

Don't Let Perfection Interfere With Possible

Two weeks ago I wrote an article on The Power of Unconditional Love. In that article I made a typographical error. A simple mistake which my computer did not detect with its editing software. I proof read all my articles, but I missed it. So dear reader, I apologize.

When you make a mistake it is wise to promptly admit it and make amends. I am relieved to have the opportunity to make amends at this time. I wish to tell you with humility that I did not take this very well initially. I was very hard on myself. I beat myself up over it. Have you ever beat yourself up over a mistake?

We tend to think everything in our lives has to be perfect. The term I use is, "running perfectionism." We run perfectionism on our spouse, our children, our jobs and ourselves. When we perceive something or someone in our lives isn't living up to our expectations it leads to disappointment, self-blame, and guilt. In my own experience, I berated myself over a typo. I had a series of thoughts that did nothing more than put myself down.

Upon reflection, I was able to stop this self-condemnation and realize that mistakes are opportunities for learning. Making mistakes and taking corrective action is how we learn and achieve success. This process is best illustrated with an example. One good example everyone is familiar with is the Apollo missions to the moon.

Did you know that the lunar spaceship was off course 95% of the time while on its journey to the moon? The primary way the spaceship reached its destination was using the force of gravity. The astronauts had to fire rockets at certain times in order to correct their trajectory. Without constant course corrections, gravity would have carried them off into outer space. They would be off course, on course, then off course again oscillating back and forth. Yet look what they accomplished. Even while being off course 95% of the time they fulfilled one of mankind's greatest achievements. They did not let perfection interfere with possible.

Another way of putting this into context is to realize we walk right foot, left foot. We do not walk right foot, wrong foot. Our lives are like steering a ship back and forth from port side to starboard side. To alleviate the tendency to demand perfectionism, it is wise to understand we are like a ship moving from on course to off course, and then back to being on course. In my podiatry practice I counsel my staff that we achieve success about 91% of the time in all of our duties. With all of the complexities of insurance and federal regulations, it is simply not possible to be 100% perfect. If we were to be given a grade, however, we still get an "A". An "A" is excellent, but not necessarily perfect.

No need to focus on the mistakes which are inevitable. It is a much better attitude to accept our limitations and celebrate the things that are good without demanding things be perfect. What I recommend for you is to live your life with the focus on what is possible, but not with the expectation it has to be perfect. Don't let perfectionism interfere with what is possible to accomplish.

Here are some ways to integrate this lesson into your life. Forgive yourself and others for human limitations. No one is going to live up to your expectations, so you can avoid disappointment through forgiveness of human frailty. In all your endeavors consider this wisdom: make an effort, not an excuse. You hold yourself accountable for the effort and not the result. This limits false expectations and perfectionism in your life. My answer to my typo mistake was writing another article. I won't let what is possible stop me from trying again. The Nike shoe company says, "Just do it." Good advice. Finally, realize the best lessons are often from mistakes. We steer our ship from port side to starboard side all the way to the moon and back.

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