

of negative thoughts — “This paper isn’t good enough to turn in,” or “I’m an irresponsible person because I didn’t do my best.” Perhaps this isn’t your best paper ever, but it is on time and parts of it are very good. You may find you are jumping to conclusions that aren’t supported by the facts.

5. Learn to respond to criticism by using “verbal judo.”

Several techniques are useful. One is **empathy**, or learning to see the world through the critic’s eyes instead of responding defensively. Another is **inquiry**. When the criticism is vague, ask the critic to respond in a more specific and objective way— “Just what did I do that you felt was stupid?” A third technique is **disarming**. The idea is to take the sting out of the criticism by finding a grain of truth in the criticism, even if it seems unfair and untrue.

6. Learn to celebrate “smaller” goals.

Try adjusting your standards. Standards can be thought of as imaginary abstractions people create to motivate themselves. Experiment with various standards to see which work out best. In any given activity you could aim for “perfect,” “good,” “above average,” “average,” “below average,” or “adequate.” If your time is limited, you may decide to do a “perfect” math paper and opt for an “average” room cleaning.

By adjusting standards, it is more likely that goals will be reached and even surpassed.

Think about the goals you want to set for yourself and discuss them with someone you respect. Ask yourself how important a particular event is in the total picture of your life. Make adjustments in your goals and act on them. Only you can decide if being “the best” at something is what will make you happy.

Books about Perfectionism

“Too Perfect: When Being in Control Gets Out of Control,” by Allan E. Mallinger, Jeannette Dewyze

“Overcoming Perfectionism: The Key to a Balanced Recovery,” by Ann W. Smith

“Never Good Enough: How to Use Perfectionism to Your Advantage Without Letting It Ruin Your Life,” by Monica Ramirez Basco

“Perfectionism: What’s Bad About Being Too Good,” by Miriam Adderholdt, Jan Goldberg



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Overcoming Perfectionism



Counseling Center

Dear Counselor,

When I was in high school, I was the star of the track team, the captain of the academic team, and I got straight A's — everyone knew I was the best. Now I'm in college and my life is very different. I still get straight A's, but so do lots of other people and even though I was really good in sports in high school, there are so many guys here who are better than me, I don't stand a chance. My friends say to loosen up and be glad I'm not flunking out. I feel if I can't be the best, then I have failed and there is no point in even trying. Nobody remembers a runner up — how can I get back on top again?

Previously Perfect

emotional and physical ills. How do you decide when you cross the line between healthy pursuit of excellence and the illusion that you can be perfect if you just try hard enough?

Here are Some Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do you see things from an all or nothing viewpoint—nothing in between?
2. When you make a mistake, do you feel it will happen again and again — once wrong, always wrong?
3. Do “should” statements dominate your self-talk — I should do better?
4. Do you feel you must achieve a flawless result and refuse to stop trying even if

1. ***Make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of attempting to be perfect in everything you do.***

Sometimes the amount of time and energy required to achieve a perfect result outweighs the importance of the results. It may become apparent that perfectionistic behavior is not always an advantage.

2. ***Start a pleasure-predicting sheet.***

Make a list of your activities for the next day and assign each a number from one to ten according to your expectation of how satisfying the activity will be. You could discover that doing an average job on some activities is more satisfying than doing a perfect job on others. Many people believe they can't experience

Nobody remembers a runner up. . .

Dear Previously Perfect,

Setting high standards for yourself and wanting to be the best you can be are very positive goals. There is nothing wrong with striving to meet high standards unless those standards are beyond reach or reason. When goals dominate your life and take away your ability to enjoy your accomplishments, you can become a victim of perfectionism. People have perfectionistic attitudes that make them unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives.

Research has shown that people who never allow themselves to enjoy their successes appear to be vulnerable to a variety of

what you are doing makes little difference in the outcome — not knowing when enough is enough?

If you answered “yes” to several of these questions, perfectionistic attitudes may be making you unhappy. Just because you have some of these feelings doesn't mean you can't learn to change your way of thinking about yourself and how other people see you.

The University of Pennsylvania Mood Clinic has developed a structured treatment program for attitude-retraining. They suggest six steps for changing old habits of thought.

satisfaction unless they perform in an outstanding manner on every activity.

3. ***Find out if dichotomous thinking works.***

Next time you pass a person on the street, ask yourself, “Is this person totally handsome? Or totally ugly? Or somewhere in between?” The world seldom divides itself dichotomously into two categories.

4. ***Write down your “automatic thoughts.”***

Make a list of the thoughts that rush into your mind involuntarily when you evaluate yourself. Did you record a lot