

## Procrastinating to Perfection? Learn to Love "Good Enough"

Melinda is a Post-It addict. Those handy little squares of paper decorate her desk, her dashboard, even the bathroom counter. With a job as an internet marketer, two daughters in grade school, and a husband who works long hours, her head is always popping with tasks she has to jot down before they're gone forever. The trouble is, she adds notes much faster than she subtracts them.

"I don't know where to begin," sighs Melinda. "So I don't begin anywhere and I just have all this clutter stressing me out."

We all procrastinate now and then because we don't want to do something boring or difficult, or just because we're feeling lazy. **But did you know that habitual procrastination can be a sign of perfectionism?** That might seem far-fetched, because when you're the one doing the procrastinating, you feel anything but perfect. But it's true. Here's how it works.

Melinda dreads attacking her Post-It's because her standards for accomplishing each task are so high. In her mind's eye, each task looms much larger than it really is. She intimidates herself before she even gets started.

And when she tries to pick one job to start on, her perfectionism throws up another roadblock. What if she picks the wrong one? What if she starts with something non-essential and forgets about another job that's really important?

Now she's stuck in the classic perfectionist pickle: **analysis paralysis**. If you've been there, you know demoralizing it is. That's when trivial pursuits such as T.V. and the internet start calling your name. And longer you put off your work, the more overwhelming it looks.

Does this sound familiar? If so, here's how to break out of this cycle. **Learn to love "Good Enough."** Your efforts are Good Enough when you've accomplished the real purpose of the job. Melinda automatically aims for perfect no matter what it is she's doing. And for some tasks, perfection is the Good Enough point. But sometimes, you can do less and still get the job done.

Melinda's current to-do list includes finishing a home page for a new website, sending out several emails to clients, and weeding the front yard. The web page is one task where her perfectionism is a real asset. Of course, she wants it to be impeccable. Her livelihood depends on it. But the emails and the weeding are candidates for a lower Good Enough point.

Normally, Melinda would draft the emails carefully, let them sit overnight, and then proof them before sending them out. That's appropriate for emails that will become permanent documents. But today, Melinda just needs to update her clients about the status of their projects.

The Good Enough point for these emails means informative, polite, and reasonably grammatical. And as for the weeding, how about defining good enough as whatever Melinda can accomplish in twenty minutes? Setting a time limit is a great tool for perfectionists, by the way!

**What's Good Enough for a given task is a very individual matter.** For example, if gardening is your passion, then maybe only perfection is Good Enough for the weeding.

I have to give you fair warning: the first few times you leave Good Enough alone, you can expect your anxiety to spike. Visions of failing or being criticized may dance in your head. For some people, doing everything extremely well is part of their identity as a good person. Doing anything less can actually feel disorienting.

If you feel anxious, think in terms of experiments. It will help you lighten up. You're not abandoning your standards. You're just experimenting with different Good Enough points. You can always crank your standards back up again.

But I bet you won't want to. **Once you experience the newfound energy of the recovering procrastinator, it's hard to go back.** All that analysis paralysis is more draining than you realize. It's huge relief to let it go.

"Aiming for Good Enough really takes the pressure off," says Melinda. "I don't have that feeling of dread, so I don't put things off as much. Amazingly, things run just fine even when I cut some corners. I still have lots of Post-It's, but at least they're new Post-It's."

Are you cruising the Internet instead of starting that report? Are those to do's on your list looking way too familiar? It might be perfectionism that's holding you back. Learn to love Good Enough, lighten up, and start checking things off your list.

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