



A RESEARCH SUMMARY

Perfectionism is Increasing, and That's Not Good News

(Curran and Hill, 2018)

<https://bit.ly/HBRPitngn>

- World Health Organization: record cases of depression and anxiety
- "People are internalizing a contemporary myth that things, including themselves, should be perfect."
- Side effects of perfectionism (an impossible goal!)
 - Failure
 - Psychological turmoil
 - Obsession with winning
 - Thinking chronically about imperfections
 - Anxiety, shame, guilt over perceived inadequacies
- A study from Psychological Bulletin about generational changes in college students' responses to Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale from 1989-2016 shows significant increase in perfectionism.
 - "Recent generations are more demanding of themselves, perceive that others are more demanding of them, and are more demanding of others."
- Concerning trend is excessively high social expectations exhibiting largest association with mental health issues including suicide
- Employers find managing welfare of young workers challenging but important
- TIPS to address perfectionism:
 - Failure is not a weakness, it is an opportunity
 - › Don't focus on what can go wrong, learn from it
 - › Employers should have compassion for perfection-seeking employees as they are typically ambitious, hard-working, and diligent
 - There are healthier goals than perfection
 - › Recognize what is realistically achievable when setting goals
 - › Being meticulous is admirable for certain tasks but not all tasks
 - › Advocate perseverance and flexibility instead of perfection as the goal
 - Done is better than perfect
 - › Perfectionists can postpone difficult tasks, which leads to more stress. They procrastinate because they can't fail on tasks they haven't started.
 - › Take small manageable steps, get started, avoid overthinking.
 - › Employers should avoid being overly critical of perfectionists



The Pros and Cons of Perfectionism, According to Research

(Swider, Harari, Breidenthal, and Steed, 2018)

<https://bit.ly/HBRpccpar>

- Perfectionists:
 - Strive to produce flawless work, have high levels of motivation
 - Set inflexible, excessively high standards, self-worth contingent on performance
 - Have higher levels of burnout, and anxiety
 - Demonstrate a more serious issue than job applicants and interviewers assume
 - Sub-categories of perfectionism create separate issues
 - › Excellence-seeking perfectionism
 - › Failure-avoiding perfectionism
 - Results of study showed
 - › Perfectionists are not better or worse performers than non-perfectionists
 - › Perfectionism is not constructive at work because downfalls have longer-lasting and further-reaching effects than benefits
 - ◊ Benefits: motivation, conscientiousness, detail focus
 - ◊ Downfalls: increased time on tasks unnecessarily, depression
 - › Managers should harness benefits and mitigate consequences
 - ◊ Communicate tolerance for mistakes, encourage rest/recovery

Perfectionism is on the Rise: Here's What We Can Do

(The Recovering Perfectionist blog)

- What's causing increased levels of perfectionism?
 - social media
 - push for higher levels of achievement
 - cultural emphasis on competition and individualism
- What can we do about it?
 - Start with yourself – give yourself some grace, adjust standards to be reasonable
 - Give others grace
 - Teach the next generation (or your employees) to set reasonable standards

*Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill.
Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt.
Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench.
Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner.
Do your work, then step back, the only path to serenity.*

Lao Tzu