Doing the Dishes… Or Procrastinating About It

Some people who procrastinate resist doing the dishes because whenever they look at them, they just don't "feel" like doing them. The dishes pile up in the sink and become an unsightly and unsanitary mess.

This is quite a classic case of procrastination.

Many of us have had this problem or know someone who has. At any rate let us use it as an example of how something can be changed for the better, and for illustration let's say it's a SMART Recovery member like you.

The first thing to happen is to recognize that there is a problem because sometimes we get so used to things like this that we conveniently avoid thinking about them. But one day it really bugs you when the chore has been particularly nasty, or maybe if you were embarrassed when a visitor came in and saw the condition. That exasperation could spark a desire to do something about it.

But there's a problem here because a bad habit has been established and for you dishwashing has been dominated by not feeling like doing them. So at this point some very good advice would be to stop and think about it seriously and decide what you really want. You will have to weigh the pros and cons, probably even write them down and compare the reasons you don't like doing the dishes with what you don't like about always having the mess. That necessary exercise will often clarify a person's thinking and help induce motivation to change.

Now it's important to formulate a practical plan to end this procrastination. The next advice would be to pick a time again when there are not too many dishes, (ones you usually would feel like leaving in the sink) and force yourself to act differently than you feel and just get to work and clean them up. It's going to seem a little strange. But you will realize that the job was much easier than usual. The food was not caked on the dishes, there weren't so many of them, and the job got done pretty fast. Kinda rewarding.

However, unfortunately the problem is not all solved. The old habits are likely to come back and you find the dishes piling up again. But you have broken a cycle and have started down a new path. And most importantly you have done this as a conscious effort of self-control.

So what comes next?

Following more good advice and some encouragement, once again you choose a time and force yourself to do the dishes even though you don't feel like doing them. Maybe it takes a few days for you to get around to it. But here's the secret: You will find that this time it becomes a little bit easier to get yourself to do them. And once again you get the pleasure of seeing the kitchen look nice without going through a major cleanup.

While doing this you would do well to think about your actions and reaffirm in principle that it is better all around to have the dishes washed up soon after they are used.

As you keep doing this from time to time, you enjoy the job being easier and the kitchen looking nice more often. This result strengthens your resolve. And once again, here's the secret: As you consciously keep working away at this and more often do the dishes promptly, it gets easier and easier to

get yourself to do them. And there comes a time when it just feels as good to do them as to let them go. There will still be times when you get lazy and let them pile up, but even then you will do them much sooner than you used to.

Know what you have done? You have broken a habit and finally there may well come a time when you just can't stand it to let the dishes ever pile up and be a disagreeable problem again.

This has been a conscious choice to use your intelligent mind to take back control of an undesired habit. You have demonstrated a lot of courage! Congratulations. And especially remember that to consciously effect change, at first you have to force yourself to act differently than you feel.

Many attempts at change fail because people hope to leap directly from the good intention to the final conclusion. But here we have a pattern of tackling change in logical stages.

First recognizing that there is a problem and weighing the reasons for changing (or not) and deciding.

Then making conscious plans and preparation and at first forcing yourself to practice an alternative behavior.

Next through repetition, establishing the new behavior with planned interim rewards and getting used to the desired results.

In all stages being prepared for lapses and recognizing them as such, learning from them and quickly reaffirming the preferred behavior. And finally achieving a clear change in your lifestyle and in emotional growth.