

EMBRACE IMPERFECTION

AND BE THE SUCCESS YOU WANT TO BE



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*Strive for continuous improvement, instead
of perfection. ~ Kim Collins*

A few years ago, I was asked to give a speech to a lovely group of talented business owners. It was, actually an opportunity I was looking forward to. Until I saw who the other speakers were. Then all my childhood fears came rushing back. What if I make a mistake and say something stupid? What if my points fall flat? What if they laugh at me or worse, don't like me?

I knew these other speakers were perfect. They never make mistakes. Everyone loves them. I was going to have to be perfect to even be in the same room as them. I obsessed over the speech for weeks. I obsessed over my looks, tried my best to lose some weight, and basically stressed over every detail.

In the end, I delivered the speech. I wasn't perfect, but I didn't get booed off the stage, either.

Lesson learned: *Do your best and embrace every imperfection.*

How do you embrace imperfection when the world demands perfection? We live in a world that insists women need to be a certain size and weight, men need to be strong and powerful, you must be the perfect parent to raise responsible kids and businesses must never make mistakes.

So how do you fit in if you aren't the perfect size? Or the strongest or the most powerful? Or the best parent or grandparent or business owner or coach?

First, you have to realize there is no such thing as perfection. We really do live in an imperfect world. Trying to attain perfection will only lead to a life of frustration and high-level stress. It can be exhausting and unrelenting pursuing the messages in our head saying "never good enough" or "What will people think?"

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In reality, we know there is no such thing as perfect. Yet we spend an incredible amount of time and energy trying to be perfect for everyone.

The simple reason we get sucked into perfection is we believe perfection will protect us. If we look perfect, act perfect and live perfect, we'll avoid the pain of judgment, shame and blame. Or so we think.

Perfection makes us believe we will be worthy of love and belonging. That need to be worthy often makes us feel like we are never thin, beautiful, handsome, smart, extraordinary, talented, popular, promoted, admired, and/or accomplished enough.

You feel guilty if you aren't working your tail off to be perfect. You're constantly telling yourself that if you fail to be perfect, you are a bad person. If you let your kids down, you're not perfect.

If you don't do the right thing, you're a bad person. If you fail at something, you're unworthy. If you don't do something perfectly, people won't like you. All these guilty thoughts lead to blaming and feeling inadequate.

The truth is, people are actually drawn to others who are real and down to earth. We love authenticity, knowing life is actually messy and imperfect.

If we want to see authenticity in others, then why can't we embrace our own imperfections and just be good enough?

Think about what the great American philosopher, William James, said about a perfect world:

“Freedom in a world already perfect could only mean freedom to be worse, and who could be so insane as to wish that? Surely the only possibility that one can rationally claim is the possibility that things may be better.”

This simply means in a perfect world we don't have the freedom to achieve anything positive because it's already been achieved. In an imperfect world, you can always make things better.

In this guide, you will learn what perfection is and why we should be embracing imperfection instead.

You'll discover why you think you need to be perfect and how you can let go of perfectionism. You'll learn how to be happy with whom you are and the fun of letting go of other's opinions.

There is a kind of beauty in imperfection. ~ Conrad Hall

What is Perfection?

So what does perfection even mean? Is it something that really exists? Let's take a look at the official definition. The Definition of perfection is...

The condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects. Or it's the action or process of improving something until it is faultless or as faultless as possible.

Perfectionism isn't the same as doing your best. Striving to do your best is about growth and healthy achievement, whereas perfectionism is more like a shield we think will protect us from getting hurt or being made fun of.

We live in a society that stresses unattainable expectations on every aspect of our lives, from how much we *should* weigh to how we should be raising our kids.

Perfectionism is the constant striving to be and do better—the sense that you or your circumstances are unacceptable as they are. It's a consumption to always do more so you can be accepted, loved and to belong.

Thinking you need to be perfect leaves you frozen, because you never really reach being perfect.

Imperfection then, is accepting yourself and the situation as it is.

It means making mistakes, not always having the perfectly pressed dress or having a few extra pounds. It means liking who you are, while striving to do your best.

So how do you learn to embrace imperfection and recognize you are enough the way you are?

We need to figure out why we are afraid to let our true selves be seen and why we're afraid of what other people think.

Before we can embrace imperfection, we must first determine why we think we need to be perfect.

The fact of storytelling hints at a fundamental human unease, hints at human imperfection. Where there is perfection there is no story to tell. ~ Ben Okri

Why Do We Think We Need to be Perfect?

As we've seen, trying to be perfect is an unattainable goal. So why do we think we need to be perfect if it's not possible to do? After all, aren't we just creating more stress and heartache when we can't achieve it?

After studying the subject for a while, here's what I've learned:

- **Acceptance, love and approval.** We have a deep sense of wanting to belong and to be loved. As humans, we're biologically, physically and spiritually wired to love and be loved and to belong to the "group". When we don't fulfill those needs, we fall apart, get sick or hurt others.
- **We have a hard time believing we are worthy the way we are right this minute.** We have a long list of prerequisites to being worthy. I'll be worthy:
 - o when I lose 20 pounds
 - o if I can get pregnant
 - o if I get/stay sober
 - o if everyone thinks I'm a good parent
 - o if I can hold my marriage together
 - o when I make partner
 - o when my parents finally approve
 - o I can do it all and look like I'm not even trying
 - o and so on.
- **Pleasing others.** We often feel we need to be perfect to please other people. If we lose the weight, then it will please our partner. If you make good grades, it will please your parents.
 - o Ever since I was little, I had a need to please other people. I had to make good grades and be a good boy to please my parents so they would love me. I had to play a certain way or talk a certain way so the other kids would like me.
 - o I craved others' approval. If I didn't get it, my self-esteem plummeted. It got to the point that I did things that weren't in alignment with who I really was. I'd have a hard time telling others no when they wanted me to do something for them, even when I didn't have time or any interest in doing it.

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- **Fear of being made fun of.** We crave approval and don't want to be the one that others bully and make fun of. If we are perfect, others won't have a reason to laugh at us.
 - o A client of mine, Mary had always wanted to be a motivational speaker. She loved helping others. The problem was, she was afraid of being made fun of. She'd had a bad experience in college when she made a mistake on a speech she was giving and the other students laughed at her and called her "Messed Up Mary." She was stuck with the nickname the rest of her college years. For years, she's dreamed of getting back in front of others, but her fear of being made fun of kept her from following her dream.

These basic emotional needs are a part of every human. These needs may not have been met in childhood. Or you may have learned love was conditional on how you performed or what you did for others. You may strive to always be perfect to earn another person's love or approval.

Trying to be perfect or always do something in the perfect way is impossible. It can lead to both anxiety and depression, or even paralysis from the fear of not being perfect.

The fastest way to break the cycle of perfectionism and become a fearless mother is to give up the idea of doing it perfectly—indeed to embrace uncertainty and imperfection. ~ Arianna Huffington

Letting Go of Perfection

As you've seen, perfection isn't something that anyone can achieve. The trick is to learn to let go of it and to live a happy life accepting yourself as you are.

Here are nine more reasons why you should let it go:

- 1. It frees up your time.** When you're not obsessing about making your body perfect or your project perfect, you have more time to spend on other projects or passions.
- 2. You'll feel better.** You'll have less stress which can cause depression, insomnia or other physical problems, from weight gain to high blood pressure.
- 3. Once you stop obsessing, you begin to enjoy life more.** And the people around you will be happier.
- 4. Letting go of perfection lets you make mistakes.** It lets you get past the worry and fear that it won't be perfect.

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5. **You'll quickly realize life isn't perfect.** You'll see that the universe is chaotic. For example, your best programmer might get sick in the middle of a big project. Or a natural disaster may crush your car. Control what you can and accept the rest.
6. **Accepting imperfection allows you to grow.** Trying to be perfect keeps you stagnant.
7. **You become more aware of what near-perfection looks like.** You'll see it in the beauty of someone's smile or the laughter from a simple mistake that doesn't matter.
8. **You'll begin to practice self-compassion.** You start to accept yourself as the way you are. Your flaws are what make you unique.
9. **Embracing imperfection allows you to examine your fears of failure or of mistakes and why they are holding you back.** It lets you see what is really behind those fears.

I like to do a three-step examination of what's causing that fear.

It goes something like this:

- a. Name the basic fear: i.e. Fear of failing
- b. What's behind that fear? Keep narrowing it down until you get to the core of the fear. Are you afraid of being laughed at? Are you afraid of not being liked? Why? Just remember we aren't in a high school popularity contest in life. Our life is ours to be lived how we want to feel.
- c. What would happen if you failed? Would it cause a major catastrophe or health problem?



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Here are 3 ways you can let go of perfection:

- **Change any negative self-talk.** Critical self-talk only reinforces perfectionism.
- **Practice self-compassion.** Being compassionate with yourself helps you accept you will make mistakes and to learn from them.
- **Spend time examining your goals and expectations.** Are they attainable? If not, change them or break them down into smaller steps if you need to.

Letting go of perfection and embracing imperfection allows you to really become a happier person. You become free to pursue what you want to make your life successful, whether that's in your profession, your relationships, as a parent or as a person.

“If you want to have more, you have to become more. Success is not something you pursue. What you pursue will elude you; it will elude you; it can be like trying to chase butterflies. Success is something you attract by the person you become. For things to improve, you have to improve. For things to get better, you have to get better. For things to change, you have to change. When you change, everything changes for you.” ~ Jim Rohn

Develop Your “Lacking” Talent to Be Successful In What You Pursue

We all want to be successful at what we pursue. The world screams at us to try harder, achieve more and to make no mistakes. We must produce perfection in order to be successful. But is that a reality?

I believe we can be successful in whatever we pursue without having to work harder or be perfect.

In order to pursue what is meaningful, we have to let go of perfection.

We all have gifts and talents. By cultivating these gifts and sharing them with the world, you get a sense of meaning and purpose. The trick is to find what is right for you.

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One of the best ways to be successful in what you pursue is to develop the talents you are lacking for what you want to do.

First ask who you need to become to be successful.

What habits, talents or behaviors do you need to begin doing?

What good habits, skills or behaviors do you need to practice more?

What do you need to *stop* doing?

Figure out what's right for you. Begin digging deeper into what you really want and how you want success to look. Then start making the changes needed to get there. For instance, successful people don't sit around and watch television all day. They take massive action in what they want to pursue. They change habits that don't fit in with what they want. They develop the skills and talents they need to help them change and grow.

To be successful, don't compare yourself to others.

Concentrate on your strengths. Go online and take a Briggs Myers test or some other personality test to help you discover and identify your unique talents. Your talent can be something you love to do or are good at.

Develop your talent. Practice, take classes, seek help, read books or whatever you need to do to build your talent to its best. Want to play golf like Tiger Woods, practice. Want to write like Stephen King, practice. (Stephen King writes everyday. No matter what. Even on Christmas Day. It may only be 15 minutes, but he writes—practices—every day.)

If you have a weakness you know you can't improve, partner with others who *can* do it.

Learn from your failures. Use failure to motivate you to continue improving on your skills and talents.

Talent is important in all areas of your life. The kind of talent you have affects how you succeed in every area of your life. Parents with a little bit of patience with kids can develop this talent to be a very patient and understanding boss.

Success in what you pursue can be found by the talents and skills you nurture. Following what is meaningful to you is the key. If you love writing, but lack the talent to string a few words together you can develop the skill. Take a class and practice.

Learning to be Happy with Who You Are

We live in a society that expects us to be perfect. We have to have the perfect hair, the slimmest body, or be the best parent. We have to be the perfect boss or employee. We're expected to be enough and if we're not we begin to question ourselves.

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In order to live a happy life, you have to learn to be happy with who you are. You aren't perfect. *No one is.*

So how do you become happy with how you are right now?

- **Understand you are *complete as you are right now.*** You don't need to change how you look, act or feel to be happy.

A friend of mine always felt she was too overweight to be go water skiing. She loved the water but rarely went because she was self-conscious of her weight. All of her life she'd been told she couldn't do sports because of her size. She finally learned that her body was what made her unique. She learned to love it. And she finally had the courage to go to the lake and get on those skis.

- **Learn how to eat healthy and exercise regularly.** By learning what your body needs to be healthy, you are discovering what you need to be happy. A healthy diet and regular exercise can help you live a more fulfilled life.

- **Forgive yourself.** Have there been times in your life when you felt you let yourself down? It can be hard, but you need to forgive yourself for your mistakes. It's essential for being able to move forward with a positive outlook on life.

There have been times in my past I've messed up big time. I would carry around the guilt for hurting others or myself for years. It kept me in a dark and depressing place for a long time. After much soul searching and education, I began forgiving myself for the times I messed up. And even though I still have some work to do, it's been freeing, like a heavy weight lifted off my shoulders.

- **Get to know yourself.** Get in touch with what truly makes you happy. Live your passions every day. Spend a little time doing something you enjoy every day. This can have a big impact on how you feel.

At one time a few years ago, I was overwhelmed with what was happening in my life. I'd spend all my time working or taking care of someone else. I rarely did things that brought me joy. I didn't even know who I was anymore. Finally, I reached a point when I knew things had to change. I began taking metaphysical classes and rediscovering what brought me joy. Now I take a few minutes every day to enjoy what makes me happy.

- **Learn to say no.** Many people, especially women, have trouble saying no to people, situations and events. When you don't say no often enough, you can become overwhelmed and your life can become out of balance. Saying no is essential for being able to focus on what you believe in, your values and what is important to you.

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Many years ago, when I was first getting going in my business, I had a very demanding client. He called me early one morning wanting me to do a project for him right that minute. I was busy with other client work and I became so upset that I said, "No I can't do that right now!" He said, "Oh! Then when *can* you do it?" I told him and he was perfectly happy. That was a great lesson to me. It proved I could say "no" when I needed to. (Without even getting upset.)

- **Ask yourself questions.** Take yourself on a date and ask the questions you really want to know about yourself. It's okay to be a chatterbox. No one else is listening to your private conversation. Get in tune with your inner happy. It's okay to take time away from everyone else to make yourself happy.

My friend who always wanted to waterski did this. She had a long talk with herself. She asked herself what she would love to do if she wasn't afraid of what others would say. She began digging deeper with questions and answers to herself until she found what truly made her happy.

When you are happy with who you are, flaws and all, you are less likely to want everything to be perfect.

You're happy making mistakes, with the way you look and the situation you're in.

Learn to Ignore Others' Opinions of You and Stop Being a People Pleaser

Many people spend their lives based on what other people think of them. They go out of their way to make other people happy. These people pleasers have low self-esteem. All of their actions or choices they make are based on what others think or expect from them.

Don't get me wrong. It's okay to be kind and helpful. But when it becomes an unhealthy way of life, it can do more harm to your self-esteem. Excessive people pleasing means you are always putting other people's needs and wants before your own. You neglect your own needs and lose the sense of who you are.

You might find it hard to speak up for yourself or to say no if you are a people pleaser. You find it difficult to set boundaries, making it easy for others to take advantage of you. You become overwhelmed and burnt out trying to do everything yourself.

The good news is you can stop being a people pleaser.

- **Realize this is YOUR life.** Recognize that your self-worth doesn't depend on approval from other people. It's called self-worth for a reason. It's YOUR perception of yourself and depends on your own opinions.

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- **Forget about those who dislike you.** Realize you won't ever be able to please everyone. People won't notice or care as much as you think they do.
- **Negative comments are about them.** You can't control what others think. You can't change someone else's thoughts and you can't force someone to be happy by your actions. The only one you can control is you.
- **Analyze what matters in your life.** Look after your own needs. Make choices that are good for you, not what's expected. Practice self-care and believe it's essential for your well-being.
- **Practice being assertive and learn to say no.** Set healthy boundaries and stick to them.
- **Do a Worst Case scenario.** What would happen if someone's opinion was bad? Would you never have any friends or be loved? Address your insecurities and the underlying issues.

If you're tired of trying to please everyone else and worrying about what their opinion of you is, follow these tips for breaking the habit. It will require effort and persistence. But when you stop being a people pleaser you'll notice improvements in the quality of your life.

Moving On by Embracing Imperfection

It all boils down to this. Trying to be perfect is tiring. It puts you in a position of paralysis to move forward. It holds you back while everyone else moves on. Instead, when you embrace imperfection, you can be successful and happy.

What to do next?

Let go of trying to be perfect. That's it.

You, nor your circumstances or the people in your life need to be perfect in order to be acceptable. In fact, people, as a general rule, like real. Real means mistakes, flaws and imperfection.

Remember the story I told you at the beginning of this guide? I was almost paralyzed with fear that I wouldn't be as good as the other speakers. What finally made the difference was realizing that these speakers were human as well. They had their faults and weren't perfect. In fact, after the meeting, we all met for a meal and laughed at our own fears.

Here are my final thoughts on embracing imperfection to be successful and happy.

- Stop comparing yourself to others.

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- Accept your body as it is. Eat and exercise to be healthy, not to be a certain size.
- Do something you excel at. Find your passion and talent. Maybe you're amazing working with kids or repairing autos and just don't know it yet.
- Spend time outside. Soak up the sun. Take pictures.
- Forgive yourself and others who you've hurt or have hurt you.

Go ahead and embrace your imperfection. You'll be happy you did.