

Is Perfectionism Costing You Opportunities?



From day to day Connie worried. She worried a great deal about the exactness of her work, about doing things the “right” way and would not launch a new product until it was perfect. In fact, she was always tweaking it because she was afraid of getting negative feedback. That’s a lot of worry and a strong drive toward perfectionism.

According to American Heritage Dictionary, perfectionism is defined as “A propensity for being displeased with anything that is not perfect or does not meet extremely high standards.”

Where does this perfectionism come from and can it be leveraged and managed?

There is one hardwiring trait that can drive you to perfectionism. It’s where this perfectionism often comes from and that is the structure/information trait. Those individuals who have this trait have the natural tendency to look in terms of good-or-bad, right-or-wrong, this-or-that. They will be the ones to dot their I’s and cross their T’s. They ask a lot of questions to seek to understand and remove most, if not all, barriers before proceeding.

There are scenarios where this drive can be a strength but can be a limitation if not managed.

How Do You Leverage Strengths?

Someone, like Connie, who is naturally wired with a high degree of structure and conscientiousness, needs to know information or have certainty before proceeding especially with products or decisions that are new. Whatever she does, she wants to be able to do it exceptionally well and often becomes an expert. She needs a work environment where she has the structure, whether it is policies, procedures, or other step-by-step guidelines. Absent the book or guidelines, she or he will ask a lot of questions to make sure they do it right or will create that structure. People who have this trait do their best work in environments where they have structure and can develop an expertise.

This hardwiring is best leveraged in areas where they have an opportunity to do what they do well: work of high quality.

How Do You Manage Your Hardwiring When It Gets in the Way of Success?

As with all hardwiring, there are down sides when an individual has an extremely high concern with the quality and accuracy or “rightness” of any work s/he does or is held responsible for. If left unmanaged, this person can become overwhelmed, have a backlog of work, and can remain stuck for long periods of time because nothing is ever good enough. They will often delay decision making if they don’t have all of the information they need or remove the barriers they are thinking of. They can get fixated on how it won’t work versus looking at how it can work.

The good news is that there are ways to become a recovering perfectionist. **If you’re wired this way, remember to:**



Be Open to Feedback. A person hardwired with the conscientious trait tries to do everything thing right because they feel that only they can do it best. They often put their heart and soul in trying to make whatever they are working on - perfect. When someone brings in another perspective or criticizes your work, it often feels like a jab to you personally. Instead, invite feedback. This can help you create an even better product and service. When you're not trying to create something perfect, it's easier to accept the feedback. Go past the criticism and look at what's underneath the feedback.

Delegate. Individuals hardwired for structure, information and perfection, often have difficulty delegating. If you do delegate, you follow up closely. This puts added pressure on yourself and others to try to meet your high levels of perfectionism. When you follow up so closely with others and correct their work, they don't give you their best work. Why? Because they figure you'll change it anyway. In fact, they become dependent on you and you are then creating more work for yourself!

Many years ago, I worked in the corporate environment. Staff would often come to me for approval of memorandums that would be distributed to employees. I had extremely competent, professional individuals that I worked with but I noticed a few errors whenever I read the memos. One day with a smile on my face, I asked one of the staff if they would make any changes to this memorandum and that I wasn't going to look at it and they would be completely accountable for the contents. I got a surprised look and then a smile, then a laugh and she snatched it back for one more review. You see, I was the problem. They depended on me to review the memos and figured I would change them anyway so I was not seeing their best work.

That changed quickly but I had to break the cycle that I created! The lesson? The next time someone on your staff brings you something to review, look for any critical issues that must be addressed, then break the cycle by simply asking them, "Are there any other changes you would make to this memo assuming you have complete accountability for it?" You'll notice a shift in their work and what they bring you the first time.

Take baby steps starting with smaller things you can delegate and select one thing to delegate that is outside of your comfort zone. One day you'll realize just how much easier running your business can be when you allow others to grow by delegating some of the details.

Release Yourself from Permanency and Be Brief. One of your natural gifts is that you are wired to give a lot of information and the information you give is thorough. People who work with you can depend on you for the completeness of your work. With this conscientious trait, there is often an underlying permanency mindset. For example, you approach developing a training product that will last forever. But what if you could think in terms of temporary and short term? Would that change what you develop?

Since you naturally see all of the details, you tend to lose track of the big picture and this can have you putting all of your energy in creating the nitty gritty details. Release the permanency mindset by creating products or services that are focused on the short term rather than trying to build something that lasts forever. When you think in the short term, you can achieve improved outcomes because the short-term product or service may not need the level of detail that a longer-term product or service needs yet still serves your customer base.

Recently, a client was executing her Business Blueprint and articulated how she was looking for the perfect blog site. This caused over a 60 day delay in her getting her blog launched. That's lost opportunity. She was looking in the permanency mindset – make it perfect to last a lifetime. I asked her what would happen if she implemented a plain blog site and then improved it over time informing her readers that they would see exciting new improvements? Combining both short-term and phased implementation she worked through her natural need to "get it exactly perfect" and got her blog up and running quickly.



Just as important, she spent time writing a backlog of articles before implementing. When she switched her thinking to shorter, bite-sized nuggets, she realized that getting the blog implemented could be done more efficiently and quicker while still adding value!

Individuals hardwired for information and structure want to make sure they give all of the information upfront. This may not be suitable to your audience. Your audience can become overwhelmed, too, and end up not taking the desired action. When you feel the weight of giving all the information at once, think in terms of phases or releases. Also consider grouping information in bullet points making it easier for your audience to digest.

Interacting

When you're interacting with someone who is hardwired for information/structure, remember these tips:

Appreciate their strength. People naturally hardwired for detail do work of great quality. Listen to their input. They can save you a ton of time when you're integrating because they've already thought of the barriers.

Clarify What's Most Important. They will work until they get it right, but some of the detail might not be critical to the success of a program or product launch. Ask them how their actions are affecting the main outcome or the big picture. This refocuses their mindset and helps to discover how their focus is affecting the whole.

Provide Detail and Proof. Individuals hardwired to need information and structure are concerned with quality, accuracy and the book. They discipline themselves to do things right and can be skeptical of anything unproven. They will naturally want to bring up the barriers. Allow an exchange of ideas or even outline the barriers and then ask "how can this work?" Since their greatest natural wiring is to look at the barriers, you will be able to troubleshoot issues before they happen, making the final implementation a successful one.

If you're hardwired this way, give yourself a break. Accept that there will be errors, you will get feedback and above all, embrace the feedback. It's an opportunity to learn!

Remember, denying this hardwiring for long periods of time actually de-energizes an individual. Getting the hardwiring met and aligning your business growth plans with it, yields increased results more quickly. Understanding your hardwiring is critical to growing a sustainable business.

Lisa Mininni is the Best Selling Author of *Me, Myself, and Why? The Secrets to Navigating Change* and President of Excelerate Associates, home of The Entrepreneurial Edge System™, the only national developmental and marketing program showing entrepreneurs how to put their personal, client and revenue goals on the fast track. For more information and a free eBook on what you need to grow your business, visit <http://www.freebusinessplanformat.com>.