

**“I just like things done right!!!”**

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Have words such as “perfectionist”, “overachiever”, “go getter”, “workaholic”, “obsessive” ever been in the same sentence as your name? If so, you might be suffering from a common complaint known as Perfectionism. I could give you a definition, but the chances are you already know it. So is what so wrong with striving and wanting the best? Nothing, in fact on one level a very real sense of pleasure can be felt as you sit back and look at what you have created or achieved. One only has to glance up at the Sistine Chapel to understand the power of being a perfectionist; Hey! If it’s good enough for Michelangelo, it’s good enough for me! Perfectionistic qualities can also be protective in nature, forcing us to push through despite the odds, getting things done or ahead of time and wanting the best for your self.

But what happens if you’re the type that gets an A- and feels the pang of disappointment that it wasn’t an A+? What happens then? The ‘almost perfect perfectionist’ invariably feels unsatisfied. Clare is a good example of this; working long hours in her small business and juggling this with home commitments, she works hard to outrun all potential problems on both the home and work front. Although it often helps her in her work, it also hurts her. Finding her errors unacceptable, she is hard on herself. She worries about what others will think of her and her efforts. Her errors precipitate feelings of humiliation and she finds that she can’t sleep at nights. She starts to socially withdraw. *Why* do this? Good question. She has trouble letting go and forgiving herself because, in her mind, it is OK for others to make mistakes, but it is not OK for her to make mistakes. Unable to derive pleasure from her accomplishments she strives to achieve the unachievable, “to fight the unbeatable foe, to dream the impossible dream”

....you know how it goes..... She becomes caught in the trap of never being good enough, robbing herself of satisfaction. This type of perfectionism can lead to depression, anxiety, low self esteem, frustration, obsessive traits and what some might describe as perfectionism paralysis.

Not like this? Perhaps you're more like Jen. She is an outwardly focused perfectionist. She feels OK about herself and her abilities, but she finds herself frustrated when dealing with others; her partner doesn't take care of things on time, or does a job that's not up to Jen's standard. Feeling dissatisfied and wanting to avoid an argument, Jen often does the job herself than ask for help. Perfectionism wreaks havoc in her most sacred intimate relationships. She begins to wonder about her frustration; her partner's failure to meet her expectations. The idea of the "Perfect" Soul-Mate' leaves her feeling bereft, forever questioning her choice of partner. Ultimately, this type of perfectionism affects both her own and her partners' experience of their relationship.

So how does one become like this you may wonder? At some level one could argue that its hard wired within us. It's in our *genes* you could say. After all our ancestors were highly motivated to learn to how to create better tools which would provide a significant advantage for survival. But today's perfectionists are more often raised in households where the parenting style is authoritarian, together with a strong dose of *conditional* love. Society also has a large piece of the responsibility pie, promoting unrealistic images of women, perfect straight white teeth and heralding the attitude that perfectionism is necessary for success. It is no wonder that those suffering from

perfectionism have an array of fears such as fear of failure, disapproval, an overemphasis on “shoulds” and an acute vulnerability to criticism.

What can be done? Take heart, there are many “Recovering Perfectionists”. One step might be to share your feelings with non perfectionistic friends. Ask them for their feedback and to gently point out to you when you are being perfectionistic or unrealistic. If that seems too difficult, you may want to talk with a trained mental health professional who will keep your concerns and fears private. Another way is more experimental in approach and involves making an intentional mistake or leaving things untidy. For example, try leaving the bed unmade, the dishes dirty, that piece of paper on the floor. See if you can tolerate the anxiety. Practice relaxation. Say “yes’ to yourself and schedule in “me time” where you rest, relax and get away from the pressure of producing. Redefine the word “mistake”. In this way you make a step towards relieving of getting things done right. And then there is the mental weeding that one can do; give yourself a reality check, examine *what* you are actually feeling, whether it is true or whether this is an old message that has been handed down to you by your family; the distorted messages.

Overcoming perfectionism doesn’t occur overnight, it is not easy and you don’t have to be perfect at it either! You may feel challenged as you face your emotions and navigate your life into new realms of being, but the effort is definitely worth the outcome. Remember ‘Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall’ - Confucius.