



Why some work hard at doing nothing



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Editor careerone

THE more clever people are, the more innovative are the ways they discover to avoid doing things – but avoiding work and failing to finish tasks is as frustrating for workers as their employers, say behavioural and psychological change experts Hugh Kearns and Maria Gardiner.

While there are many reasons for people avoiding work, most people attempt to address the symptoms before recognising the problem.

Long-term change cannot be achieved without identifying whether lack of deadlines, fear of negative feedback, confrontation or an unhappy environment is driving workplace avoidance.

“It is not a lack of information that stops people from doing their work – it is a lack of understanding and working out thought patterns,” says Mr Kearns, who heads the unit providing professional development at Flinders University. The unit offers strategic guidance and development programs for university staff and students.

“To get genuine and lasting

behavioural change, you must also change your thinking,” Mr Kearns says. “Most courses and programs teach people how to change their behaviour because this is the obvious part that everyone can see, just like the tip of the iceberg.

“What this doesn’t take into account is that it is our attitudes and beliefs – the parts most of us can’t see – that are responsible for what we do and feel.”

Ms Gardiner, a clinical psychologist in private practice, teamed with Mr Kearns about eight years ago to use the latest in psychological and educational research and practice to improve careers. They have won a prestigious national Carrick Institute award for outstanding contribution to learning.

“Basically a lot of the work we do is focused around becoming effective, about dealing with perfectionism, procrastination, overcommitting, self-doubt, time management and more,” Ms Gardiner says.

Aside from the work undertaken at Flinders University they are also known as ThinkWell™.

ThinkWell™ offers an evidence-

based approach to self-management based on the principles of cognitive behavioural coaching and latest psychological research. It has been used extensively with doctors, academics, PhD students, CEOs and other occupational groups.

“ThinkWell™ challenges your underlying thinking so that people can manage their time more effectively and efficiently, spend more time with family and those who matter, set goals and achieve them and think more clearly and make better decisions,” Ms Gardiner says.

“Usually it’s circumstances that drive avoidance and procrastination. It’s extremely common across the board and it robs the workforce of a huge amount of productivity.

“We find that most people want to do well at work. They feel a black cloud hovering over them when there is a problem. It’s knowing why and how their thought processes work that changes outcomes.”