



# The Curse of Perfectionism: Why It Hinders Workplace Productivity [\(Click on the underlined words to read more articles\)](#)

- Perfectionism can be a hindrance to workplace productivity, as employees who focus too much on making things perfect waste time and miss deadlines.
- The pursuit of perfection is driven by a fear of failure and can lead to negative personal consequences such as stress, burnout, and sickness.
- Leaders can help their teams focus on meaningful work by setting clear expectations on individual projects and utilizing the 20:80 rule (Pareto Principle).
- Leaders should also model behaviors of self-acceptance and share stories from times when they have failed.
- Reducing the emphasis on perfectionism can improve employee performance, satisfaction, and overall wellbeing in the workplace.

Perfectionism can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it can push individuals to strive for excellence and achieve great things. However, in a workplace setting, perfectionism can be the enemy of productivity. Employees who focus too much on making things perfect can waste time and miss deadlines, negatively impacting the operations of a business. Read on to learn how to spot perfectionism at work and how leaders can help their teams focus their best energy on their most meaningful work.

## Perfectionism is Bad for Everyone

On the surface, perfectionism looks like holding one's self to a very high standard. However, the pursuit of perfection is actually [driven by a fear of failure](#). When left unchecked, perfectionistic individuals waste precious time and contribute to widespread inefficiency. But the problem is bigger than the impacts at work. The insecurities that drive perfectionism also lead to negative personal consequences, such as stress, anxiety, burnout, even sickness. One study found that perfectionists are more [prone to experiencing physical and psychological stress due to their self-imposed high standards and need for control](#).

At work, perfectionism might look like missing deadlines, wasting time, procrastination, or ironically, low effort. If a perfectionist feels as though they cannot succeed because of expectations outside of their control, [they may unconsciously give up](#). When this happens, no one is happy. On the one hand, the perfectionist is miserable and filled with self-loathing, and on the other hand the boss or manager is fed up. Fortunately, workplaces who choose to face perfectionism head on reap the words of greater productivity, increased performance, and a happier workplace.

## Ways to Combat Perfectionism

An insightful finding about perfectionism is that it actually decreases performance, not the other way around. When someone is driven to make every detail perfect, [they can easily become focused on the wrong outcomes](#). Leaders can override the perfectionistic flinch by setting clear expectations about

individual projects. Getting specific about how long a task should take or when good is 'good enough' will help employees put effort in the right place.

But this only works if the leader has also dealt with their own perfectionistic tendencies. If leaders have unrealistic expectations, they are likely contributing to issues around productivity and inefficiency. Leaders who help their teams apply the 20:80 rule know an effective strategy. This productivity guideline, also known as the [Pareto Principle](#), states that 80% of results will come from 20% of the effort. In other words, leaders should expect the highest quality on the most important projects. In the workplace, the Pareto principle looks like ranking assignments based on their level of importance, so employees can focus on the most significant tasks first. When leaders and employees norm on these expectations, communication is clear, workplace satisfaction increases, and stress levels go down.

An important reminder about leading by example: employees who fear failure need more than strategies. They need stories from their leaders about times they too have fallen short. According to [Dr. Grace Lordan](#), the founding director of the Inclusion Initiative and a behavioral science professor at the London School of Economics, "Leaders can change norms in their team by sharing with subordinates their mistakes and what they learned from them. In doing so, leaders shift the focus from perfection to progress." Leaders have tremendous authority to shape the narrative of their workplace. Those who admit mistakes and share failure, make it easier for perfectionists to lay down their arms.

## The Takeaway

Although perfectionism may appear virtuous at first glance, it harbors a painful underside. The adverse effects of imposing unrealistic standards manifest as insecurity and stress among employees. A productive workplace thrives when its employees possess confidence in their abilities and acknowledge that perfection is an unattainable benchmark. By reducing the emphasis on perfectionism, not only will employee performance improve, but workplace satisfaction and overall well-being will also see significant enhancements.

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