

Perfectionist Traits: Do These Sound Familiar?

Are Too-High Expectations Wrecking Your Inner Peace?

By Elizabeth Scott, M.S., About.com

If you're wondering whether or not you're a perfectionist, there's a good chance you are one, at least to a degree. ([Take The Perfectionism Quiz](#) if you want to know for sure.) Perfectionists are a lot like high achievers, but with some key differences. These differences are important, as perfectionists tend to experience more stress! The following are ten telltale traits of perfectionists. Do any of these sound familiar?

All-Or-Nothing Thinking:

Perfectionists, like high achievers, tend to set high goals and work hard toward them. However, a high achiever can be satisfied with doing a great job and achieving excellence (or something close), even if their very high goals aren't completely met. Perfectionists will accept nothing less than, well, perfection. 'Almost perfect' is seen as failure.

Critical Eye:

Perfectionists are far more critical of themselves and of others than are high achievers. While high achievers take pride in their accomplishments and tend to be supportive of others, perfectionists tend to spot tiny mistakes and imperfections in their work and in themselves, as well as in others and their work. They hone in on these imperfections and have trouble seeing anything else, and they're more judgmental and hard on themselves and on others when 'failure' does occur.

"Push" vs "Pull":

High achievers tend to be *pulled* toward their goals by a desire to achieve them, and are happy with any steps made in the right direction. Perfectionists, on the other hand, tend to be *pushed* toward their goals by a fear of *not* reaching them, and see anything less than a perfectly met goal as a failure.

Unrealistic Standards:

Unfortunately, a perfectionist's goals aren't always even reasonable. While high achievers can set their goals high, perhaps enjoying the fun of going a little further once goals are reached, perfectionists often set their initial goals out of reach. Because of this, high achievers tend to be not only happier, but more successful than perfectionists in the pursuit of their goals.

Focus on Results:

High achievers can enjoy the process of chasing a goal as much or more than the actual reaching of the goal itself. Conversely, perfectionists see the goal and nothing else. They're so concerned about meeting the goal and avoiding the dreaded failure that they can't enjoy the process of growing and striving.

Depressed by Unmet Goals:

Perfectionists are much less happy and easygoing than high achievers. While high achievers are able to bounce back fairly easily from disappointment, perfectionists tend to beat themselves up much more and wallow in negative feelings when their high expectations go unmet. This leads to...

Fear of Failure:

Perfectionists are also much more afraid to fail than are high achievers. Because they place so much stock in results and become so disappointed by anything less than perfection, failure becomes a very scary prospect. And, since anything less than perfection is seen as 'failure', this can lead to...

Procrastination:

It seems paradoxical that perfectionists would be prone to procrastination, as that trait can be detrimental to productivity, but perfectionism and procrastination do tend to go hand in hand. This is because, fearing failure as they do, perfectionists will sometimes worry so much about doing something imperfectly that they become immobilized and fail to do anything at all! This leads to more feelings of failure, and a vicious cycle is thus perpetuated.

Defensiveness:

Because a less-than-perfect performance is so painful and scary to perfectionists, they tend to take constructive criticism defensively, while high achievers can see criticism as valuable information to help their future performance.

Low Self Esteem:

High achievers tend to have equally high esteem; not so with perfectionists. They tend to be very self-critical and unhappy, and suffer from low self-esteem. They can also be lonely or isolated, as their critical nature and rigidity can push others away as well. This can lead to lower self-esteem.

If you see some of these perfectionist traits in yourself, don't despair. Recognizing that a change may be needed is a very important first step toward creating a more easygoing nature and achieving the inner peace and real success that comes from overcoming perfectionism and being able to say that 'almost perfect' is still a job very well done! Read this article for important [tips on overcoming perfectionist traits](#) and enjoying your life, your work and your *self* more!

http://stress.about.com/od/understandingstress/a/perfectionist_2.htm

Overcoming Perfectionism: How To Develop a Healthier Outlook

Learn to Be Perfectly Imperfect!

By Elizabeth Scott, M.S.,

Are You A Perfectionist? Perfectionism can rob you of your peace of mind, enjoyment of life, and self esteem. Though it's a process that may take a little time, shedding the burden of perfectionism can greatly decrease the level of stress you feel on a daily basis. Here are some important steps you can take to maintain a healthier attitude:

Make a Cost-Benefit Analysis:

Take a closer look at your perfectionistic traits. You may think you're more effective because of them (although according to research, this probably isn't true), but at what cost? Perfectionism has many negative consequences, and you may be experiencing several of them right now. Make a list of all the ways perfectionism is hurting you (and those around you), and you'll be more motivated to shed these tendencies.

Become Aware of Your Tendencies:

You may not realize how pervasive perfectionism can be. By becoming more aware of your patterns, you're in a better position to alter them. If you're able, it's a great idea to record your perfectionistic thoughts as they pop into your head. If it's impractical for you to jot thoughts down as they come, it's a great idea to go over your day each night and remember the times when you felt you'd failed, or hadn't done well enough, and write down what you thought at the time. This will help you become more aware of perfectionistic thoughts as they come to you in the future. (You can even journal about your feelings about these thoughts, but don't feel you've 'failed' if you don't have time to do this!)

See the Positive:

If you're struggling with perfectionism, you probably have honed the skill of spotting mistakes in even the best works of others and of yourself. You may just naturally look for it, and notice it above all other things. While this habit may be difficult to just stop, you can soften your tendency to notice the bad by making a conscious effort to notice all that is good with your work and the achievements of others. If you notice something you don't like about yourself or your work, for example, look for five other qualities that you *do* like. This will balance out your critical focus and become a positive new habit.

Alter Your Self-Talk:

Those who wrestle with perfectionism tend to have a critical voice in their head telling them their work isn't good enough, they're not trying hard enough, and *they're* not good enough. If you're going to overcome perfectionism, you need to work on changing this little voice! Negative self talk can perpetuate unhealthy behaviors and wreak havoc on your self esteem; by altering your self talk, you can go a long way toward enjoying life more and gaining an increased appreciation for yourself and your work.

Take Baby Steps:

Perfectionists tend to set goals of unreasonable excellence with no learning curve. These goals tend to be unrealistic and cause problems by being so rigidly demanding and leaving little room for error. Instead, you can reduce a lot of stress by changing your goals. You don't have to sacrifice the end result, but if you set bite-sized goals for yourself and reward yourself when you achieve them, you'll tend to be more forgiving with mistakes. For example, you may normally tackle the task of getting into better shape by working out five times a week. Unfortunately, if you're not used to working out regularly, you may get quite sore from such a quick change, and perhaps give up. But setting the goal to exercise once or twice the first week, and add an additional workout periodically until you've worked up to your goal, you will more likely reach your goal, enjoying many more 'successes' in the process.

Enjoy the Process:

You may be used to focusing on results, and beating yourself up if your results are less than perfect. One important way to recover from perfectionism is to begin focusing more on the *process* of reaching toward a goal, rather than just focusing on the goal itself. The previous suggestion (setting baby steps) can help you create more of an enjoyable process out of your striving. You can also enjoy the process of reaching a goal by getting involved with a group who is also trying to achieve the same goal you're after, or journaling about how you *feel* and what you *learn* as you reach toward your goal. If you find you don't achieve perfection, you can then reflect back and see all that you've gained in just working toward a worthy goal, assessing and appreciating the gains you *did* make in the process.

Learn to Handle Criticism:

If you tend to look at criticism as an attack, reacting defensively, an attitude change can help. Constructive criticism can give you important clues on how to improve your performance, making your less-than-perfect performances into useful stepping stones that lead to excellence. If the criticism you're receiving is pointed or harsh, it's okay to remind others (and yourself) that mistakes are a great way to learn.

<http://stress.about.com/od/lowstresslifestyle/a/perfectionism.htm>