



Perfectionism: The Double-edged Sword

Do you push yourself to be the "best?" The best student, greek, athlete or friend. Do you get upset with yourself when you're anything less? While we all strive toward excellence, some individuals have great difficulty accepting a personal role of less than "number one." These people are considered perfectionists.

Many college students are perfectionists. To these students, obtaining a "B" is considered a failure. They are unwilling to accept an "average" performance or role, because to them, "average" equals "second-rate."

Perfectionism is not the healthy pursuit of excellence, as most people tend to believe, but rather it is the compulsive striving toward unrealistic goals, declares psychiatrist David Burns. "Setting high personal standards and goals, and working hard to attain them is appropriate", he says. "However, perfectionists set excessively high goals and strive compulsively to achieve them, punishing themselves for mistakes and lowering self-esteem because they can't reach these impossibly high goals."

Perfectionists believe compulsive striving is necessary for success. Aiming to be the "best" all the time virtually guarantees feelings of failure. In fact, studies suggest that perfectionists are often less productive and successful, and experience more stress and anxiety than their co-workers. For perfectionists, who measure worth entirely in terms of productivity and accomplishments, this vicious cycle is self-perpetuating and self-defeating..

So what's the answer? First of all, be aware of the difference between setting high personal standards and perfectionism. Setting high standards involves the pursuit of success and realistic goals, while perfectionism involves setting impossibly high goals and is motivated by the fear of failure..

Secondly, learn to focus on your successes rather than perceived failures. Perfectionists typically view success as an "avoidance of failure." As a result, they rarely gain satisfaction from their achievements..

And finally, your worth as a person is not determined solely by your accomplishments. Feelings of self-worth are also affected by such factors as interpersonal relationships, physical health and appearance, spiritual beliefs, and emotional well-being. Perfectionists often focus on only one area of their life to the exclusion of others.

The **Counseling Center** can help you discover the difference between self-defeating perfectionism and the healthy pursuit of excellence. The Center offers personal and group counseling as well as workshops on many subjects, including perfectionism. For more information, call the Center at **974-2831**. The Center is located in SVC 2124. Hours are Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

For more information or assistance:

USF students may call 974-2831;

Faculty and staff may call 974-5469