

Perfectionism Characteristics and Root Causes

©2011 – 2018 Hillary Rettig. All rights reserved.

www.hillaryrettig.com

hillaryrettig@yahoo.com

The “Big 6” Characteristics

1. Define success narrowly and unrealistically and failure broadly, and punish self harshly for failure
2. Grandiosity: “things that are hard for others should be easy for me.”
Also: underplanning, over-reliance on luck, unwillingness to invest or sacrifice to meet goal.
3. Overidentification with work.
4. Overemphasis on product vs. process, and on external rewards:
5. Shortsightedness: do or die; overemphasis on current moment or project over long-term career; “Ahab problem” (sticking with one project too long), “butterfly problem” (jumping from project to project, looking for one that will “inspire” you to finishing).
6. Views punishment / deprivation as a motivator.

Other Characteristics

Labeling	Hyperbole	Fixations	Pathologizing
Negativity	Dichotomization	Rigidity/ Dithering	Arbitrary Categories & Couplings
Unconscious Process	Invidious Comparisons	Blind Spots/ Misplaced Pride	

Not a random list! All of the above are deviations from accepted best practices of teaching, coaching, mentoring, capacity-building, etc.

Causes

- Society/Media – pervasively perfectionist
- Parents (themselves influenced by media)
- “Teacher Malpractice”
- **Situational perfectionism**
- Self-reinforcing, addictive-type behavior

Solutions to Procrastination and Perfectionism

©2011 – 2018 Hillary Rettig. All rights reserved.

www.hillaryrettig.com
hillary@hillaryrettig.com

More information on, and examples of, many of the below solutions at <http://www.hillaryrettig.com/solutions-to-perfectionism/> and the other links as indicated.

1. Understand that procrastination and perfectionism ARE solvable. Key is really “getting,” deep in your bones, that perfectionism *never* works, and is *always* a dead end. Then...

2. Cultivate a mindset and habits of **Compassionate Objectivity** (nonperfectionism).

- Defines success broadly; celebrates successes
- Remains grounded and realistic; focuses on planning
- Maintains healthy emotional distance from work
- Focuses on process and internal / intrinsic rewards
- Takes the long / broad / high view. Emphasizes finishing / showing work.
- Rejects punishment / coercion / deprivation.

Also...

- Rejects labeling, hyperbole, fixations, comparisons, etc.
- Develops an objective and compassionate way of viewing oneself, one’s work, and one’s “successes” and “failures.” (Success & Failure converge!)

3. Use **journaling** to shift yourself into analytical / problem-solving mode and deal with the inner perfectionist / bully / critic:

- Use free writing to answer the question, “Why don’t I feel like doing my work?” Take your time, skip the blame and shame, and get it all out. (Often 20-30 reasons!) Then implement solutions.
- Dialogue with your inner perfectionist: address her concerns *without* buying into her mindset or solutions.

4. **Work techniques that preempt perfectionism:**

- Make sure you are abundantly resourced and supported.
 - <http://www.hillaryrettig.com/solutions-to-procrastination/>

- Make sure you understand...
 - Your best practices.
 - Your “project arc”: e.g., honeymoon, “antihoneymoon,” middle (long, boring, scary), light at end of tunnel, finish, submit, follow-up. <https://bit.ly/2IsyfOT>
- Work in timed intervals. (Start small!)
 - Goals: (1) finish your interval, (2) manage your moment-by-moment experience of your work to stay in compassionate objectivity.
- Chunk it! And use “microdrafts.” (Dozens of *fast* pass-throughs of your section, each time correcting the easy and obvious errors only.)
 - Quantity yields quality, which is an emergent property. <https://bit.ly/2K5GJbU>
- Work nonlinearly:
 - Visualize your work as a 3D map and use the WriterCopter <https://bit.ly/2FXQUN5>
 - Randomize! Assign #s to sections of your work and use dice or a bingo wheel. <https://bit.ly/2jJBuTK>
 - Work backwards in the piece.
 - “Dip into” difficult or scary sections—e.g., 1 min every hour of work—until they become un-scary.
- Work in community as much as possible, and ask for help early and often.
- Show your work early and often to avoid hoarding. <https://bit.ly/2rt3jU8>

5. Practice **Abundant Rewards / No Punishments**

- Reward = tangible reward (optional), physical reward (e.g., stretches or Snoopy dance), and emotional reward (feeling of pride and satisfaction). <https://bit.ly/2rtaMDp>
- Particularly important to celebrate tiny and/or partial achievements or victories.
- Move from constant state of judgment/punishment (disempowered), to constant state of reward/affirmation (empowered).
- You *don't* need to punish yourself (ever!) to act and improve!

6. Bonus Links

- www.hillaryrettig.com/how-to/how-to-avoid-burnout-by-frequently-rewarding-yourself/
- www.hillaryrettig.com/what-to-do-if/what-to-do-if-you-have-a-tendency-to-overgive/
- www.hillaryrettig.com/2013/05/18/what-joyful-productivity-looks-like/
- www.hillaryrettig.com/2012/08/06/all-your-work-should-be-sand-castles/
- www.hillaryrettig.com/2013/02/21/how-to-cope-with-success-related-losses/
- www.hillaryrettig.com/2010/05/03/the-key-insight/

####

5/10/18 version