How to Overcome Perfectionism

by Eliqitie

OK, you've got your first episode ready to go for your new podcast! The album cover, which took you six months to finally get right is "perfect," and you've purchased your website domain name. Now, you're looking to find the right social media handles on multiple platforms so you can direct people to find you online. But, and I mean BUT, you're not sure if the sound for your trailer is correct. So maybe you need to spend another three to four hours on sound editing your ten-minute trailer so that the sound is also "perfect."

If you just read the above sentences and picture yourself, you can admit that you're a perfectionist. Yes, it's OK to say it and own it because you'll never get over being a perfectionist until you admit to what you are doing and accept that you want to shift to a new and different approach!

What is Perfectionism?
Perfectionism is the mindset that every activity, project, or experience we create must have everything exactly right, down to the minute details. Of course, you're never happy with the finished product, but you have never been, so isn't that normal?

What Does it Mean to Be Perfect?
Perfect: A catchy phrase that has seeped its way into the hospitality and service industry. How many times have you answered a server with, "Yes, I'd like ketchup with my fries," for them to respond with an enthusiastic, "Great, perfect!")

Perfection, my dear friend, is a lie for our reality. Yup, that's how it is; I'm going to be straight with you. Perfection exists only in our minds. Perfection is a state that we make up and construct for ourselves. When was the last time someone told you that your work wasn't perfect?

Once we've made up this false state, we proceed to believe that we can achieve perfection. However, we view this as perfection. So next, we will strive endlessly and use up countable hours to hit the mark we have constructed and made for ourselves. However, we must remember that because perfection is a state we create and make, we can always move the marker a bit farther because what we create as human beings will never be perfect. This is where our own catch-22 comes in - and why projects often aren't completed, and why we are unhappy with our work.

What Happens When You Try to Be "Perfect"
So what does that mean for those who strive to be perfect? It means we will toil and work on a project that we have now made neverending because we want perfection for an ideological goal that can never be achieved.

Thus, perfectionism is a fast way to be unhappy with what we do, how we view our work, and, ultimately, who we are.

Why Perfectionism Will Leave You Feeling Wholly Unsatisfied
As a matter of fact, no, being unhappy with your work constantly isn't OK. It's not OK for your self-esteem, your sense of purpose, or those living with and around you. You're never happy as a perfectionist because you can't complete or close the door on anything to move on to the next project. Or, you dump projects that you don't feel are perfect (even though you've spent thousands of dollars and hours of your time creating what you love) and pick up another project that you feel is even better than the one before. Because you know in your heart that the next project or work you do will be THE ONE, right?

How You Can Change Your "Perfect" Mindset
First, you'll need to admit to being a perfectionist. Yes, it's hard for us to admit we aren't doing something right (especially when you're a perfectionist!), but this is Step One if we are going to work through the process of learning how to put our work out there and to stop filling our desk-top with dozens of folders containing unfinished projects.

Secondly, get out a piece of paper or a journal. You'll want to do this with an actual pen or pencil and paper - not your technology. When you want your brain to process your feelings, it's best to utilize the movement of your hands on paper. Now, write down why you think you need to be perfect. Brainstorm them! Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or anything else. Brain dump your feelings onto paper. What you are feeling is never right or wrong; it just is! Keep brain-dumping until you can't think of any more reasons you need to be perfect.

Now, you'll want to take each reason and write it down separately on another piece of paper, giving yourself room to write underneath. An easy way to do this is to take a piece of paper, (I prefer blank paper) and fold it into fours. Write one reason in each box. Then, you will write down where that feeling came from under your reason.

Maybe it was a parent always telling you that you weren't good enough. On the other hand, you could have been raised in a private school setting with high standards that you felt you couldn't meet. Or, you may have had an older sibling you were compared to and may have felt that you aren't as good as your sibling.

When you're doing the writing exercise, be honest with yourself. Remember, there aren't any right or wrong answers.

Once you write these down, look and see who and why you believe you must be perfect. I bet you'll find that the reason you aren't completing your projects or putting your creative content out into the world isn't that you're not good enough - it's because somewhere in your past, someone made you feel that you aren't good enough. And there's a big disconnect between being able to and feeling that you can't.

And while I'm not a practicing therapist, I've found out in my own life (coming from an abusive home environment which has caused me to carry that trauma into my adult life) that I can choose to feel any way I can want about a situation. And the biggest challenge with making a big shift in your mindset comes with accepting that you can!