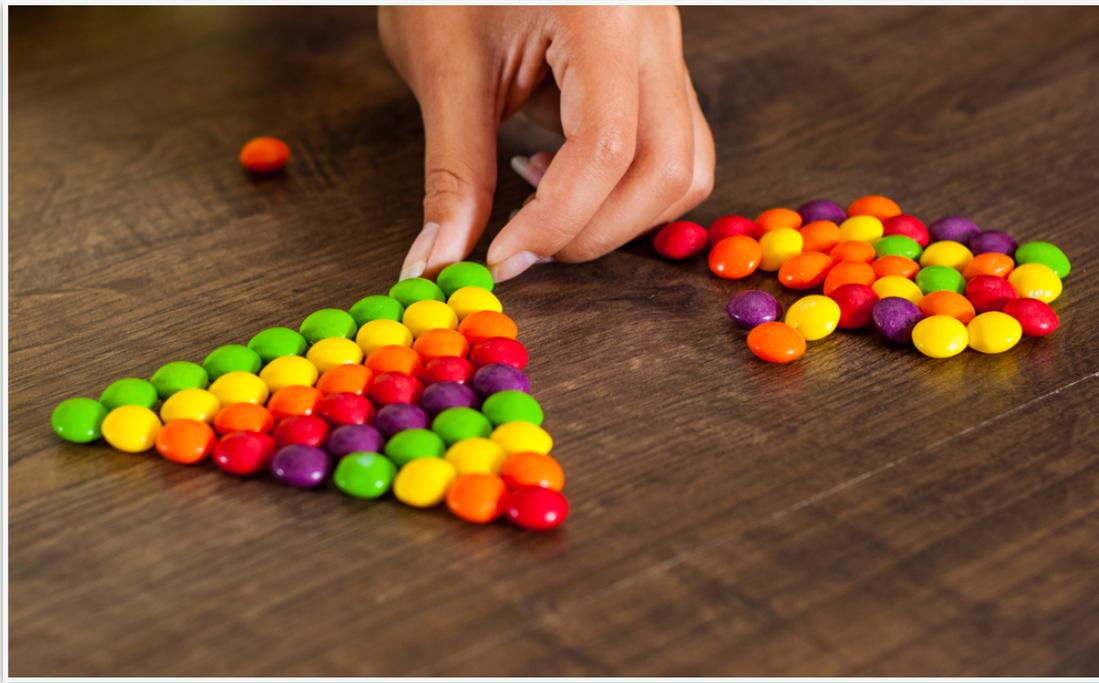


A Twist on Perfectionism



Can You Relate?

The photo I chose for this article speaks volumes about my own perfectionistic traits. I almost chose a similar photo but the way the lines of skittles curved drove me crazy and the imperfect distance between each line irritated me. I wanted to jump through the photo and fix it.

Upon finding this photo I laughed, it's so perfect!

Oh the irony!

Write, Rewrite and Wrong Again

In the early days of building my business my perfectionistic ways stifled my creativity. I wrote a lot but rarely published things and if I did you can bet they took excruciating months of what I call the "write, rewrite and wrong again" process.

When the cost of my "failure to launch" became more distressing than the comfort of lingering on my launch pad, I committed to shifting my perfectionistic ways.

Pathologizing

My first step was to reflect on my thoughts and notice my language and negative narrative. I became aware of pathologizing, "*what's wrong with me, if I could fix what's wrong with me, I could post/write/publish/podcast*" and then ruminating on what might be "*wrong*".

This process of pathologizing gave me an excuse to relate to the cycle as "not fixable". I was broken, flawed and different from the rest. Full stop. Look no further.

The longer a project sat, the louder my shame, scorn and guilt became until I eventually abandoned the project altogether.

I've recently reviewed Brene Brown's new book, Atlas of the Heart and was delighted to read her take on perfectionism. (Brown, 2021, pg. 142)

"Where perfectionism exists, shame is always lurking.

Brene writes, "Shame is the birthplace of perfectionism. Perfectionism is not striving to be our best or working toward excellence. Healthy striving is internally driven. Perfectionism is externally driven by a simple but potentially all-consuming question: What will people think?"

My shame and worry kept me locked in the cycle of inaction, the perfect self fulfilling prophecy.

Ontological Twist

Buried deep underneath and key to breaking up with the cycle was the belief:

"I am broken, flawed and different from the rest."

The actions I'd been taking always stemmed from the belief. I either wrote in order to prove *"I'm not broken"* or didn't write which proved, *"I'm broken"*. The cool thing about unearthing beliefs is that once you unearth them, you can challenge them.

And so I shifted my thoughts to a compassionate inquiry...

"If there's nothing wrong with me, nothing to fix, then what might be possible?"

I began by noticing and writing down the specific traits I experienced and my accompanying thoughts.

As you read what I discovered, think about your own.

Strong attention to detail

I can't just post this one idea, I need to create a complex plan, figure out where this post fits in and I need to do more research to substantiate that point I've made before posting.

Hyperfocus

Oops, I just spent 8 hours on that spreadsheet, getting the formatting, colours, columns and formulas to work when the bookkeeper just needed a quick email with the total of my last cell phone bill.

Preference for things to be in order

I'm not willing to move forward with client outreach until I receive my business cards back from the printer and then my website to go live. Whatdya mean my website went live yesterday?! I don't have my business cards yet!

Lover of rules

I can't speak about these things, I'm not a therapist, lawyer, accountant, doctor. I haven't passed my ACC, I don't have my business license yet, who do I think I am?

A desire for certainty and fact

My instinct says this but what if I'm wrong? Cue 14 days researching other coaches and what they say/do/post.

The ability to see and hear things that are out of place

I have a law and finance background, there's no way I can talk about spirituality.

Distress at disruption

I'll never complete that short bio I need to submit when I know the kids will be home for lunch today. I need 8 clear hours to write!

I then followed up my discoveries with this question...

"What gifts do these traits bring?"

Solution

I went through each trait again, identifying and writing down its gift.

I invite you to do the same.

Here are a couple of examples that left me in awe, I'd never related to these traits as in this way before.

I know you have them too.

Strong attention to detail

Ability to synthesize multiple streams of information and to identify future and emerging trends and opportunities.

Hyperfocus

Ability to deeply focus and accomplish complex tasks in record time.

A desire for certainty and fact

Voracious reader, resourceful, a deep researcher and endless learner.

The ability to see and hear things that are out of place

Ability to intuit what might be missing from a plan, a goal, a business, a family dynamic.

My distress at disruption

Ability to sense and feel deeply, accurately predict and fuel my intuition.

Conclusion

I lean into those gifts now and write and create just because. The process is liberating and cathartic. I publish videos and podcasts to simply enjoy the creative process, to satisfy my love of apps, technology, gadgets and gizmos, to bring voice to really fascinating people and to live my life, fully self expressed.



Tracey is a Master Certified Coach, a Coach SuperVisor and has a diverse Coaching Practice working with leaders in private and public organizations. Passionate about her work and her clients, her coaching niches developed as a result of her background in law and finance including leadership transformation, communication, relationship and performance. She is a dynamic trainer, speaker and facilitator having written and delivered a series of programs over her 17+ years experience including The Bomb Proof Executive which she wrote specifically for Senior Level Executives and Creative Conflict written specifically for teams to harness the power of crisis and conflict to stimulate innovation and creativity.