

Sales Tip!



Perfectionism and Procrastination

Are perfectionism and procrastination opposite sides of the same coin?

Perfectionism is a mental obsession with achieving the ideal as a minimum requirement. For some people, it is a conscious form of procrastination that prevents them from getting started on goals and projects. For others, it's an unconscious form that prevents them from completing projects, accomplishing their goals, and adding value to the world. In either case, it's a debilitating condition.

When you seek perfection, you seek the ideal situation or set of circumstances. But, "ideal" is always relative—typically, something superior to where you are or what you have at the moment. So, seeking perfection is like seeking the horizon. You can keep your eye on it, but no matter how far you travel, you can never reach it. No matter how much progress you make or how much you achieve, you will never be happy. Because of the impossible measurement standards you set, nothing is ever good enough (including the contribution of others). Projects are not finished; goals are not achieved; and you are always unsatisfied.

For some people, outright procrastination is a defense mechanism for not being able to deal with the need to achieve perfection. Their thinking is something like, "Unless I can be guaranteed that the outcome will be perfect, I'm not even going to start." That line of thinking leads to more procrastination disguised as preparation and organization, but there is no action in relation to the task at hand.

Both procrastination and perfectionism are paralyzing traps that undermine an individual's (and even an organization's) confidence and create chronic dissatisfaction. As a result, so many good ideas remain locked in people's heads or left on the drawing board because they don't feel those ideas are "good enough"... when in reality, they are good enough for most of the world.

Can procrastination and perfectionism be overcome?

Yes.

Perfectionism and procrastination are learned habits, and as such, can be unlearned. And that "unlearning" process starts by taking action. The brain doesn't get serious—become fully engaged—until you take action. And that requires you to let go of the "shoulds" that prevent you from taking action, whether it's starting a project or completing it:

I should be ... I should know... I should have... You must recognize and admit that "I should" thinking doesn't do any good. To get beyond that type of thinking, just get started:

1. Outline the project or goal... Identify its purpose and importance... Identify the intended outcome.
2. Establish success criteria... and stick to them.
3. Involve others... if only to reinforce your commitment.

Getting started puts the gears in motion. Recognizing that "good enough" is, in fact, good enough will keep the gears turning. When you let go of perfectionism, opportunities open up and people who can help you capitalize on those opportunities show up. The people and opportunities were always there, but your tunnel vision—focus on perfection—prevented you from seeing them.

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