

Re-evaluating the Importance of Achieving



People who are perfectionists tend to be overly concerned with achievement and the pursuit of unrelenting standards. They often rely on their ability to achieve unrelenting standards as a basis on which to judge their self-worth. In turn, this can have a big impact on the balance of their lives.

How can Over-evaluation of Achieving affect an Individual's Self Worth?

Most people evaluate their self-worth based on a variety of things. When judging their self-worth, they might consider their *personal qualities* such as kindness, loyalty, willingness to help people, sense of humour, *relationships* with family, friends, partner, and *skills* such as achievements at work or school, ability to play sport, cook, or play a musical instrument. They might evaluate how happy they are based on how well important things in their life are going.

Perfectionists tend to judge their self-worth based almost entirely on achieving their unrelenting standards. They *overvalue* achieving and achievement. They may have other interests, but over time these seem to take a lesser place in their lives.

This system of self-evaluation may have developed through particular life experiences and/or positive reinforcement from people around them. People who try hard and are successful are often rewarded by others (e.g., praise, high marks, promotion at work) so achieving can become equated with being hard-working, conscientious, and intelligent – in short, being of worth. Perfectionists come to believe that they are **only** of worth if they are pursuing or achieving the high standards they set for themselves.

The Impact of overly-relying on Achievement to Judge Self Worth

Since perfectionists base their self worth on their ability to achieve unrelenting standards, they tend to work extremely hard to achieve these standards. Perfectionists often perceive this as highly beneficial. They may argue that by focussing all their energy on one area they are more likely to achieve their standards. Indeed, because of their hard work they have the potential to perform well.

However, when people base much of their self-worth on only one thing in their lives, they are putting a **tremendous** amount of pressure on themselves to make sure that it works out. That's why it's not surprising that perfectionists tend to be overly focused on achieving the high standards they set themselves. And they often feel stressed, irritable, depressed, anxious or guilty, and think negatively about themselves. When a goal is achieved they may feel relieved, but they don't tend to feel happy for very long. In fact, perfectionists tend to dismiss their success ("I was just lucky") or conclude that the standard set was too low ("anyone could have done that") and re-set the standard higher for next time.



Tackling the Over-evaluation of Achieving

You may find it helpful to think about the amount of importance you place on each of the areas of your life that contribute to your self-worth.



If you find that your self esteem overly relies on your ability to achieve, you may want to consider broadening your interests. This will give you a chance to develop other ways of feeling good about yourself, apart from the pursuit of those relentless high standards.

Identify the other areas of your life that may have once been important to your self-worth but have now taken a lesser place. Choose one area you would like to start with and then think of some activities you could engage in to help you do that.

You might find yourself thinking that you don't feel like doing this activity and want to put it off until you feel ready. Don't — act now! People often want to wait until they feel motivated before they act. However, an important thing to bear in mind is, motivation may not come on its own, but when you **ACT** first, motivation will then follow. Remember, **ACTION** before **MOTIVATION**, and you'll soon find that your life will be more balanced. You will be less preoccupied with only one aspect of your life, and less dependant on that success and achievement for your self-evaluation.

*For detailed information regarding the use of these techniques see Perfectionism in Perspective Module 8.