

Perfectionism.



Both perfectionism and imposter syndrome are a product of (distorted) thinking patterns. Once we become aware of these thinking patterns we can begin to see how they are influencing the way we view ourselves and how we approach our work.

Key takeaways

1. **Perfection is driven by fear** – fear of judgement, fear of failure, fear of not being good enough, fear of being exposed, etc
2. While we believe that perfection drives many positive aspects of our career to date, we often fail to see that **it hurts us more than it helps us**.
3. **Perfection harms us and our progress**. It wastes time, drives procrastination, and limits learning opportunities because we view our work in black and white terms of ‘success or failure’. When we set the bar so high we fear failing, and we justify sacrificing rest and life outside of work.

Questions to consider

1. Why does it have to be perfect?
What would happen if it wasn't?
2. Think about the bigger picture. Would aiming for ‘good enough’ make the task easier to approach, reduce the stress and tension, allow you to think clearer, and get the project finished faster?
3. Is this need to be perfect helping or hurting me? Is it hurting / delaying / complicating the task, dragging out the deadline, or adding layers of stress unnecessarily?

Actions to take

1. **Recognise the role that fear and anxiety are playing** – this is the first step in gaining control.
2. **Identify your red flags** – your signature physical responses to stress and tension (clenched teeth, furrowed brow, sore back, etc) so you can recognise when it's happening.
3. **Calm your red flags in the moment** by actively releasing the tension and using breathing techniques. Then address the thoughts by asking yourself the ‘questions to consider’.
4. **Break your patterns** by experimenting with your behaviour:

What if you committed to writing rather than doing yet another literature search?

What if you sought feedback on that draft without doing yet another read through?

What if you kept writing rather than re-writing and re-writing the same passage?

More resources to explore

[Desiree Dickerson “Overcoming perfectionism during the pandemic” *Nature*, 16 July 2020](#)

Imposter Syndrome.



As imposters, we see our success as happening in spite of us and our failures as being a product of us. The wins are never a product of our good work and capabilities but instead attributed to something external. And on the flip side, the failures, negatives, and losses, are entirely our fault.

Key takeaways

1. **Imposter syndrome is a sense of inadequacy**, an often debilitating belief that you are a fraud or that you're not good enough.
2. Through this distorted lens, **imposter syndrome is very self-perpetuating**. You end up filtering all of the positives externally and internalising all of the negatives, which begins to erode your sense of ability.
3. **This erosion of confidence in yourself and your abilities leads you to compare yourself to others**, further amplifying your 'weaknesses' and feelings of inadequacy.
4. You then unknowingly adopt behaviours that **reinforce that belief**.

Questions to consider

Overcoming imposter syndrome starts with recognising the biases in your thinking. You are viewing yourself and your work through a distorted lens. Remember, your thoughts are NOT facts so you *can* call them into question.

1. What would be the worst-case scenario if you 'exposed' your weakness (eg. saying you don't know or understand something and asking for an explanation)? How likely is it to actually happen?
2. How is this thought helping or harming me?
3. What benefits might you be missing out on by not raising your hand / asking the question / admitting you don't know?

Actions to take

1. **Recognise your thoughts are not facts**, This is key to overcoming imposter syndrome.
2. **Be conscious of stepping back and separating your emotions from facts** – just because you feel stupid in that moment, doesn't mean you are stupid.
3. **Identify your areas for improvement and work on a plan for change** – We cannot be experts in everything. But we *can* upskill in anything. Commit 1hr a week or 20 mins a day to furthering your understanding. Small steps can make big changes.
4. **Acknowledge and celebrate your wins** – we want to be the best we can be, but don't forget to look back and see how far you've come and the impact of what you've already achieved.
5. **Remind yourself of what's important** – Why are you doing this? Why are you here? Keep your focus on this ultimate goal, rather than your perceived faults and weaknesses.

More resources to explore

[Desiree Dickerson "How I overcame impostor syndrome after leaving academia" *Nature*, 8 October 2019](#)