

## **DON'T LET PERFECTION PARALYSE YOUR CAREER**

I'm a perfectionist, but it isn't something I'll ever boast about. Conversely, it's a liability that I, and many other professionals need to grapple with and tame throughout our careers. The trait has hampered human beings through the ages, and been the subject of many philosophical musings. Voltaire said it succinctly: "perfect is the enemy of the good", while Confucius suggested perfectionism is a limitation: "better a diamond with a flaw than a pebble without".

Managing perfectionism is particularly relevant in a modern-day career. Being meticulous and uncompromising clashes with the requirements of success in our digital age where speed is key to being competitive and budgets are tight. A desire for perfection is rigid and time-consuming, while today's rapidly changing business environment requires us to be agile and highly efficient.

When I was growing up, I was proud of being referred to as a perfectionist and for a while, my uncompromising pursuit of excellence worked in my favour, pushing me to work harder. This made it all the more confusing and frustrating when a strategy I had used in one successful meeting failed when applied in another. I quickly discovered that being overly focused on perfection can make you controlling, anxious and hamper creativity. A growth mindset requires us to embrace challenges and tackle things we aren't necessarily good at, to keep trying until we get it right. But when a fear of failure drives a desire for perfection, it holds us back from making bold, courageous moves – the kind that gives rise to truly great innovation and leadership.

Perfectionism can also take its toll on our confidence. Clinical psychologist Dr Anne Wilson Schaeff describes it as "self-abuse of the highest order" – interesting in our sector where looking after others is the end game. It seems there's more of this to come, too. In a recent study, psychologists Dr Martin M Smith and Dr Simon Sherry conducted a meta-analysis of nearly 25,000 people, many of them university students, and found a significant rise in perfectionism over the past three decades. They attributed it to an increasing emphasis on winning in our competitive world, the impact of controlling and critical parents, and social media providing too many unobtainable images of perfection. Describing perfectionism as an epidemic, they said millennials have "too many yardsticks upon which to measure their success and failure."

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So, what do we do about it? A stumbling block for perfectionists is comparing ourselves to people we admire and putting them on pedestals. Realising that nobody is perfect is a brilliant first step towards ending an unhealthy obsession with excellence.

Procrastination is another common downfall, as fear of things not turning out the way we hope quickly turns into avoidance. A perfectionist can be extreme in the way they evaluate, deciding that things are perfect or they're not good enough. A task becomes less daunting when you start with small, manageable steps, so set realistic goals, avoid over-thinking tasks and just get started.

It's important to keep things in perspective. Ask yourself: "If I don't do this perfectly, will it really matter in the long-run?"

Think about the worst-case scenario. For example, if you speak up and get the answer wrong in a training programme, you may feel deflated or surprised. You may even have someone in the room who looks at you smugly. But if that's the worst-case scenario, you can deal with it. It's not fun but nor does it matter that much. With that simple thought strategy, the fear dissipates. The interesting part of this scenario is that most people would admire your courage to speak up.

Finally, become aware of your inner critic – that voice inside your head that keeps reminding you that you're just not good enough. If we run with this narrative, we get lost in the fear of failure, criticism or rejection. Being dedicated and thorough is not the same as being obsessive and ruminating. Shifting your perspective is key.

**Written by Reika Roberts**

*Reika Roberts is the Chair of ABIC. She has over 30 years business experience and is considered a thought leader in the industry. With a strong background in business management, client development and start-ups, she holds a double degree in accounting and finance and post graduate qualifications in skin. Reika has gained deep fulfilment in mentoring talent and seeing future leaders of our industry emerge. As Managing Director and co-founder of derma aesthetics, distributor of derma-aid skincare and Exceed medical micro-needling, she is primarily responsible for the commercial operations and is proud of the multiple awards won globally for marketing and customer service.*

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