

10 Perfectionistic Leadership Styles You Set Unrealistic Standards Of Performance

Your high Perfectionistic score indicates that you feel a need to be seen by others as perfect. Although you are task-oriented, you frequently see high-quality results as unsatisfactory because they don't meet your unrealistic standards. You may be using perfectionistic behavior to a degree that is ineffective and unhealthy for you.

The Perfectionistic scale measures the degree to which we feel a driven need to be seen by others as perfect. A dramatic difference exists between the act of perfecting something and the concept of perfectionism. Rather than working to make things the best they can be, perfectionists need to seek flawless results. They perform at very high levels to attain feelings of self worth.

In general, society rewards the perfectionist's diligent approach to task accomplishment, although the results produced by perfectionists are often disappointing. When measured for management effectiveness, perfectionistic managers tend to rate significantly below the average as seen by others, but far above average as they see themselves. Perfectionistic thinking creates this unrealistic gap.

Perfectionism is a defensive system, not a positive motivational system. It is not a trait to be fostered or admired but one to be reduced, for your own well-being and personal effectiveness. Although perfectionism gives the illusion of perfection, it seldom represents the attainment of that state.

Being perfectionistic will cause you to work tirelessly on tasks, make excessive demands on others and set unrealistically high goals and performance standards - only to reap all the resistance, latent anger and, ultimately, failure associated with this style.

You are inclined toward the idea that nothing you ever do is good enough. If you have adopted and choose to sustain this style of thinking, you will pay a very high price: Namely, increased physical symptoms, alienation in personal relationships and distorted perspective on priorities and details.

You tend to believe that unless you are "perfect," you are nothing. This belief can cause you to be overly controlling and obsessively concerned with details. You are likely to have difficulty delegating responsibility. Your need for perfection may begin in an inordinately strong fear of failure. If this is true for you, your fear of failure continues to generate your perfectionistic behavior. In turn, the purpose of your perfectionistic behavior is to mask the fear and keep it from intruding on your daily activities. Keep in mind that it will be easier for you to confront and deal with this unrealistic fear than to just work on reducing your perfectionistic behavior.

The demands you place upon yourself and others are not likely to reflect the needs of today, but instead probably stem from your past. If you are to change your tendency to be perfectionistic - and it can be changed - you will need to examine your deep, private convictions about needing to prove something.

Extreme perfectionistic behavior can result in stress-related medical symptoms characteristic of the cardiac-prone "Type A" personality. This style that is predominant in you is linked to a rate of illness, from various causes, that is more than seven times the normal rate. Because your body interprets what you think as reality and reacts accordingly, if you maintain this style of thinking, you will be under constant and unrelenting stress and self-manufactured pressure.

Your need for perfection will make you unable to ease up on many things. You will probably have difficulty relaxing because of a nagging feeling that there is still more to do. Choose to do it if you wish, but realize that you are placing unrealistic demands on yourself.

You will have a hard time letting go of the need to control everything because, to you, not being in control means risking the chance of error. Any error, no matter how small, means that you failed. You must, therefore, feel compelled to anticipate everything, for the chance for failure exists everywhere. By over- controlling, over-anticipating and overreacting, you experience only this fear of failure - with little chance for success. If all that energy was directed toward more realistic goals, you would enhance your performance and reduce your stress. Your relationships are also very likely to improve under these changed conditions.

Your high score suggests that perfectionism is a burden for you and will continue to be, unless you decide to shed it and change your thinking style for the better.

How You See Yourself

Your high score on the Perfectionistic scale indicates that these characteristics may describe you:

- A tendency to attach self worth to accomplishment of tasks.
- Repetitive, sometimes ritualistic behavior.
- Low self-esteem.
- A tendency to place excessive demands on self and others.
- A preoccupation with detail that distorts perspective and judgment.
- An excessive concern with avoiding mistakes.
- An inability to deal with, or express, emotion.

Your Perfectionistic Style on the Job

Although you tend to see yourself as highly effective, your approach to management is actually self-defeating. Your concern with detail leads you to produce overly systematic goals and plans, which you formulate without staff involvement. You need to oversee all aspects of a project and

tend to get so lost in details that you often lose sight of what you were trying to accomplish. Because you feel that things won't get done correctly unless you do them, you tend to discourage self-direction in staff members. Subordinates typically find you emotionally isolated and difficult to approach.

Becoming More Effective: Steps to Change

While some perfectionism may reflect a desire to improve things, too much can cause stress. Your score for this style is a good indication of your tendency to be perfectionistic. If you have perfectionistic inclinations, you may want to explore ways of thinking that are less defeating to you. The following suggestions will get you started:

- Recognize that your drive for perfection is very self- defeating and is rooted in your basic values about life.
- Realize that only you can continue to maintain this state and only you can change it.
- Accept that your present striving for perfectionism represents an impossible goal and by definition is not attainable.
- Understand that your work is not your worth. Your feelings of self worth should not be tied to how hard you work or how effective you are on the job.
- Seek input from others. Your behavior will be very clear to them, but perhaps not to you; in fact, you are likely to be the only one who does not realize the impact you are having on yourself.
- Alter your standards in some activity to see how the results differ. You may be pleasantly surprised.
- Learn to express feelings: Doing so will improve your relationships. Learn to express good feelings first.
- Examine your alternatives. Read more about the Achievement and Self- Actualizing styles. Studying these styles can show you there are more effective ways to approach your life and work. By developing the positive characteristics of these styles, you can gradually eliminate your perfectionistic behavior.

Action Steps for Change

Now that you have reviewed the Perfectionistic Style, review the following suggestions, and rate them in terms of your perceived need for change, where 0 is little or no need and 3 is a strong need.

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| 1. Realize that I expect too much of myself. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 2. Start setting goals that are attainable; not impossible. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 3. Accept myself as a human being with human flaws. | 0 1 2 3 |

4. Lower my unrealistic standards.	0 1 2 3
5. Allow myself to make mistakes and learn from them.	0 1 2 3
6. Stop driving others away with my demanding behavior.	0 1 2 3
7. Learn to relax more.	0 1 2 3
8. Stop expecting so much of others.	0 1 2 3
9. Stop getting hung-up on details.	0 1 2 3

Changing Your Behavior Can Result in These Benefits

- Reduced emotional and physical symptoms of stress.
- More realistic standards of performance.
- A more balanced life, with equal time for work and relaxation.
- An improved sense of self worth not dependent on task accomplishment.
- Increased productivity as a result of more realistic goals and performance standards.
- Improved relationships.
- Considerable reduction in the risk factors associated with cardiovascular difficulty and other forms of stress-related illness.
- Increased job security. Most organizations seem to erroneously value this style in the middle ranks, but find it too costly at key levels.
- Increased effectiveness as a manager and greater promotability. Reducing the driven qualities of this style will enable you to use better approaches to your management responsibilities.
- Increased patience with yourself and others.
- A very good chance of significant reductions in hypertension.
- A better, happier, and more effective life style, with all the rewards that implies.