

### When Good Enough is Good Enough

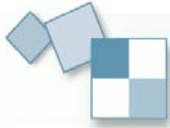
Most individuals and cultures value striving for excellence; being the best at whatever one takes on. But for a number of people this desire for success and accomplishment can take a dark spin, it can become a compulsive drive to attain impossible goals. This pattern of self-defeating behavior and thinking is referred to as perfectionism. Paradoxically, rather than leading to a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction, individuals who are perfectionistic most often feel badly about themselves and feel others look down on them. They are unable to accurately gauge their own efforts and outcomes and, ironically, may actually achieve less than people with more realistic goals and self-appraisal. The explanation for this may lie in what is referred to as the *Pareto Principle*, the observation that twenty per cent of our efforts often yields eighty per cent of the desired outcome. This means that the remaining eighty per cent only delivers meager additional gains. And that eighty per cent could be better spent taking on other challenges, or even spent enjoying one's accomplishments.

The origins of perfectionism often stem from a range of family, social and personal factors however there does seem to be associated with several key fears and beliefs:

- A fear of failure whereby not meeting a desired goal is equated with personal worthlessness
- A fear of making mistakes, whereby a mistake isn't seen as a natural part of any task and an opportunity for learning, but rather a catastrophic disaster.
- A black-and-white way of thinking, so that any outcome that isn't completely successful is a total calamity.
- An inordinate dependence on the approval of others; if they do not attain perfectionism than others will condemn and reject them.
- The sense that their efforts are never good enough, they must do more and try harder

Perfectionism is a personality style that is ultimately self-defeating and inhibits true personal accomplishment and worth. There are several things one can do:

- Set realistic and reachable goals that are based on your own wants and needs and on what you have accomplished in the past, not on some unattainable ideal or other's expectations.
- Aim for modest improvements and set subsequent goals in a sequential manner.
- Experiment with your standards for success. Pick an activity and instead of aiming for 100%, try for 90%, 80%, or even 60% success.
- Pay attention to the *process* of doing an activity rather than the outcome. Enjoy doing more than achieving.
- Note how you are feeling. If you are not experiencing enjoyment but rather feel mostly nervous, ask yourself if you've set impossible expectations for yourself.
- Use feelings of anxiety and depression as opportunities to ask yourself, "*Have set up impossible expectations for myself in this situation?*"
- Celebrate mistakes, even 'failures' as opportunities to grow and learn.



## resiliency builder

Bear in mind that aiming for personal and professional goals is quite different from the self-defeating process of perfectionism. Healthy strivers set goals based on their own wants and desires rather than responding to external expectations. Their goals are realistic and usually just one step beyond what they have already accomplished. In other words, their goals are realistic, internal, and potentially attainable. They take pleasure in the *process* of pursuing the task rather than focusing only on the end result.