin. They were **unable to figure out where and how to start, were paralyzed by shame or anxiety, or were simply overwhelmed by how much there was to do.**

Here are the results of my [**"Getting Started Blues" Survey**](#). See for yourself!



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“Getting Started Blues”

RESULTS from the SURVEY

Survey created and summarized April, 2012
by **Bonnie Mincu**, Senior Certified ADHD Coach
Founder of “Thrive with ADD”

Do you feel like you’re alone in your trouble getting started on tasks and projects?

Most adults with Attention Deficit Disorder share your struggle.

PURPOSE of the SURVEY: To determine the nature of the problems people with ADD / ADHD have in getting started and getting things done.

WHO WAS SURVEYED: The survey was sent to 17,800+ people on the *Thrive with ADD* mailing list of ADD / ADHD Adults. The survey responses were anonymous.

SURVEY PROTOCOL: The answers were automatically randomized, presented in random order, which varied for each participant. This eliminated undue bias towards answers that were in a particular order.

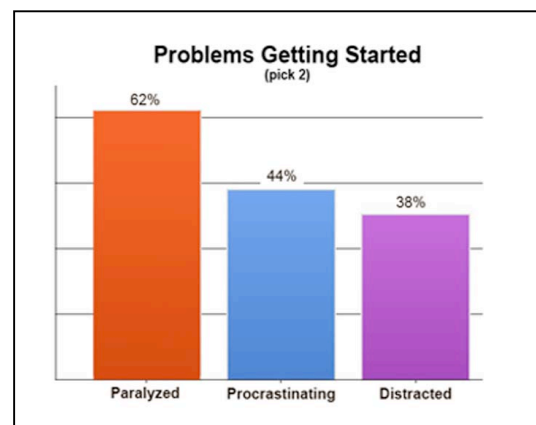
COMMENTS: My thoughts and conclusions follow each question.

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Q: When you’ve had trouble getting started, which of these statements do you relate to the most? (no more than 2)

- 62% I was paralyzed and unable to start
- 44% I procrastinated on starting because of boredom or lack of motivation
- 38% I tried to start but got distracted or interrupted

BONNIE'S COMMENTS: Once each term was defined, it is significant that more than 30% more ADD respondents cited mental paralysis as their main problem than procrastination.



Q: PROCRASTINATION - Simple procrastination is when you just don't feel like starting; you're not motivated or interested. Which statement do you relate to most regarding this kind of procrastination?

- 43%** I start work at the last minute and often don't finish on time, or feel I **could have done much better if I had started sooner**
- 32%** I finally get a **burst of focus** that gets me started, and I finish at the last minute
- 16%** If I wait long enough, I never get started and end up never doing it
- 6%** Other
- 2%** I don't have much trouble with this kind of procrastination

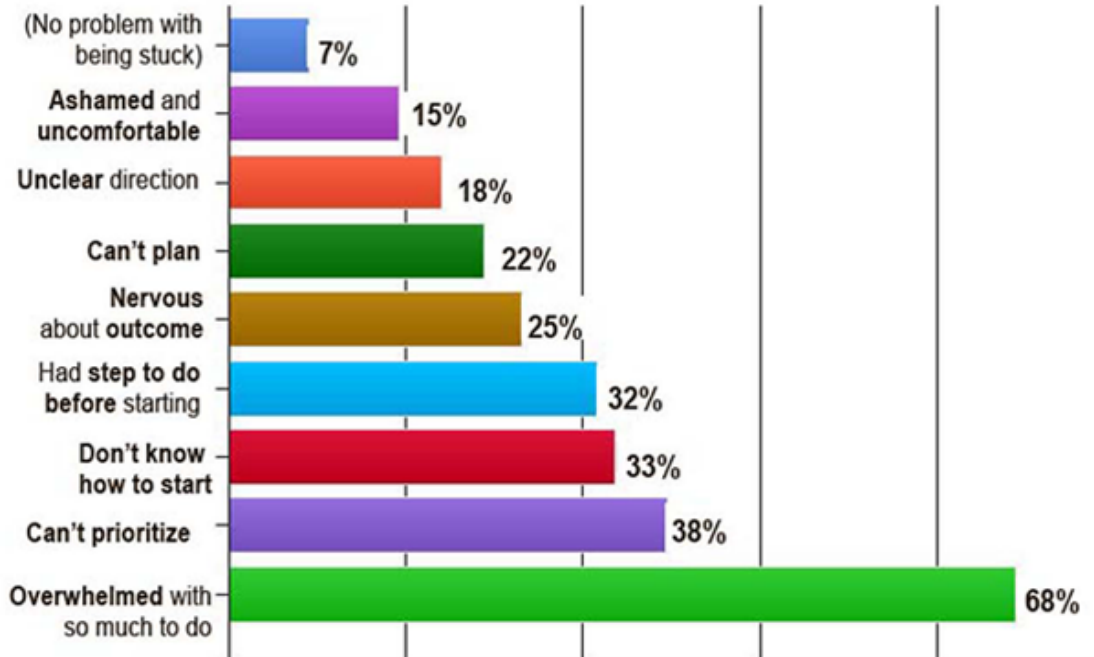
BONNIE'S COMMENTS: This kind of procrastination is most typically associated with ADD / ADHD. Only 2% say they don't experience procrastination when bored or unmotivated. While **a third are able to do well at the last minute due to adrenaline-induced focus**, the majority suffers negative consequences from procrastinating.

Q: DISTRACTION - Distraction is when you are pulled off course from interruptions, which can come from others or from your own thoughts and impulses. Which of these seem to happen most often? (no more than 3)

- 65%** I feel a **sudden need to search online** for something unrelated to the task
- 44%** My mind drifts off
- 36%** I get distracted by stimuli in my environment: sights, sounds, or smells
- 27%** I receive e-mail or text notifications
- 24%** People interrupt me while I'm working
- 14%** Other
- 11%** My phone rings
- 3%** I don't have many problems getting started due to distraction

BONNIE'S COMMENTS: A whopping 65% of distraction comes from an urge to do something online that is irrelevant to the task at hand. That seems to indicate that we must have a much higher tendency to get distracted now than before technology was ever-present. Also, there are more respondents pulled off course from internal distraction (red) than from external distractions and interruptions coming from others (blue).

Q: MENTAL PARALYSIS - Which do you most relate to when you feel mentally stuck or paralyzed?



- 68% I'm **overwhelmed** by how much there is to do
- 38% I can't decide how to **prioritize** or choose between options
- 33% I can't figure out how or **where to start**
- 32% I can't move forward because there's **something else that has to be done first***
- 25% I am **nervous about the outcome**, which keeps me from starting
- 22% I need to plan out the project and **can't figure out the planning**
- 18% I'm not sure how to proceed because I'm **not clear** about the direction, purpose or action steps.
- 15% I'm **ashamed**, and therefore, uncomfortable about taking the next step
- 7% I am not often prevented from getting started because of paralysis

BONNIE'S COMMENTS: The most paralyzing state by far is the feeling of overwhelm that overtakes people when they perceive there's too much to do. Other significant factors that stop respondents in their tracks are when their ADD affects their brains' executive functioning in ways that keep them from being able to prioritize, plan or begin (**red**).

Many respondents are also paralyzed by emotional or anxiety-based response (**blue**). Ambiguity with not knowing how to proceed is a common cause for anxiety. Although it wasn't stated as one of the options, many responders named perfectionism as a paralyzing factor.

***Q: When you can't start because something else must be done FIRST, that is most often:**

- 47% **Information that has to be found or organized**
- 34% Steps that should have been performed before you can start
- 10% Information, permission or agreement that must be obtained from someone else
- 9% Other

BONNIE'S COMMENTS: This is where we see how disorganization can affect getting started. Almost half the respondents said they get stopped by having to look for something necessary to moving forward.

Q: Any other challenges on getting started?

BONNIE'S COMMENTS: The many comments listed here (below) are only a fraction of the valuable comments that survey respondents posted. If you read through these, you'll see that you are not alone in your challenges. And for every difficulty written here, there are solutions!

SELECTED RESPONSES from SURVEY:

"I can start a project. But **if I'm interrupted or I have to put it aside for some reason, I never come back to it and can't find where I left off.**"

"**I think of something else I can do that I feel is 'easier' for me, I can complete and feel a sense of accomplishment.**"

"I want to start but I simply can't make a decision or decisions. If I do try to start something early, it's a complete waste of time. **I simply cannot make decisions until I absolutely must.**"

"**I think I need more preparation or planning** and sometimes end up adding more layers to my task at hand so it **becomes even more overwhelming.**"

"I have a gift for being able to find something else that "has" to be taken care of "right now". **Even spreading pine straw or doing the dishes tops starting or working on something "I have to do."**

"I start one thing that **reminds me of another unfinished item** which reminds me of another unfinished item, etc."

"**I get pulled into doing some other unrelated, less time sensitive task**, rather than doing the task that HAS to get done. Taking this survey is a perfect example. **I need to be doing my taxes, and yet I am taking the time to fill out this survey...."**

"I know from past experience that there's **something I'm not accounting for that will bite me later and I can't figure out what that is in advance.**"

"Other tasks due immediately, so I lose the larger chunk of time I need to do the project. **I do all of the shorter tasks time wise and then it's the end of the day and I'm too tired.**"

"**I can't pay my bills because I have to open the mail that I have avoided opening for weeks.** Once it's opened it's too hard to sort it into categories. It ends up in a folder that's lost somewhere under a pile."

"I am used to winging and doing things on the fly and the **projects that are multi-step and too long to hold in working memory cause the anxiety.**"

"**Shame and guilt overwhelm my mind.**"

"I have great **difficulty making decisions on how best to proceed.** Also, I have so many started but unfinished projects I'm discouraged from starting another."

"Worry that I won't be happy with or will be **criticized for the output.**"

"... **TOO MUCH BLOODY E-MAIL, TO READ, RESPOND OR DELETE!** Sometimes I just don't feel like turning on the computer."

"**Wanting everything to be "just right" and all figured out ahead of time** seems to be my main 'bug-a-boo'!!"

"**Paper work!** Organizing my important papers to find them easier. Do not know where to begin, overwhelming. Hate having to read through things, takes too long, **I would rather scrub a floor.**"

"...**When it comes to actually starting the project, I need someone with me (even just on the sidelines visiting) to help keep me motivated.**"

"Even though I know how to get started, **I often feel overwhelmed that I must do a perfect job** that I sometimes over do what is needed distracting me from the point of why I'm doing the project. I always feel that I'm missing something and this causes my paralysis."

"... **feel really down when i get kicked in spite of my best efforts.** And feel really pissed off when people who have things a lot easier than me, do stuff worse than me..**I just wish my brain was wired liked a normal person and I would have shown them....if only...."**

"**I often can't find my notes** from when the assignment was given or from my original meeting(s) about

a project. **Or the stuff is in several places** (home, office, car) and lost in all three. **Or whatever notes I took are totally illegible.**"

"I often can't find the information I already created to help me organize!"

"In my imagination, I can see how I think something could, or should, be done to be thorough and perfect. **It becomes too big of a project, and too intimidating to even start**, because by then I'm **already worrying that I'll forget something.**"

"Most projects are not of enough value - value is based upon stimulation... Creative stimulation will drive me to work endlessly. Others don't seem to be able to do this kind of work - but **the routine things others can do I find, most of the time impossible.** I have tried hundreds of solutions most work only for a few days."

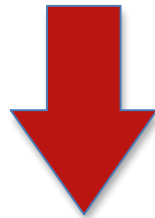
"My environment is too cluttered and disorganized, I can't find what I need or I don't have enough space to spread the papers I need to work with out on my desk because there are too many piles."

"The existential thought of "What's the use?" often gets in the way."

"1. Fatigue 2. Major Resistance (to anything that requires effort). 3. Inertia ...if I'm on the couch it feels like I'm crazy-glued there."

"... It takes me so much longer to get things done than it used to, and I think I get discouraged."

" I was surprised that I could really break (things) down to your survey answers so easily. Seeing it written like that helps to see how the issues I have really boil down to a few simple statements."



**See the blog post about this survey, with readers' comments, at
the Thrive with ADD BLOG (April 13, 2012),
CLICK HERE: <http://bitly.com/paralysis-or-procrastination>**

Procrastination TRANSFORMATION

The Secrets to Getting Started

Note from Bonnie Mincu of THRIVE with ADD:

As a result of this survey, I have created an
in-depth online training program
to help in getting started:

“PROCRASTINATION TRANSFORMATION.”

See details at

<http://www.procrastinationtransformation.com>