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Remember when the best answer to the oft-asked job interview question, "What is your biggest weakness?" was, "I'm a perfectionist"? Well, today that characteristic truly *is* a weakness – or at least an obstacle to success. If this was your true response, and not just one you thought was better than, "I'm actually quite lazy" then, rather than simply working toward success, you may in fact be trying to be perfect. Perfectionism refers to a set of self-defeating thoughts and behaviors aimed at reaching excessively high unrealistic goals. It is often mistakenly seen in our society as desirable or even necessary for success. However, recent studies have shown that perfectionistic attitudes can actually interfere with success. The desire to be perfect can both rob you of a sense of personal satisfaction and cause you to fail to achieve as much as people who have more realistic strivings.

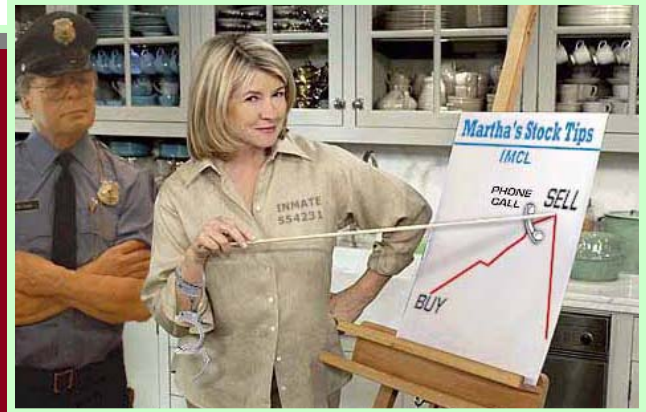
If you are a perfectionist, it is likely that you learned early in life that other people valued you because of how much you accomplished or achieved. As a result you may have learned to value yourself only on the basis of other people's approval. Thus, your self-esteem may have come to be based primarily on external standards. This can leave you vulnerable and excessively sensitive to the opinions and criticism of others. In attempting to protect yourself from such criticism, you may decide that being perfect is your only defense.

Edwin Bliss said, "Perfection, fortunately, is not the only alternative to mediocrity. A more sensible alternative is excellence. Striving for excellence is stimulating and rewarding; striving for perfection - in practically anything - is both neurotic and futile." This month we're talking to you Martha Stewart!

top ten signs your a perfectionist:

Are you a perfectionist? Take the test:

1. You can't stop thinking about a mistake you made.
2. You are intensely competitive and can't stand doing worse than others.
3. You either want to do something "just right" or not at all.
4. You demand perfection from other people.
5. You won't ask for help if asking can be perceived as a flaw or weakness.
6. You will persist at a task long after other people have quit.
7. You are a faultfinder who must correct other people when they are wrong.
8. You are highly aware of other people's demands and expectations.
9. You are very self-conscious about making mistakes in front of other people.
10. You noticed the grammatical error in the title of this list!



are you alienating people at work with your perfectionism?



"Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism. Confronting your fears and allowing yourself the right to be human can, paradoxically, make yourself a happier and more productive person." - Dr. David M. Burns

Have you ever had the boss from hell? Unfortunately, too many of us have endured such a 'leader' during our working life. These folks manifest themselves in many ways, but one of the most common traits of these people is their demand for perfection both from themselves and from their employees. Gordon Flett has produced some interesting research on such people.

Jazz Saxophonist Ornette Coleman has probably never heard of Gordon Flett. I hadn't heard of him either until recently when a rash of articles began appearing in newspapers all over the world.

Professor Flett of Toronto's York University, who collaborated with University of British Columbia Professor Paul Hewitt in his research, claims perfectionists are people who not only hold unrealistically high standards but also judge themselves or others as always falling short. "Perfectionism is the need to be, or to appear, perfect," says Flett. "Perfectionists are persistent, detailed and organized high achievers. Perfectionists vary in their behaviours: some strive to conceal their imperfections; others attempt to project an image of perfection. But all perfectionists have in common extremely high standards for themselves or for others."

Does this sound like some of those bosses we've worked for? Even more to the point, does any of this sound like you?

If it does, you should also know that, according to Flett, perfectionists are prone to health problems because they are under constant stress. One of the obvious health problems related to this stress is high blood pressure.

And some of these unhealthy perfectionist traits can be found in children. Back in 1994, 30 preschoolers, aged 4 and 5, took part in an experiment at a computer camp in Toronto. Interviewers asked the children five questions to determine perfectionism levels. They then gave the kids a computer task that was rigged to fail. The 'most perfect' children showed the greater signs of distress, such as extreme anger and anxiety, according to Professor Flett.

Simply put, there are three types of perfectionist:

- ✓ Self-oriented - who expect perfection of themselves;
- ✓ Other oriented - who demand perfection from others;
- ✓ Socially prescribed - who think others expect perfection of them.

In addition, Flett's researchers found that perfectionists showed three different types of behaviour:

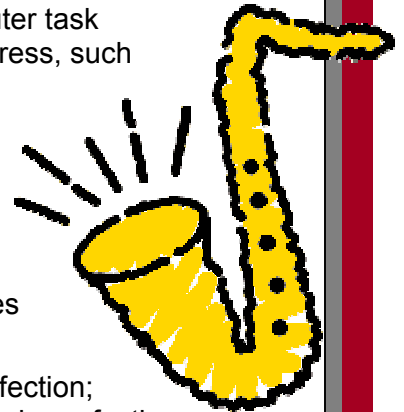
- ✓ Self Promotion - attempting to impress others by bragging or displaying perfection;
- ✓ Avoidance – avoiding situations because they are afraid to display their own imperfections;
- ✓ Hiding Problems – keeping their problems to themselves, including being unable to admit their failures to anyone.

Says Flett, "Perfectionists are persistent, detailed and organized high achievers". And therein lies the rub. It can be hard to give up 'perfectionism' because the rewards for high achievers can be so intoxicating.

For those who want to abandon perfectionism - recognizing that it's unhealthy - Flett suggests honestly assessing the behaviour and asking: "Is this working for me?"

"Everybody acknowledges that nobody's perfect," Flett mused, "but still people are trying to be that one (perfect) person."

Which brings me back to jazz musician Ornette Coleman. He summed it all up in a sentence. "When I realized it was alright to make mistakes, I knew I was on to something." Thanks Ornette!



"Perfectionism is a dangerous state of mind in an imperfect world"

– Robert Hillyer