

Excellence vs. Perfectionism

One of the biggest factors that causes stress in clinical practicum, and can even slow down our practice growth, is our values in regard to perfection.

As health professionals, most of us would say that we are perfectionists in our standards of care, and in our lives. If asked, our spouses, significant others, children, and staff would wholeheartedly agree. I think most of us believe, however, that perfection is rarely attainable. Therefore, if we are going for perfection in ourselves and other people, we are continually faced with being disappointed, frustrated, and upset. When perfection isn't reached, we have a tendency to beat up on ourselves and others emotionally...this can be at the subconscious level.

My message to all of us is to turn **PERFECTIONISM** into **EXCELLENCE**. Excellence means doing "your" best...perfectionism means "winning is everything." If you are into excellence you have an opportunity to preserve your self image, no matter where the finish. With perfectionism you must win, or down goes your self image. A perfectionist expects people to be a certain way. Excellence means loving people no matter what. Perfectionism really puts pressure on ourselves and other people. Excellence is simply having high standards that are possible. Excellence is more about "who you are: rather than getting praised for "what you do." Excellence experiences and learns from mistakes. Perfectionism dwells on mistakes. Excellence learns by failing, and perfectionism believes failure is a disaster. That is why perfectionism often leads to depression. Let's begin the process of eliminating our perfectionistic values...Does this mean brain surgery?

Awareness of these two concepts is important to the quality of our personal and professional lives. It is hard for our families and clients to be full of joy when we are into perfectionism. It would be great for all of us to read this article each morning for the next few weeks, so we can go into our day and simply create excellence in every part of our lives. Life is a process...let's lighten up and enjoy it.

Adapted from Tom Pitts in *The Practical Perspective*, Pitts & Company, Reno, Nevada.