

Episode 4 - The Lies of Perfectionism, Part 3



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Welcome to the *Perfectionist Professional Woman* podcast. This is Episode 4, The Lies of Perfectionism, Part 3.

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! Welcome to the third and final episode in my three-part series about the lies of perfectionism. I've covered two lies in each of the previous two episodes, and I'll be covering two more in this episode. If you haven't already done so, you might want to listen to part 1 and part 2 first so you have some context around what I'm sharing, but it's also totally fine if you don't want to do that. You can listen to them in any order, and I'm confident you'll get lots of value and goodness regardless. If you stick around to the end, I'll tell you how you can grab my free handy bonus that beautifully complements the whole podcast series.

OK. Now, before I share lies five and six, I want to quickly recap the first four. Just for fun, if you're able, pause the episode and see how many you can recall on your own. This is a great little strategy from learning science called

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[retrieval practice](#), and it helps you lock in your learning. This isn't a new strategy by any means--if you've ever used flashcards to quiz yourself about what you remember, you've implemented a form of retrieval practice--but recently it's been proven through research to be more effective at helping you retain information than re-reading, re-listening, reviewing, or taking notes. The act of deliberately trying to recall information strengthens your brain's ability to remember. Plus it's quick, no-tech, completely free, and easy to do. Sometimes the old ways are still the best ways, right? OK. If you want, go ahead and pause the episode now, try to recall as many of the first four lies as you can, and then come back after that.

Alright. Ready to move on? Here we go. Let's see how many you got.

Lie number 1: Your worth and value as a person come from the quality of work you produce.

Lie number 2: Anything worth doing is worth doing well, so if you can't do it well, you shouldn't try.

Lie number 3: There's a "right" way to do things.

And lie number 4: Perfectionism helps you improve and grow.

How many did you get? The good news is that even if you didn't recall them all, the act of *trying* to do so and then checking your answers will reduce forgetting in the future.

OK. Let's go on to lie number five.

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Lie #5

Lie number five is that other people's opinions about you, your work, and your life matter more than your own. At first blush, you may wonder how this lie relates to perfectionism. Well, perfectionism never comes out of self-confidence and abundance. It's deeply rooted in self-doubt. When you feel self-doubt, you seek other people's validation to feel better about yourself. You think that if you're "perfect," they'll value and like you more, and you use their opinions to determine how you're doing in that regard.

The problem with believing this lie is that it erodes your self-trust and confidence, and it teaches you to discount or doubt your own knowledge, skills, and inner voice. You end up listening only to others. You become dependent on external validation because you're not able to validate yourself. It limits your capacity to make decisions and solve problems because you're always looking to others for answers and direction. At the extreme, you think you don't know what to do, how to act, how to be, unless someone tells you. You don't believe you're capable of figuring things out on your own.

Now, I'm not saying that listening to others is bad--certainly we can learn and benefit from doing that. But no one else on earth knows what's best for YOU. No one else is better equipped to direct your life and validate you than you. We each have everything we need within us to chart our own paths and validate ourselves. Sometimes we need a little help uncovering and believing that, and I've found things like coaching and prayer very beneficial in that regard.

Since the first time I started learning about how the brain works, which was way back in February 1999, I've been fascinated with neuroscience. At that time, I attended a two-day workshop presented by [Pat Wolfe](#) called "Mind,

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Memory, and Learning: Translating Brain Research to Classroom Practice.”

Up until that point, I had only heard that the brain was like this black box and no one understood how it worked. Pat Wolfe talked about recent (well, recent back in 1999) brain research where scientists had learned about things like neurons, and glial cells, the hippocampus, the amygdala, and prefrontal cortex. They’d begun learning about how these different parts of the brain function, and Pat Wolfe talked about how we apply that knowledge as teachers to help our students learn better. I was hooked! I thought if we know how the brain works and can actually use that knowledge to optimize what we do in the classroom, what teacher wouldn’t want to know and do that? It seemed like a no-brainer to me--sorry, not sorry for that terrible pun!

Anyway, I came back from the workshop and tried sharing what I’d learned with other teachers at my site, but no one seemed that excited about it--at least not as excited as me. I talked about it in teacher trainings I presented and tried to get others thinking about and discussing how they could apply it, but it never seemed to get much traction, and I was kind of baffled.

Then I thought maybe I wasn’t presenting it in a compelling enough way. Maybe I didn’t know enough about brain research to communicate its value to others, so I kept studying, and over the years I’ve read lots of articles and books on brain research and related topics of learning science and cognitive neuroscience. I’ll put links to some of my favorites in the show notes if you’re interested.

I continued to include brain research in the professional development I gave whenever I could and I even incorporated it in my district’s technology plan. Some people got excited about it, but honestly, most didn’t, and I started thinking maybe I was wrong in my love and fascination with neuroscience.

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Maybe all those teachers who seemed disinterested were right and it wasn't that great or useful. Maybe I was missing something.

Now, to be fair, I don't know what was going on in all of those teachers' heads, so I don't really know if they thought it was valuable or not. I'm not trying to badmouth anyone here. Looking back now, knowing what I know now, I know that my brain had a whole heap of expectations about how I thought they all *should* respond. And when their responses didn't match my expectations, my brain made it mean they weren't interested and didn't care.

My point is that I started valuing their opinions (or what I perceived to be their opinions) above my own. I was looking to everyone else to validate my interest and passion. I started to think I was misguided for caring about that stuff, that it wasn't as big a deal and as exciting as I thought it was, and so I started sharing it less. It wasn't until I found coaching years later that I realized it didn't matter if other educators aren't interested in neuroscience. I am, and that's what matters for *me*. Someone else's disinterest doesn't make my interest wrong. I don't need anyone else to be interested to make it ok and valuable and amazing for *me* to be interested.

Coming to that realization about neuroscience has helped me in other areas as well, like this podcast, for example. Shortly after I recorded my first episode, I heard one of my mentors say she didn't think coaches should do a podcast when first starting their business, and she offered several reasons why. I was pretty bummed when I heard that because I was excited about doing a podcast, and I felt really good about it. But my mentor had so much more experience as a coach and a business owner than I did, and her reasons made sense, so I felt like I should follow her advice...at least for the time being. So I stopped working on the podcast. I had other episodes written, but I didn't record any more.

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Over the following few months, I continued to think about doing a podcast, and I continued to feel bummed about waiting. I started questioning my mentor's advice--not from a rebellious or defiant stance but from one of curiosity. I started to ask myself, "What if it's not true that I shouldn't start a podcast right now? What if it's totally fine if I do? There really aren't any rules here. Why might it be a good thing *not* to wait?" I wrote down all the reasons doing a podcast might be a good thing for me, and I realized that writing the episodes had helped me clarify my thinking. It had helped me better understand the topics, tools, and strategies I was sharing which enabled me to teach them more clearly and succinctly. It helped me be a better coach which helped my clients.

Once I recognized that, I decided to move forward with the podcast. I realized I hadn't been trusting myself to make my own decisions, to make choices based on what I thought was best. I was totally relying on someone else to direct my path. I also realized that even though my mentor's advice was well intentioned, she didn't actually know what was best for me. Only I could know that. Her opinion was valid and valuable, but it wasn't more valid or valuable than mine was for my life.

OK. So how do you know if you're believing this lie in your life? Let's do a quick check-in. Take a moment to be still and ask yourself a few questions.

- Am I valuing someone else's opinions about me, my life, or my work above my own?
- If I am valuing someone else's opinion above my own, why? Do I like that reason?
- What do I think about my own capacity to direct my life?
- If I don't trust myself to make decisions about what's best for me, why is that?

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You might find it helpful to journal on one or more of those questions just to see what comes up with you, what you can learn about yourself doing that.

I want to note that these questions and all the questions I'm encouraging you to ask yourself in this "Lies of Perfectionism" series are meant to help you gain awareness of what's going on in your head. They are not meant for you to use against yourself or to judge yourself for not doing something right. And I know that might be challenging, especially if you're in the habit of being very self-critical and judgmental. If that's the case for you, just imagine you're a scientist collecting data or a pollster collecting survey results. The data or survey results you're collecting aren't good or bad -- they're just information for you to explore and play with.

Lie #6

OK. We've made it to the last lie for this episode, lie number six. This lie says that chaos, mess, and failure are all bad and things to be avoided. The lie prevents you from seeing chaos, mess, and failure as normal parts of learning and growth. But in truth, you can't have learning and growth without some chaos, mess, and failure. I've got a few examples to share about this.

First example. Think of the process to organize a room, a closet, a drawer, or even a purse. Typically you start by taking everything out of the space first. After you take the stuff out or sometimes while you're taking it out, you decide what you want to get rid of. Then you group like items together, and lastly you decide where and how to put the items back.

If you've ever gone through this process, you know things get worse before they get better. When you take everything out of the space, it looks messy

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and chaotic; and if it's a large space with a lot of stuff, it looks VERY messy and chaotic.

My husband and I organized our garage a few months back, and it looked like a bomb had exploded in the garage and onto our driveway for a while. But I've organized enough spaces in my life to know that the initial chaos and mess don't mean we're doing it wrong. In fact, it means the opposite. I know we have to go through the messy part to get to the good part at the end.

Next example. Think of a baby learning to walk. The beginning stages of that are very messy. It takes a long time for a baby to learn to stand up and balance on its own. Then learning to stay balanced while it leans forward just slightly and puts one foot in front of the other takes even more time. There's a lot of falling down, getting back up, wobbling, using furniture and other things as aids to get up and stay balanced, and running into things. But the baby just keeps going, right?

The movements initially look awkward, unsteady, chaotic, and jerky as the baby is learning to coordinate all of the arm, core, and leg muscles needed to walk. But eventually, the walk starts to look more steady, smooth, and natural.

It's interesting to me how we don't think twice about the time and messiness required in learning to walk. We don't think babies are defective or inadequate or stupid because it takes them so long to learn to walk. We accept that all of their falling down and getting back up is normal. In fact, falling down and getting back up is essential to learning to walk because each time the baby stands back up, it's building muscle necessary to be able to stand and balance. Isn't that fascinating? Falling down, which we might see as a failure or a setback, is actually an essential part of learning to walk. It's not just an inconvenience the baby has to learn to get over. If the baby

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didn't fall down and get back up hundreds of times, it wouldn't develop sufficient leg strength to be able to walk.

Somewhere in late childhood, though, we start to think that failure and messiness should no longer be part of that learning process. We start to think learning new things should be smooth and easy...all the time.

Perfectionists take this thinking to the extreme and believe that if their learning journey *is* messy and chaotic, if failure *is* involved, there's something wrong with them.

The last example I want to share relates to when I first started learning to coach several years ago. I was still working for a school district at the time, and my boss had me and a number of colleagues in the department go through [cognitive coaching](#) training. A wonderful woman named [Delores Lindsey](#) facilitated the training, and throughout the course of the training, she would teach us about certain tools or strategies of cognitive coaching and then she'd have us practice using them to coach others in our group. Sometimes she would coach someone to demonstrate for us.

I LOVED learning about cognitive coaching. I loved learning the tools and strategies, loved learning about why it was effective, loved learning about how to do it, and I loved learning about how it could help and empower teachers. But actually doing it was a different story. Practicing it was painful for me. I didn't know what to say, what questions to ask, which tool or strategy to employ based on what the other person was saying. I was constantly worried about positioning my body correctly, monitoring the other person's verbal and visual cues, trying to build rapport, and whether or not I was paraphrasing effectively. I was very much worried about doing it right, and consequently, I sucked. Then I'd watch Delores coach, and she was so relaxed and smooth, and I'd feel terrible because I couldn't do it like her. I kept telling

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myself I *should* be able to do it like her because she'd taught me the tools and strategies. I kept thinking I shouldn't feel awkward and confused and like a hot mess. I was a smart, capable, professional woman. I had a masters degree and years of experience--this should be easy for me!

Now, maybe you can already see in that example what I couldn't see at the time, and what it took me a few years to recognize. I didn't recognize then that these "failures" were a necessary part of my learning process. Struggling through the initial mess and chaos and figuring out how to do it through repeated trial and error was part of what helped me learn to coach.

When I went through [coach certification](#) at [The Life Coach School](#) a couple of years after that, the instructor, [Brooke Castillo](#), told us in our very first class that we all really sucked at coaching. She said she knew that may sound rude, but she wanted to give us permission to be a beginner and to come to the certification program with a beginner's mind. I was really struck by that, and it occurred to me we don't often give ourselves permission to be a beginner. Once we've accumulated a certain number of years on the planet or degrees or certifications or whatever, we think we should no longer be a beginner...at anything.

Now, just think about that for a minute. How ridiculous and unrealistic is it to think that hitting a certain age or attaining a particular degree would mean we're no longer a beginner at anything or that we don't struggle and fail while we're learning new things? It seems crazy and illogical to me when I say that out loud, but that's exactly what our brains tell us.

My brain still offers up this lie quite regularly, and even though I know logically it's not true, it still *feels* true each time it comes up. It's such a well-practiced belief for me, so I have to keep redirecting my brain to something more useful each time it makes an appearance. The more useful

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things I redirect to or with include mantras like, “Failure and mess aren’t bad--they’re normal. This is all part of the process. Nothing has gone wrong here.” I also remind myself of stories like the ones I shared previously where I can see now the value and normalcy of the mess, chaos and failure.

Sometimes I’ll remind myself of the book by Pema Chödrön titled *Fail, Fail Again, Fail Better* where she says that failure can be a rich fertile ground for discovery and creativity, and I’ll think, “I wonder what will grow from this fertile ground.”

If you’re trying to release this lie of perfectionism, first notice when you’re thinking it. Awareness is always the first step to change. Second, come up with your own short mantras that you can tuck in your back pocket and pull out when you need them. You can borrow from the ones I shared, or feel free to come up with your own that are believable and powerful for you. Third, think back through your life for examples of when failure was fertile ground for you. You may have to go back a little ways, but we all have those stories. And like the mantras, use those stories when you need to remind yourself of the benefit and necessity of failure.

RECAP

So that’s it! Let’s quickly recap the two lies that we discussed in this episode.

- Lie number 5 is that other people’s opinions about you, your work, and your life matter more than your own. The truth is that other people’s opinions about you *might* be valid and valuable for you, but they’re never more valuable than your own. Only you can know what’s best for you.

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- And lie number 6--chaos, mess, and failure are bad. The truth is that chaos, mess, and failure aren't bad. They're actually necessary and very useful in helping us evolve and grow.

OK. As I mentioned at the beginning of this episode, you can grab a free PDF bonus guide that beautifully complements this "Lies of Perfectionism" podcast series. The guide contains all six of the lies I've discussed in this and the previous two episodes plus one more bonus lie. I think you'll get lots of value from it, and I hope you'll head over to kerimartinez.com/4 to grab it.

As I wrap up, I want to end with one final thought about perfectionism, and that is that perfectionism itself is a lie. Despite what your brain might tell you, perfection in this life isn't possible. We might achieve perfection for brief moments--like if we play a piece of music, type a document, drive a car, or shoot a basketball without error--but we can't do that every time for everything. In this life we're meant to stumble and make mistakes. That's a big part of how we learn and grow and evolve.

We are all perfectly *imperfect* beings, so let's be compassionate with ourselves as we navigate our imperfections. In his October 2017 General Conference talk titled "[Be Ye Therefore Perfect--Eventually](#)," (I just love that title) Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said, "[E]xcept for Jesus, there have been no flawless performances on this earthly journey we are pursuing, so while in mortality let's strive for steady improvement without obsessing over what [the] behavioral scientists call 'toxic perfectionism.'"

And to that I say, "Amen, Elder Holland. Amen!"

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If you'd like some help unwinding any of the lies of perfectionism from your life, this is what I do as a coach. I help my clients get clear on how these lies are affecting their lives, and I teach them how to release them.

In 12 weeks I can teach you everything you need to reduce self-doubt, anxiety, and overwhelm and increase your self-confidence, self-worth, and peace. I can help you get unstuck and start taking action to create the life you want even when you're nervous, anxious, and afraid to do so.

Coaching is one of the best and most empowering gifts I've ever given myself, and it can be the same for you. If that sounds like something you want, head to the show notes for this episode and click on the link to schedule a call with me. I promise I'm not going to pressure you to sign up or hound you after the fact with a bunch of follow-up calls and emails to try to convince you to work with me. I HATE that kind of thing! I don't like it when other people do it to me, and I'm not going to do it to you. I don't coach people against their will, and I also don't think coaching is right for everyone. So if it's not right for you or if it's not right for you right now, I will wish you well and we'll simply part ways as friends.

OK. That's it for this episode. Thank you, as always, for listening! If you'd like to see show notes and a transcript, head over to kerimartinez.com/4. That's k-e-r-i-m-a-r-t-i-n-e-z dot com forward slash four. You don't need to put www at the beginning.

If you found this episode and the whole "Lies of Perfectionism" series valuable, I have two requests. First, subscribe to or follow the podcast so you don't miss the next episode, and second, please share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from it. I want to help as many women as

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possible to stop needlessly suffering under the weight of perfectionism, and I hope this podcast series will help me do that.

Thank you, have a beautiful week, stay well, and ciao for now!