



The 70% Principle: Why It Knocks Procrastination Out of the Ball Park

Three Month Vacation Podcast

Sean D'Souza: Hi, this is Sean D'Souza from psychotactics.com and you're listening to the Three Month Vacation Podcast. This podcast isn't some magic trick about working less. Instead, it's about how to really enjoy your work and enjoy your vacation time.

I was sitting in the café minding my business when this woman was sitting across from me. She looked up a few times and made eye contact. Then she summoned up courage and moved across and she spoke to me. Apparently she was a writer. She had written three or four books and never got them published, so I asked her why. You probably know her answer. She said, "Well, I'm a perfectionist."

This is the problem. We think that we are perfectionists, but everyone is a perfectionist. Everyone would like to do the best possible job, and yet some people get their job done and others don't. The reason why they do that is because of a simple concept called the 70% principle. This podcast is going to explore what is the 70% principle, how it helps you, and when you should stop.

Let's start off with the first one, which is the 70% principle. What is it? In 2004 we were headed out from Auckland to Los Angeles. It was the first time we were having a Psychotactics workshop internationally. Of course everything had been sold. We'd booked the venue. We'd got people to sign up. We'd printed the notes. We'd done everything. There was only one little hitch. We still hadn't got a visa from the US embassy. It wasn't because we were delaying or procrastinating. It was just that they were giving out visas just a week before departure. You can imagine the situation, can't you?



What if we didn't get the visa? What if something happened and the workshop couldn't go ahead? Life is full of so many what ifs. It becomes much simpler if you take a software developer's philosophy. A software developer's philosophy is very simple. It is get 70% right and come back and fix the rest later. So many of us don't complete our projects because we think that it's not good enough. Then having completed a project we don't sell it because, again, we feel somehow it could be improved. Of course it could be improved, but your 70%, the audience is already waiting for that right now. They're waiting for the information that you have and they don't care about the remaining 30%, not just yet.

We went ahead with our first workshop simply because we thought that's the best we can do, 70%. When I wrote my first book, *The Brain Audit*, it was only 16 pages. Today it's 180 pages. What's the real size of the book? To me I think it's about 1,500 pages. Well, not as a single book but as different courses and books. The point is that if you wait for that perfect moment, if you wait to get everything down, it never happens.

When you think like a software developer you go, "Okay, this is the maximum I can achieve." You go out there and you put it out there. Then you can come back and fix it. The brain audit started out with version 1 and then went to version 2, and is on version 3.2. Will there be a version 4? I don't know, but the point is very simple. You can always fix it later. We understand the 70% principle but why does it work? It works for a simple reason. That clients are waiting for your stuff right now. Your audience is waiting for your stuff right now. If you don't put it out there they still have to get it. They still have to get the information.

There's a story about Jack Johnson, Jack Johnson the musician. In a Rolling Stone interview Jack Johnson said, "A song like "Bubble Toes," I don't know if I would have written that song if a million people we're going to hear it." He said, "It was like a joke to my wife around the house. Then a couple of friends liked it and then people asked for it at shows, and it became popular." We're going away from the point. The point is the middle that comes in the middle of the song. It goes like this: la da dada da da, da dada da da da da, la da dada da da. Jack had been planning to put in words but when the time came to release the song there were no words, so he ran it as la da dada da da. Today that's the most endearing part of that album. In fact, if you just play the la da dada da people know that's Jack Johnson.



That's really what the 70% principle embodies. It embodies the fact that people are ready for your music as it is. It might be in version 1, it might be in version 2. It doesn't really matter. That whole concept of perfection, that's just a story you've been telling yourself. That's just another way to procrastinate. That's just another way to not put out that book, that song. That's just another way to hold yourself together. Exposing yourself with just 70%, that really works because your audience is ready for it right now.

The main point is that it's never going to be 100%. No one is ever satisfied with their work. When you look at a writer going through a book, by the time the writer goes through that entire book they have changed. They have physically changed. Something in their brain has changed. When they look at the first few pages it's totally different from page 200.

The late night comedy show Saturday Night Live, that runs on the 70% principle. They can rehearse all they want but then on Saturday night they have to go live. That's the best they can do. At this point in time they're in their 40th season just doing 70% of what they can do, and doing it by deadline. This brings us to the third part, which is how do you know that it's done. When do you stop? When is that 70% reached? The answer is very simple.

We know that we've reached our 70% when the time is up. Let's say you have to write an article. You give yourself a couple of hours and at the end of those couple of hours you're done. You're doing a painting, you give yourself 45 minutes and at the end of 45 minutes you're done. Over the years I've wanted to write books on membership and pricing and presentations, and every single book I could have done better. Every single podcast that I've done I could have done better, but there is a deadline. When you have that deadline and it's an unshakable deadline, then the job gets done.

The reason why people call themselves perfectionists is because they never intend to put the book out. They never intend to have the la da dada da da out there. The ones that put it out there, they get the rewards. That's the one thing that you've got to do today. You've got to make sure that you have a deadline. Whatever you're producing, whatever you're creating, whether it's a book or an article or a song, or maybe you're just going to fix a tap or paint a ceiling, the point is you need to have a deadline and on that deadline it's done.



It is absolutely incredible what a deadline can do for us. We would have never gone to that workshop in the United States if we knew in advance that the visa was only going to come at the last minute, but we had tickets. We had a deadline and we had to go. We had to go for the visa, and we got the visa. There's a happy story there. Sometimes you don't get happy stories, but if you take an average of just putting it out there like a software developer, you'll find that you have more happy stories than unhappy stories. That's what the 70% principle is all about. Get 70% done, have a deadline, and then you can always come back and fix it later.

That brings us to the end of this episode. For the last few podcast episodes I've been talking about the information product workshop. The most critical thing today is just how to put together information when there are so many experts out there. The goal isn't to get someone to read your stuff, but how do we get them to read right to the end and then come back for me. Most information isn't that compelling. The reason why it isn't that compelling is because it doesn't have a structure. When you have structure it goes flowing from one section to the other to the other and you get to the end. When you get to the end you want more. It's just like a meal. It's like an amazing ... You go back to the restaurant again and again and again. That's what we're going to cover at the information products workshop. It's at psychotactics.com/dc. All of this action is happening in the first week of May, so go to psychotactics.com/dc and find out for yourself. If you can't make it to the workshop, get yourself the home study and you can find this in the home study section at psychotactics as well.

That brings us to the end of this podcast. You want to hang around for one more story? Okay, we'll do one more story. Have you heard of the song "Second Wind" by Billy Joel? If you listen to that song, right at the end there is a flub. There is this mistake. If you just listen to the song you don't pay attention to it and you don't notice it, but of course Billy Joel knew he had made a mistake, and he was in the studio and he wanted to erase it, but that was the whole point of the song: to make a mistake. That was the 70%, so he kept it.



Today if you listen to that song you can hear it. Now I'm going to play this piece of music because my wife absolutely loves this. Here we go.

Oh and before I go—Can I ask you a small favour? Would you be kind [enough to leave a review](#). Your review, rating (and subscription) are most appreciated. They help the rating of the show and I read every single review. And if you have any feedback, you also want to write to me at sean@psychotactics.com. Anything you'd like to see or listen to anything you don't like, just write to me at sean@psychotactics.com. I actually implement the feedback. You can do this from your phone or your computer. [Here's a graphic, if you need any help](#).

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