

Episode 2 - The Lies of Perfectionism, Part 1



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Episode 2 - The Lies of Perfectionism, Part 1

Welcome to the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. This is Episode 2, The Lies of Perfectionism, Part 1.

I'm Keri Martinez. I'm a wife and mother of three children and three bonus children. I'm also a certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For a good portion of my life, I equated perfection with happiness and success. I thought that striving to *be* perfect and *do* things perfectly was the key to feeling happy and to being successful. I've since come to realize that perfection *isn't* necessary to achieve either one of those--quite the opposite, in fact--and that has made such a difference in how I think, feel, and experience life. So if you're a professional woman and you'd like to know how to release perfectionism so you can trade self-doubt for self-confidence, stop beating yourself up, and start enjoying your life more, then come with me. Let's do this together.

Well, hello! How's everything going for you? It is finally starting to feel a little like fall in Southern California right now. We're still in the 70s and 80s during the day, but the mornings and evenings are a bit chilly, which I love. So I hope you're getting to enjoy some fall goodness where you are, as well. Or if you're not listening in real-time, I hope you're enjoying something about whatever season it is for you right now.

OK. Let's get into the topic of this episode, and that is the lies of perfectionism. And I want to mention that this is part one of a three-part series. I'll talk about two lies of perfectionism in each episode, and if you stick with me to the end of this podcast, I'll tell you how you can get your hands on a free bonus PDF I've created for the entire series that is just so good!

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Alright? Alright!

So, why am I calling out perfectionism and its lies? What's so bad about it? When I was younger, I thought perfectionism was a good thing. I was proud to tell people I was a perfectionist. I wore perfectionism like a badge of honor, and at one point, I even listed it on my resume as one of my greatest strengths, because I thought it showed I cared about doing quality work, that I was someone who did quality work. Plus, as a Christian and member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I'd regularly heard the scripture Matthew 5:48 quoted that says, "[Be ye therefore perfect](#)," and I thought being a perfectionist would help me do that, that it would help me be perfect. I mean, it seemed logical. If I was trying to do things perfectly or get things to be perfect, then I was following that commandment.

So, I held onto those beliefs about perfectionism pretty tightly for most of my life. If someone had told me earlier that being a perfectionist was a problem, I probably wouldn't have believed it. I would have thought they were crazy if they said perfectionism was hurting me.

And I'm sharing that to say that if you think perfectionism is a positive character trait, I get it. If you think it's useful and noble to be a perfectionist, I understand where you're coming from. If giving up perfectionism sounds like a form of blasphemy or sounds like it would lead you down a path of mediocrity, I get that, too. But I want to invite you to consider that something else might be true. You don't have to change your beliefs if you don't want to, but just consider what I'm going to share and see what you think.

The main reason I think perfectionism is problematic is that it keeps you stuck. It limits you. It traps you in fear. It zaps your confidence and stops you from trying new and challenging things. It keeps you living small and stops

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you from living into your true potential. It stops you from pursuing your dreams.

A few years back, I hit one of the lowest points in my life, and I felt completely stuck, inadequate, and worthless. I felt like I couldn't do anything right--at work, at home, at church, anywhere--and I was miserable.

I didn't see it at the time, but the beauty and benefit of me experiencing that was that it loosened my brain's tenacious grip on my perfectionist beliefs. It allowed me to open up just a little bit to questioning those beliefs. Before that time, I had never considered that those beliefs were anything other than gospel truth. I thought they were just facts.

And before that time, I had never considered that those beliefs might not be serving me and might actually be causing most of the pain and suffering I was experiencing. I had never considered that I didn't *have to* believe those things, that I was allowed to believe something else if I wanted. And let me tell you, recognizing and accepting that I didn't *have to* keep believing those things has made all the difference in my life. It's brought so much relief and peace and self-acceptance, and it's enabled me to do things I never would have thought possible. It's allowed me to release so much self-doubt and grow my self-confidence.

So, if you're a tried and true, dyed-in-the-wool, card-carrying perfectionist, I invite you to be open to what I'm going to share. Just consider, what if it's true that perfectionism isn't all it's cracked up to be? What if these perfectionistic beliefs are actually lies that are hurting more than helping you? What if you stopped believing them? How might your life be different if you released them and believed something else instead?

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Now, I want to note that you might not even realize you're believing some of these lies, because beliefs like these often operate in our subconscious. Just like a fish is unaware of the water it's swimming in, you might be unaware of certain beliefs you're swimming in. And if that's the case, looking at other external things can help you identify the beliefs. It's like a doctor using external signs and symptoms to diagnose internal issues. You can look at results in your life to help you identify the beliefs behind them.

So I'm going to tell you things to look for to help you identify whether or not you're believing each lie. And after that, I'll give you suggestions of how to counteract and stop believing them, if you want. You'll probably notice some overlap among the different lies, because that's just how life is, right? Areas of life rarely fit in exact, distinct boxes. My hope, though, is that as I describe what the lies create, you'll be able to recognize how they're impacting your life and then you can decide what you want to do from there.

OK? Sound good? Let's dive in.

Lie #1

The first lie of perfectionism is that your worth and value as a person come from the quality of work you produce. Now, if you just thought, "That's not a lie; my worth and value *do* come from the quality of work I produce," let me clarify. I'm not talking about your worth and value in a job capacity. I think it's reasonable to assert, for example, that the quality of work you produce in a particular job impacts your value to that employer. You would not be of much value to a hospital as a surgeon if you had no knowledge or skills around surgery, or if you fainted at the sight of blood. You wouldn't be of much value to a corporation as an accountant if you weren't good with

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numbers, knew nothing about balance sheets and P&L statements, or didn't like working with spreadsheets. But that's not the kind of value I'm talking about. I'm talking about your value and worth as a human being, a person living on planet Earth.

The lie comes from connecting the quality of work you do to your value or worth as a human. And I'm not just talking about the work you do for your job. This could also be work at home with your kids, at church, volunteering in the community, in a softball league, in a book club--there are lots of places we do "work" in life. But the truth I want to highlight is that the quality of what you do or produce has *nothing* to do with and doesn't impact your worth as a person *at all*. Similarly, the choices you make have no impact on your worth as a human. You can't, for example, increase your worth by making "good" choices, and you can't decrease your worth by making "bad" ones. There's nothing you can do or not do that will make your inherent value as a human any more or less than it already is. Your worth is already infinite and nothing can change that. Full stop. End of story.

Now, I know some of you are skeptical about what I just said. You don't quite believe that the choices you make have no bearing on your worth. We're so conditioned to equate the kind of choices we make with the kind of person we are, and the kind of person we are with our worth. Good choices equals good person equals lots of worth. Bad choices equals bad person equals less worth. But just stop and think about that for a bit. If you have to make good choices to be a good person, where does that leave you, me, and every other person on the planet? I know of only one person in the whole history of the human race who's ever made ONLY good choices, and that's Jesus Christ. Everyone else makes a jumbled mess of good and bad ones. That's what's supposed to happen during our sojourn on earth. That's part of how we learn

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and grow. None of that affects our innate worth. As children of God, our worth is already and always will be infinite.

Isn't that the best news?

OK. Let's talk now about how the lie might be showing up in your life, how it might be manifesting itself in your thoughts, feelings, and actions. If you believe your worth and value as a person come from the quality of work you produce, you tend to think things like, "there's no such thing as 'good enough,'" or "anything short of perfect is a failure," or "I have to get everything right." You're afraid to share your work with others because you worry what they'll think about *you*. You worry that if your *work* is subpar, they'll think *you* are subpar. This then causes you to check and recheck and tweak and redo your work so much that you finish at the last minute, finish late, or sometimes don't finish at all.

When someone doesn't like or praise your work, you doubt and judge yourself. You feel all kinds of shame. You might even feel worthless. Those feelings compel you to do one of two things--either check out and give up or take on even more work to prove that you're *not* worthless, to prove that you are worthwhile. Either way, it's a vicious, depleting cycle.

Growing up, I excelled at school, and I derived a lot of my self-worth from grades, test scores, scholarships, and academic awards I received. I obsessed about getting high marks and thrived on people telling me how good my work was. Similarly, I was devastated when I didn't get high marks. This continued when I became a teacher. I would spend a crazy number of hours each week developing and refining and checking and tweaking my lesson plans and classroom environment because I needed all of it to be just right so

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others would think I was good enough so I could then think I was good enough.

And I followed the same pattern when I left the classroom to work at the district office. I nitpicked and obsessed over every training I gave, every presentation I created, every document I wrote. I'd review and revise and second-guess myself right up until the thing was presented, and then I'd wait nervously for feedback. And if the feedback was positive, I'd feel great; but if the feedback was anything less than stellar, my heart would just sink and I'd spiral in thoughts of not being good enough.

I remember designing a training presentation a few years ago. I don't remember the topic of the training, but I remember I used a food theme in the slide deck. And I had some clever tie-in between the training topic and food that I thought would really help the learning stick for the attendees. And I was pretty excited to share it with the rest of my team and my boss. I worked on that slide deck for hours, playing with the layout, image selection, font choice, spacing, wording, all the things to get it just right. Then when I presented it to the team, my boss didn't like it. She didn't go into a lot of detail about why--she just said it wouldn't work for what we were doing. And I think she might have said the food theme was confusing or something along those lines. Honestly, I was so devastated after her first comment that I didn't hear much of anything else that followed. At that point, the only thing going through my head was that my work wasn't good enough, therefore I wasn't good enough. And then I just kept mentally flogging myself for the rest of the meeting...and beyond.

It all felt very dramatic and heavy.

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Now this wasn't an isolated incident by any means. This kind of thing happened many times, and each time it did, I'd beat myself up for not being good enough and then try to redouble my efforts to do better and be better. I mentioned before that this kind of thing can become a pretty vicious, depleting cycle -- and it certainly did for me. Each time I'd try again, it was a little harder than the last time to muster some confidence. Finally it got to the point where people didn't even have to say anything negative about my work. If they weren't gushing over how good it was, if they were just kinda neutral or only mildly approving of it, I immediately thought they didn't like it and therefore didn't like me.

Have you ever gotten your car stuck in the mud or snow to the point your tires are spinning? And you give the car a little more gas, hoping the extra oomph will get you out, but you just keep spinning the tires and get more stuck than before. And the more you push the gas, the more your tires spin, and the deeper they dig into the mud or snow.

That's what happens with this cycle. So, your boss doesn't think your work is good enough and you get stuck in a little patch of not-enough-ness. So you try to fix it, but it's not from a space of self-confidence. Your boss might like the next thing you do and you might get a little traction out of the not-enoughness, but the next time she doesn't like your work, your wheels are spinning again and you're stuck a little deeper. Again you try to fix it, but with even less confidence than before. Each time you work with less confidence, the quality of your work drops, which increases the chances your boss will think your work isn't good enough, and the cycle just repeats until you're completely mired in not-enoughness.

And that, my friends, is a very sad, soul-sucking place to be.

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Looking back now, I can see what a hot mess I created for myself by believing that lie for so long. The funny thing is, I knew I was believing that, but at the same time, I didn't realize it was a lie. I didn't realize it was an *optional* belief. I just thought it was the truth, a fact of the universe. I didn't realize I could choose to believe something different, and I certainly didn't understand how believing something different could drastically change my life.

But, the great news is, that belief IS optional! You don't have to believe that the quality of what you produce is connected to your worth and value as a human being. You can choose to believe something different.

So do a quick check-in right now and ask yourself a few questions. First, are any of the signs I described showing up in your life? Do you see evidence that you believe your worth as a person is tied to the quality of your work? Second, do you want to keep that belief? If you do, that's totally fine! I'm not here to tell you you have to change your belief. But if you think that belief isn't serving you, I'd like you to consider some what ifs.

- What if you believed the opposite?
- What if it's true that your worth is inherently infinite?
- What if there's nothing you can do to change that?

Give your brain some time and space to let those questions percolate -- especially if this is the first time you've considered things like this -- and just see what comes up for you. Notice how you feel as you consider them.

Of all the lies of perfectionism, I think this was the hardest one for me to let go. This one still comes up for me from time to time. But I think it's precisely

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because I struggled so deeply that I'm now pretty good at recognizing and managing this lie. I can now catch it and redirect it a lot quicker.

Lie #2

The next lie we're going to examine in this episode is that anything worth doing is worth doing well, so if you can't do it well, you shouldn't try. You've probably heard the first half of that before -- anything worth doing is worth doing well. I know I heard that quite a bit growing up. The intent of that statement is to motivate us to do our best, right? Which seems so noble and helpful. The problem arises when our brain unconsciously tacks on the second part, that if you *can't* do it well, you shouldn't try.

This sneaky add-on comes from our cultural obsession with success. Most of us were taught from a very young age that failure is bad and something to be avoided. Think of the messages you received in school about failure, for example. A's were heralded and F's were cause for shame, and they still are for the most part.

So, this lie shows up in you avoiding things you're not good at or that you *might* not be good at. It limits you to doing only comfortable and familiar things, and convinces you to abandon things you don't master quickly. All of which makes perfect sense, right? If failure is something to be avoided at all costs, it's no wonder our brains tell us we shouldn't attempt anything at which we might fail, or to give up when we don't see immediate, speedy progress. It's no wonder our brains add on the sneaky afterthought that if you

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can't do something well, you shouldn't even try. Our brains are simply trying to protect us from the pain and shame of failure.

Growing up, no one would have ever accused me of being athletic. I was uncoordinated, awkward, and kind of slow in anything that involved physical movement. My parents signed me up to play soccer when I was around seven or eight, and I remember being put in as goalie because it involved the least amount of running. I can't say for sure, but I think the coach was trying to put me where I would do the least damage to the team.

When I got to middle school and had to run around the field for PE, I would always be one of the last kids to finish. Running seemed hard and something I'd never be any good at, so I didn't try.

Years later, a good friend started talking to me about running a 5K. She ran races all the time and could run what seemed to me crazy distances. I was really overweight and out of shape at the time, and even running around the block sounded terrible, let alone running a 5K! I was sure I wouldn't be any good at it, so I dismissed the idea outright when she first suggested it.

But this friend told me that she, too, had been really overweight before and hadn't been a runner, but she had trained and eventually worked up to running marathons. She said she could train me, and that I'd be able to finish a 5K. She told me I didn't need to run for time, just run to finish. I still thought it sounded terrible and that I'd suck at it, but I eventually agreed to try.

We started training for the Bolder Boulder 5K in Boulder, CO and it was hard. I was slow, my knees hurt, my feet hurt, my hips hurt, I huffed and puffed the whole time, my gait was stiff and awkward, and my endurance was sadly

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lacking. Each time we'd go out I'd think about quitting and that I'd never be able to finish. And each time my friend would run with me at my excruciatingly slow pace and encourage me. And eventually, I started to suck a little less. I could run a little longer without needing to stop and walk. I could run longer overall distances without dying. My feet, knees, and hips hurt a little less.

And you know what? When it came time to run the race, I finished! I was slow, and I just about died from running at that altitude, but I finished. And I started to think that maybe running was something I COULD do. Maybe I could try a little more?

My friend continued to encourage and train me, and we eventually ran some 10Ks, half-marathons, and even a full marathon together. I even enjoy running now. I'm still not fast, and I'm ok with that. I think back on all the years I didn't even consider that running a race could be an option for me. I wasn't good at it and didn't think I ever could be, so I stopped myself from even trying. I held myself back by believing the lie that if I can't do it well, I shouldn't even try.

I will never run in the Olympics, and I won't ever break any world records with my mile time. I doubt anyone will ever sponsor me or put me in an advertising campaign because of my speed. But so what? Furthermore, everything I know how to do well now, at some point I sucked at it. This is true for all of us. We weren't good at walking or talking or writing our name or driving a car or even eating solid food at some point. Imagine if babies didn't attempt to eat, talk, or walk because they might not automatically be good at those things. It seems laughable to suggest that, right? But that's exactly what we do in other areas as we start to get older. It's what we do, but

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I'm offering that we don't need to. We don't need to hold ourselves back just because we might not be the best or amazing or as good as someone else -- especially at first.

Do a quick check-in here and ask yourself a few questions. First, do you notice any evidence of this lie in your life? Are you holding yourself back because you think you're not good at something or might not be good at something? Are you hiding your ideas at work because you think they might not be good enough? Are you avoiding taking on certain responsibilities or applying for a new position because you might fail? Are you shying away from social situations because you might not know what to say or how to act? Is there a hobby you'd like to start or a skill you'd like to learn but you haven't started yet because you think you might not be any good?

Second, if you do see evidence of this lie in your life, what do you want to do about it? If you think it's not serving you and you'd like to believe something different, consider these what ifs.

- What if it's totally fine not to be good at something?
- What if it's not a problem to suck at something, especially at first?
- What if not being good at something is a necessary, normal first step to actually becoming good at something?

Give yourself and your brain some time and space to let those questions sink in and again see what comes up for you.

RECAP

OK. Those are the two lies for this episode. Let's now quickly recap.

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- The first lie I talked about is that your worth and value as a person come from the quality of work you produce. The truth is that your worth is already infinite, and nothing you do or produce can change that.
- The second lie is that anything worth doing is worth doing well, so if you can't do it well, you shouldn't try. The truth is that it's totally fine not to be good at things, and not being good at something doesn't mean you shouldn't try.

These are the first two of seven lies of perfectionism I have for you. I'll be discussing two more in the next episode, and two more in the episode after that. And if you've just done some mental math, you probably realized that's only six lies. Well, if you'd like to see the complete list of all seven, I've created a free PDF that you can grab in the show notes for this episode by going to kerimartinez.com/2. And you can even get the list before listening to all three episodes. Isn't that awesome? Of course I hope you do listen to all three, but if you don't want to wait, I get it. Go grab the list now and then you can use it as a guide as you listen to the remaining two. I think that would be a fun way to enhance your listening and learning experience.

All right, that is it for this episode. Thank you so much for listening! If you'd like to see show notes and a transcript, you can go to kerimartinez.com/2. That's k-e-r-i-m-a-r-t-i-n-e-z dot com forward slash the number two. You don't even need to put www at the beginning. While you're there, be sure to grab the complete list of all 7 Lies of Perfectionism I mentioned, and then feel free to let me know how the list helps you. You can do that on Instagram or Facebook -- I'm @kerimartinezcoaching on both of those.

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Lastly, if you enjoyed this episode, I have two requests. First, subscribe to or follow the podcast so you don't miss the next one, and second, share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it. You can take a screenshot and post it on social media, and be sure to tag me @kerimartinezcoaching so I can properly thank you!

Have a beautiful week and stay well, my friends! Ciao for now!