



You know you need a will. Here's what's stopping you

TINUKE OLUYOMI DANIEL

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Writing a will is one of those things that people keep putting off.

Multiple surveys have shown that many Canadians do not have a proper estate plan. We all know that's not good. Few would dispute that having a legal document that outlines what should happen to your money, your property, and or your children, when you die is really important.

So why do so many people people procrastinate on getting a will, or any number of other thrilling financial tasks, like starting a financial plan, building an emergency fund or filing taxes? For many of us, the thinking starts as, "Well I'm young, I don't really need to do that yet" and before long it becomes, "Why does it seem so hard to just get this one thing done?"

Most academic research suggests that we're good at procrastinating. And while all people are different, I'm going to help explain some of the more universal reasons we put off important tasks. I will also give you some tips to ensure you get off your butt and get it done. Because you really need to get this done.

1. It's hard to see yourself that far in the future

When you think of your will: Who benefits? Not you in the here and now. And for most of us, that's who counts the most. In behavioural science, this is known as delay discounting. We tend to discount the value of future rewards — in this case our loved ones inheriting our assets — the farther they are from right now. A 2016 study titled The Procrastinators Want It Now, led by Haiyan Wu at the California Institute of Technology, found that individuals who were most inclined to procrastinate were also more likely to accept an immediate payment of about \$10, even after being told they would receive more money (as much as \$20) if they waited a day or more. To put it another way, the reward you might get from surfing the internet probably feels much more valuable to you today than arranging to see a lawyer. Even if that's not rational.

2. You don't know how hard - or easy - it's going to be

You know you need a will. But chances are good that you've never written one before. You are not sure if it is complicated, easy, expensive or cheap. Few of us have a concrete view of the process. Studies have shown that thinking about tasks more concretely can make a difference in whether you procrastinate. A 2009 study [published in the journal Psychological Science](#) showed that helping people think more concretely about a task (in this case completing a simple email questionnaire) reduced the amount of time they spent procrastinating on it. This suggests that finding out the exact details of the process or steps in getting a will may just be what you need to catapult you into action. In fact, you could do that [right now](#).

3. It's sure to be unpleasant

Let's face it: Writing a will means you have to think about your death. And because we use present state and past emotions to imagine the future, you most likely attribute sad emotions to your death. When the time comes, you won't feel any of those things – because you'll be dead. From a behavioural perspective, one thing you can do is find a smaller more immediate reward that's greater than your aversion to the task. In other words? Make it fun. Seriously. Studies have shown that people are less likely to procrastinate when a task is [labeled as fun](#). Some people have gone to the extent of hosting [will-writing parties](#) with friends (with an attorney present to get the job done, of course) or arranging a “We did it!” celebratory hang-out with friends who have also updated their wills. Making something social is a great way to normalize fears and concerns, as well as add an element of accountability. Because you'll feel bad showing up to the party if you haven't done the work.

I hope you now have a sense of why you might be procrastinating on getting a will, as well as some tips on pushing through and getting started. As you can guess, the information above applies to any number of things you may be avoiding. But if there's one thing that unites it all, it's this: As humans, we're really bad at imagining the future.

The best thing we can do is trick yourself into thinking about the things we want to do right now. And, in your case, maybe you should call your lawyer.

Tinuke Oluyomi Daniel is a behavioural scientist at [Evree](#), a Toronto-based startup that builds an app that makes saving as easy as spending. If you have a question you'd like answered, send it [our way](#).

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