

Eliminate Perfectionism with Excellence

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Coach



It was summer 1993 and I was preparing for nursing school by taking Microbiology. It was an intensive six-week course that included a lab. The final exam consisted of 100-multiple choice questions. I got 93 correct.

Now you'd think I would be happy. It was a fabulous grade and it ensured that I received an 'A' for the class. But I was mortified. All I could think about was how I got seven questions wrong! I was so angry and frustrated. I couldn't believe it.

I couldn't believe my behavior either. It was ridiculous to feel badly about this test. Receiving an 'A' was the best there was and yet I was choosing to feel bad and give myself a hard time. I realized that I needed to flip my perspective. Instead of focusing on what I did wrong, I could choose to focus on my accomplishment. And in that moment, I made the shift from perfectionism to excellence. And you can do it too.

The Pursuit of Perfection

Perfectionism is a time-stealing, energy-draining monster. It forces you to strive for unachievable outcomes because no matter what you do, it's not good enough. In your pursuit of perfect, you refuse to see things as they are, but rather insist on living up to some illusion that doesn't exist – it's always just out of reach.

Perfectionism is a black hole trapping you from giving yourself to the world. Perfectionists will often not complete things, not start things, or not take on projects for fear of not being able to perform 'perfectly'. Perfectionists fear making mistakes and therefore, find themselves stressed, in constant state of worry over what could happen, and focused desperately on not failing. They maintain unrealistic expectations of themselves and of others and will often micromanage causing undo stress on themselves and others.

Sound like anyone you know?

Perfectionism is also one of the roots of procrastination. The fear of not being able to deliver at some unachievable standard often causes you to avoid doing what needs to be done believing the consequence of not doing something is better than the consequence of not being perfect.

The Costs vs. the Benefits

What is the cost of striving for perfection? Perhaps it keeps you from trying new things or from participating in activities or projects. Maybe it causes things to pile up when you resist finishing them. Having piles of unfinished projects are stressful. Striving for "perfect" focuses your attention on what's wrong or what's not working rather than seeing all of the good and all that is right. It also feels bad when you make a mistake and, as a perfectionist, you use that mistake as an opportunity to berate yourself mercilessly.

Are there any benefits to striving for perfection? Well, one might be that it forces you to do top notch work on what you do deliver. It's important that you discover what costs and benefits you derive from striving for perfection. There are good reasons for choosing to behave this way whether it fills a personal need, it protects you from something you fear, it's the only way you know how to be, or this way of being has enabled you to achieve what you've accomplished thus far. Understanding your relationship to perfectionism and uncovering any attachment you have to striving for perfection will be helpful as you choose to let go and follow a different paradigm.

It's All Perfect

Imagine that whatever you do will be perfect. If you do it, then it's perfect. You are a wonderful, intelligent, creative human being. Whatever you create will be wonderful. And if you make a mistake, that's wonderful too. It's an opportunity for learning and growth. If you don't like what you've done, then that's your judgment and you can work to change it so you get a different outcome. But in the doing, you are learning – about yourself, about whatever it is you are trying to accomplish, and about life in general. Life is perfect just the way it is. It's when we think it should be different that we run into trouble.



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Haven't you ever had a bad hair day where you received more compliments on your hair than any other day? Just because you don't like something doesn't mean it's bad. That's simply your opinion.

Humans are perfect in our imperfection. What is perfect anyway? Not making mistakes? Mistakes are gifts where we learn the most about how to do things and how not to do things. It's how we grow. We don't learn by getting everything right all the time. We're always better off after making a mistake because of what we learn, how we change, and what we then choose to do with that learning.

Strive for Excellence

In order to achieve the success you want in your life and career, shift your mindset to that of excellence. Results will always be great and you'll always keep striving for better. There's no fear with excellence; anyone can do it and it's realistic.

A focus of excellence keeps your attention on what's right and what's working well, rather than what's not working. This helps you to appreciate the positives and how things could be even better. Excellence has no limits. You can always reach for greater and greater levels of excellence. What you accept as excellence today will be different tomorrow, in a month, or in five years. Life is ever-changing. You are ever-changing. And as you progress on your life journey and you learn more, things take on different meanings and your additional knowledge contributes to new standards for excellence.

We know what it feels like when we receive excellent service at a restaurant. What if they were striving for perfection? Who would know whether they had achieved it? All you know is that the meal was fabulous and the service was enjoyable, the wait staff attentive. They could have made any number of mistakes along the way and you would never have known.

And you know what? It wouldn't have mattered. Mistakes would be great learning opportunities for the employees and the compliment you give provides them with the feedback they need to know what they are doing well. That's life. That's striving for excellence.

In striving for excellence, identify the results you want and create ways to bring about those results. Take small strides toward what you want to achieve. And celebrate your success along the way. Perfect the journey and the results will be more than you ever expected were possible.

Julie Fuimano, MBA, BSN, RN, CSAC is named one of the TOP 100 THOUGHT LEADERS in personal leadership development. Your happiness and success is her business! Her coaching clients experience dramatic and profound results in their productivity, level of confidence, and their relationships. As a certified coach, accomplished writer, and motivational speaker, Julie empowers your personal best and teaches you simple, practical tools for meeting your goals, communicating effectively with others, and enjoying yourself at work and at home. Visit www.NurturingYourSuccess.com to learn more about coaching with Julie or contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to have her speak at your next meeting or conference. Subscribe to her blog at www.NurturingYourSuccessBlog.com.



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