

Perfection vs. Excellence

By Kate Monroe, CEO

A stylized, handwritten signature of "Kate Monroe" in a cursive script, with "CEO" in a smaller, sans-serif font underneath.

There's a huge difference between doing something well and doing it perfectly. Attempting to be perfect can bring on feelings of inadequacy and even interfere with completing important projects. ***Excellence, on the other hand, is attainable and is always more than good enough.***

Eliminate the idea of perfection from your life and you'll see your productivity soar. For example, a poorly written, but complete, book can still be published. But a perfectly composed book that's only half finished is essentially worthless. Of course, there's a middle ground between poor and perfect. And that terrain includes excellence.

The problem with perfection is that it can never be truly attained. So, in pursuing perfection, not only are you doomed to fail, but in the end, you also might have nothing to show for your efforts.

The Law of Diminishing Returns

Kate

Apply the Law of Diminishing Returns to striving for perfection:

Imagine if you spent 25 hours on a two-page paper for a college class. Would you get an A? I would certainly hope so, but what else may have suffered because of it? What about your other classes and obligations? Maybe instead you could have done something enjoyable.

The other thing to consider is this: could you have gotten an A with two hours of work? Or five? ***From a practical standpoint, the same results can often be attained with much less time and effort.*** There is nothing to be gained by spending more time on something than truly needed.

If you spent six hours washing and waxing your car and your neighbor spent two hours on his, do you think anyone could tell the difference a week later? More importantly, what else could you have accomplished with those extra four hours? Life is short, and there's a lot to do. What else could you do with your time besides trying to be perfect?

Pursuing Excellence Instead

Of course, you'll want to decide on the level of excellence you wish to attain before getting started on a project. Everything you do should have standards that you strive to attain. If you choose your benchmark of completion properly, there's never a good reason to go beyond that point.

What exactly is excellent, anyway? In our discussion, ***excellent means that the task was completed at a high enough level that there's no cause for concern.*** You know your work will meet whatever requirements are put upon it. Regardless of the nature of the task, you know that it's done well enough and you have zero concerns about it.

When deciding how well a project really needs to be done, consider the possible outcomes if the task is completed at various levels of quality. Obviously, a surgical instrument requires a much higher level of quality than a spoon.

Once the proper level has been set, you now have a target, a goal that's been chosen with some thought and intelligence. Now, simply ***perform the task to that level and stop***. That task is completed, and it's time to do something else.

Giving up a habit of pursuing perfection might seem challenging. ***However, you'll be happier, more productive, and you'll maintain your sanity much more easily by striving for excellence instead.*** Focus on exceeding expectations. In terms of time, quality, and productivity, excellence always wins in the end.