

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a difficult character defect to deal with because we do not believe it is a defect. We believe it is good to be perfect. That is the trap of perfectionism.

Perfectionism makes continual demands on our time and energy. It tells us we are not doing enough, pushes us to work harder, pushes us to do more, and pushes us to do everything perfectly. Many times we would rather do nothing at all than risk failure. When we do not do things perfectly we feel very guilty.

We easily can get caught up practicing perfectionism. We make lists of things to do and organize our tools. We worry continually about what might happen if tasks are not done right or on time. We may also worry about not pleasing our boss, co-workers, mate, family, friends, or ourselves.

We almost always fall short of perfection because the high standards we set are impossible to reach. It is then that guilt and feelings of inadequacy set in. This affects our fragile self-esteem because with this incorrect thinking our self-esteem depends upon our performance and our on-going need to be perfect. Practicing perfectionism locks us into a cycle of misery. In this cycle, we set high standards, fail to achieve them, punish ourselves because we did not, and may set even higher standards to compensate.

This cycle has many negative side effects. It isolates us from friends and family. We spend so much time at our work that there is no time for relaxation. When we do not relax and rarely have fun, our stress accumulates.

Often others are not aware of our need to be perfect. It may not show in our actions, but we feel inadequate when we look at the accomplishments of others. When we decide we have had enough and truly desire to change, we turn to the Twelve Steps of Emotions Anonymous (EA) for help. We share our feelings and talk about our perfectionistic behaviors with other EA members who understand. We use the slogan, "Don't compare." We begin to value ourselves without having to compete with others. We consider giving up our inner drive for perfection. We recognize the pain our perfectionism causes us and those around us. We see how absurd our expectations have been.

In order to let go of our perfectionism, we first must admit we have it and that we are powerless over it. We can then begin to take action in the following ways:

1. We stop comparing ourselves to others and begin to appreciate ourselves for who we are, and not for what we do.
2. We become willing to accept new ideas from others which broaden our perspective. We no longer belittle our-, selves for not thinking of them first.
3. We give ourselves permission to make mistakes, recognizing that we are not perfect, but perfectly human. We strive for progress, not perfection.
4. We begin to realize that we no longer always need to be right. We value listening and sharing with others.
5. We allow those around us the freedom to make mistakes and acknowledge that their lives are their responsibility.
6. We try living one day at a time, planning our actions but leaving the outcomes to our Higher Power. We remember to "Let go and let God."

We have had this problem for many years, and we realize it will take time to change. We practice patience. As we begin recovery from our need to be perfect, we become more loving, and we learn to enjoy life. We accept ourselves as we are for today. We make realistic lists of things to do and feel comfortable if only a few are completed. We stop judging ourselves and others. We begin to understand that we are perfect in the eyes of our Higher Power.

As our awareness grows, we more easily see how limited we are by practicing perfectionism. We now have courage to change. Our lives become happier and more serene. Because our perfectionism is only arrested, never cured, we continue to practice the Twelve Steps of EA. We find relief one day at a time.