

A.B.D.

My problem happened again yesterday. You may know the one I'm talking about. It seems to hit me right before an important deadline. A critical grant application was due at midnight. I'd known about the deadline for two months. *Better get moving.*



The logical breakdown of the steps march through my head like a military band on the 4th of July. Project budget, outcomes, 150-word summary, staffing, timeline. I'm a fine-tuned working machine; my priorities are clear. I have a list, of course.

Then, out of nowhere, comes a burning desire to empty the dishwasher. *Only take a minute*, I tell myself. *Besides, it needs to be done.* A smile comes to my face. *My wife will appreciate it when she gets home.*

As I zip through plates, glasses, and silverware with surgical precision, the next thing to do becomes obvious – empty the bathroom and bedroom waste baskets. *Only take a second.* As I empty the last one, I notice the kitchen trash is a little rank so I tie off the bag and take it outside to the garbage bin.

Back inside, I notice that the kitchen floor needs to be mopped, the cat food area is a mess, and their water bowl is as dry as a skeleton. I'm in high gear now. Moving fast. The flow of new priorities is reaching flood stage in my mind.

“The silverware drawer would certainly benefit from organizing.” I look around for the source of the voice but no one is around.

Twenty minutes later I have the drawer looking good when it occurs to me that my wife probably liked it just fine the way it was.

Stuff happens quickly. The urgency I felt at the beginning of the day to get the grant application done has been completely swallowed by household chores. Jonah and the Whale?

“Are you avoiding something?” the voice says.

You talking to me? There’s no answer.

I vacuum the lamp shades, replace a basement light bulb that burned out six months ago, and clean out the vegetable bin in the fridge. Finally, I step into my home office and glance at the wall clock. *Hot dog! It’s only 9:20. Tons of time to finish the grant before midnight.*

I click on my MacBook Pro for just a peek at my personal email before I get to work on the grant. *Five minutes delay won’t matter.*

While the laptop is booting up the voice comes again. “Did you put a rotten apple in the fresh kitchen trash bag?” I turn around but no one’s there.

I retrieve the stinky apple and take it outside to the garbage can. *That’s better.*

My hands are gooey. I notice three empty BUD LIGHT cans and a KFC box of bones lying in the grass beside the street. *Inconsiderate people!*

As I pick up the litter I notice that the street drain at the corner is clogged with plastic bags, leaves, and a golf club bent in two.

“Better get that cleared out,” that other voice again. “It’s supposed to rain this afternoon, you know.”

Back on the porch I see that the grass needs to be mowed. *I’ll make a note of it.*

I’ve never played golf, but friends swear by it.

“Maybe you should try it,” the other voice says.

“Yeah, right,” I say out loud. “But not before I finish the grant application!”

My across-the-street neighbor yells, “Who you talking to, Mister Van?”

I wave and step back inside. *Is this manic behavior?*

“No way, Buddy,” the other voice again. “It’s a new level of consciousness.”

Fat chance.

Thirteen personal emails await including a spammer entitled – *Latex Dog Toys Now Available* – and a note from my sister in Seattle. *Better open that one.* OK. The attorney helping probate my father’s estate has more questions and I’m the executor. *How did that happen? Oh, well. It’ll only take a minute.* After responding to all thirteen, I switch to work email and start randomly opening and responding to one, then another. *That’s the most efficient way, right? Wait, I don’t own a dog.*

A self-generating stream of new priorities entirely drowns out all awareness of my original top priority for the day. *Is that a high-pitched hum I’m hearing?* One thing leads to another. I look up and it’s 11:30 and I haven’t even turned on my cell phone.

“But you sure are getting a lot done!” the other voice says, proudly.

Yeah. But nothing I’ve accomplished so far is on my priority list. Where is that damn list anyway?

I’m moving faster now, knocking off things that are not on any list anywhere. Like Steph Curry raining 3-point baskets from twenty-four feet out.

Could this be the day I finish everything?

“Silly boy,” the other voice says.

Perhaps you know how the rest of this story goes because you have this disorder sometimes too. An entire day goes by, spent in furious activity on anything and everything *except* your top priority. It’s not that you haven’t been productive. In fact, you’ve been *extraordinarily* productive. Pat yourself on the back.

The high-pitched hum in my ears morphs into a menacing drumbeat like the theme music from the movie *Jaws*. *BOOMP, BOOMP, BOOMP, BOOMP, BOOMP, BOOMP.*

A growing sense of anxiety in the primal core of my mind. The grant submission deadline is getting closer, and there’s less time to get it done!

It's too much! I can't take it anymore!

In spite of it all, I submit the grant application at 11:56 pm. *Four minutes to spare.*

After I've calmed down a bit, it comes to me. A name for my problem – **Avoidance Behavior Disorder**. A.B.D. for short. Other people have it too. *Wonder if it's contagious, like omicron.* As far as I know, there's no known cure.

PS I'd love to write more, but I just remembered. I have a big presentation at noon today to get ready for. Later, alligator.