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Should You Be Perfect?

Liya Panayotova, Psychologist, [liyap.com](#) 5.4K reads

Sometimes, we are faced with demanding tasks, while others may have enormous expectations of us. However, most often we are frustrated, when it is us who insist on perfection.

We chase after perfection, refusing to be happy before our impossible standards are met. This pattern could lead to the overwhelming realization that the day you are entirely happy with yourself and what you do may never come, if you keep engaging in the same behaviors. It is possible that you may be trying too hard and that your expectations are unrealistic.

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Perfectionism vs. Growth

Seeking constant improvement isn't necessarily a bad thing, but when we put public speaking and anxiety into the equation, we may be faced with a dysfunctional situation. Perfectionism can be a significant contributor to anxiety. For someone who is already struggling with anxiety, it can become the straw that broke the camel's back. More importantly, you should remember that there is a distinct difference between wanting to grow as a person, and being a perfectionist who is never satisfied with anything. In other words, being motivated and seeking to improve upon yourself is very beneficial, but not taking the time to appreciate yourself isn't.

The Struggle of Perfectionism

Psychology recognizes perfectionism as a personality trait. Those who possess it, tend to set very high standards. As a result, the individual's perception of their own success is conditional to meeting these standards. Having requirements of yourself and others, that are nearly impossible to achieve, could make you fiercely self-critical or unfairly demanding of others. Research has shown that perfectionistic traits are closely related to anxiety. One of the key tasks before people who do to therapy to deal with their anxiety and perfectionism, is to replace their impossibly high standards with realistic ones, that would help them prosper, while keeping a positive outlook of themselves.

Are You a Perfectionist?

If you have been preparing to speak in front of an audience, you probably have some standards and expectations. It may often be challenging to recognize how realistic they are, so the short survey below could give you some idea.

These are traits and habits associated with perfectionism. Read each statement and decide if it is relevant to you.

Statements:

I was born to be a winner, so everything I do must be perfect. Otherwise it's useless.

I am a very conscientious person and can't tolerate mistakes.

I often see the world in absolutes: as black or white, right or wrong.

I am very goal-oriented and achieving my goals is all I care about, regardless of what the process requires.

I am prone to "all or nothing" thinking. If I can't reach my standards, I won't even try.

The possibility of failure frightens me.

I don't like it when others criticize me. I expect everyone to appreciate my work.

I am my harshest critic.

I spend a lot of time trying to perfect something, while other people say it's already good enough.

If you answered with "Yes" to more than four statements, then it is very likely that your public performance anxiety is being triggered by perfectionism.

What Can You Do?

As you already know, perfectionism isn't necessarily a bad thing. If you add some flexibility into your "everything must be just right" expectations, you could be on your way to finding a reasonable balance.

Examine Your Standards

Having high standards can be useful, as it pushes you to learn, develop and achieve new goals. However, there is a significant difference between expectations that are high, and unachievable standards. For example, an unrealistic expectation would be, "I want to be a charming, perfect, mesmerizing speaker! I should make no mistake and have an impressive answer to each question." Instead, a more realistic and flexible version is, "My goal is that next time I speak in front of an audience, my speech can be classified as 3-4, on a 1-5 scale. If the audience has any questions I can't answer, I'll acknowledge that and suggest a source, where they could find the answer."

Don't Discard Perfectionism Entirely

Understanding the fundamentals of perfectionism, as well as how it affects you, could turn your perceptions around. For example, when creating a preparation plan for your next public event, make a solid one and stick to it. If something gets, in the way, try to utilize some flexibility, by coming up with a plan B, rather than getting frustrated. For example, if you haven't done everything you planned for today, reschedule it for tomorrow and then put some extra effort into making up for the lost time. In this way, you'll still be able to achieve your goals and remain efficient, but without creating tremendous pressure for yourself. Use your perfectionism and turn it into your ally, instead of an enemy.

The World Has Shades

Sometimes life may seem black or white, but in reality it seldom is. That means that you shouldn't directly assess whether you completed your goal or not, as this attitude presupposes only two possible outcomes. Each step towards your goal counts, as well as each choice you make. You'll spend a lot of time in these gray areas, so recognize them and enjoy the opportunity to be moderately successful every day, not only when you fully accomplish the core goal, which could take months, or even years.

Be Self-Compassionate

Instead of assuming the role of your own harsh critic , try to be a compassionate friend. That doesn't mean that you should give up your standards entirely and slack off, but rather that it is useless to beat yourself up when you do not reach them. Instead, giving yourself a chance to be an imperfect, flawed human being, with good and bad days, reasonable criteria and the flexibility to find various ways for achieving your goals.

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