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What is this?

15 ways to silence your inner perfectionist and accept 'good enough' work

L-R: Sherine Khalil, Deb Boucher, Mark Becker, Ted Helprin, Russell Benaroya, Daniel Serfaty, Betsy Hauser, Samir Mokashi, Joy Frestedt, Liz Wooten-Reschke, Kenneth Croston, Jessica Hawthorne-Castro, Zee Ali, Rachel Namoff, Solomon Thimothy

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By Business Journals Leadership Trust Expert Panel®
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It's often said that "perfect" is the enemy of "good." While it's important to take pride in the quality of your work, a goal of perfection sometimes means too much extra time, resources and energy invested into a project.

So how do you let go of that need to be perfect and get more "good enough" work done? We asked the members of Business Journals Leadership Trust for some simple ways to silence your inner perfectionist and shift your mindset. Their best responses are below.

1. Think of weekly, not daily, priorities.

Think of work in terms of a week, not a day. What are the five priorities or deliverables you want to complete by the end of the week? Make sure at least one has a revenue impact on the business. Some days kids eat poorly, fighting every meal. But if you look at what they ate over a week, you find that, overall, they ate well. This is the same idea. Some days are more productive than others, but your weekly goals keep you in check. – Sherine Khalil, Valor Compounding Pharmacy

2. Set deadlines for yourself.

Setting deadlines is the key to taming perfectionism. Specifically, time blocking is an effective way to enforce those deadlines by providing a hard stop when the work must be good enough. Another approach is to implement "select perfectionism" with the Pareto principle: Determine the 20% of work that merits a higher degree of scrutiny and thoughtfully acknowledge the 80% that doesn't need it. – Deb Boucher, Cushman & Wakefield

3. Learn to discern whether this is the time and place for perfection.

This is difficult because "perfect" has its time and place. The teaching is to help people discern when "good enough" truly is good enough. It is similar to the discussion about striving for accuracy versus precision. For example, I tell my people that when they are providing a forecast, I'm really only asking for their best guess, backed up by credible assumptions. – Mark Becker, Florida United Methodist Foundation

4. Communicate scope early on.

In the agency world, a perfectionist can wreck margins. But it's that dedication to working and reworking a solution to the point that it's flawless that can make all the difference. So, rather than position myself in opposition to a perfectionist designer, I bring them in early on project scope. I ask them to define the time boxes that will drive the budget. And then I hold them to it. – Ted Helprin, Supply

5. Think of projects as experiments.

Experiments have a hypothesis, a series of tests, results and learning. Some may fail. Some may succeed. By thinking about your initiatives as experiments, you don't dwell on perfection — you dwell on learning and the velocity of learning. That way you can avoid perfectionism because experiments are not permanent. – Russell Benaroya, Stride

6. Define 'must-haves' and 'nice-to-haves.'

Establish realistic goals at the outset of any endeavor and then share them with your team. "Good enough" sounds to some like "just enough," so positively frame your goals in terms of "must-haves" versus "nice-to-haves." With these in mind, the team can consider whether to stretch for the nice-to-haves once the must-haves are completed, without feeling the job was half done. – Daniel Serfaty, Aptima, Inc.

7. Empower your team to own projects.

Empower your team to take ownership of what you hired them to do. I tell my team, "If you are 70% to 80% sure, then do it." I trust that most of the time they are going to get it right. The few times that they don't, I'm there to back them up and give them feedback on how to do it better next time. That's how we all learn and grow. – Betsy Hauser, Tech Talent South

8. Commit to a time limit.

Create a timeline for yourself that outlines when you want to finish and how many hours you will spend on the project. Stick to your limit. Once you reach it, whatever

you have is what will go out. This will allow you to get your work done and be efficient while doing it. – Samir Mokashi, Code Unlimited LLC

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9. Develop standard operating procedures.

We don't try to "silence" the perfectionist. We constantly discuss quality and how to get work done on time and on budget for our clients. We review documents, with disagreements going to an "adjudicator," and all of this takes time. In the end, time is the enemy both of "perfect" work and of work that is "good enough." Standard operating procedures help keep us on track. Some staff members need more help. – Joy Frestedt, Frestedt Incorporated

10. Offer yourself and others grace.

We have a sign in our office that reads, "Let whatever you do today be enough." This is not an encouragement to slack off or follow your own free will into work assignments. It is, however, a reminder that we trust our team members to bring the best version of themselves to work each day — and depending on the day, that best can vary. It's also a reminder to offer one another grace, especially now. – Liz Wooten-Reschke, Connect For More

11. Determine the root cause.

The first step is to determine if the issue is perfectionism or fear of making mistakes. To foster an environment that encourages innovation is also to use mistakes to learn and grow. Share stories of failures and how those experiences were turned into successes. Build trust with your team to give them the confidence required to take chances, make mistakes and get better each and every day. – Kenneth Croston, Electronic Locksmith, Inc.

12. Finish what you start, then revisit it.

It is important to do your greatest work and put your best foot forward in all aspects of work, but the constantly changing landscape can make one want to change direction during projects — which can lead to a vicious cycle. Therefore, finish what you started on any project. You can always come back to it and reevaluate the approach when more data or perspectives come into play. – Jessica Hawthorne-Castro, Hawthorne Advertising

13. Prioritize and schedule your work.

Always set a firm deadline. Deadlines are our best friends when it comes to pushing ourselves to complete our projects and goals. They force us to prioritize and schedule out how the work will get done and to define a realistic "good enough" within that timeline, knowing that we all have a lot of other things that must also get done. Time restraints limit our "perfectionist" mindset. – Zee Ali, Z-Swag

14. Focus on action.

Action is the key to getting it done. When forward movement is happening and your work ethic and personal achievement are strong, it is easy to breeze past "perfect." The great is in the doing. The action is in the doing. Measuring action is the doing. – Rachel Namoff, Arapaho Asset Management

15. Forget about others and focus on you.

Perfectionism is essentially fear. We're afraid we'll make a mistake or be judged by someone who knows better. But here's the thing: There will always be someone better, someone smarter, etc. Forget about the others; you do you. Adopt a learner's mindset and just make it happen. Your potential mistakes are attempts. That's it. – Solomon Thimothy, OneIMS