

Finish: Give Yourself the Gift of Done by Jon Acuff Book Summary

Finish identifies perfectionism as the biggest enemy of our goals. Before we even begin, we've made a rule in our heads that says "if it's not good, it's not perfect and thus, not worth it." The harder you try to be perfect, the less likely you'll accomplish your goals. Are you lazy? Incompetent? Simply doomed? No. You just haven't identified your true enemy yet: perfectionism.

The real work of finishing a project begins after the first sign of imperfection. Imperfect is perfect

We've all been there: you start an exciting new project, but somewhere along the way, it stalls and remains unfinished. Our pardons are always the same, as we'll tell ourselves or other people that "life just got in the way," or "I was never able to get back on track."

But if we're being truthful, a more precise explanation is "I quit once it stopped being perfect," because the real obstacle to finishing our projects is perfectionism.

Finishers make things easier and simpler. The next time you work on a goal, I dare you to ask the following questions during the middle of the project: Could things be simpler? Could things be easier?

Any plan can be destroyed by perfectionism. Once, the author, Jon Acuff, began a new year with an ambitious new exercise regime. It started off perfectly, with over 70 miles run in the months of February, March, and April. But then came May, and he only completed eight miles, followed by June, with only three. With his excellent streak ruined, Acuff gave up.

Acuff had the same thought a lot of us have: "If it's not perfect, then it's not worth doing." But this is dangerous thinking because nothing in life is perfect and no one should go around

thinking everything will go their way. If we demand perfect work, we'd never achieve anything!

Instead, it's best to expect imperfection and understand that when it arrives, the real work begins. We have to lower our expectations.

This is the first lie that perfectionism brings you about goals: Quit if it isn't perfect.

It's normal for imperfection to arrive first thing on Monday morning. Before you even sit down at your desk, there may well be a lot of problems that need fixing. How you handle these imperfections, and how you proceed once they come to you, is what determines your achievements in meeting goals.

In fact, it's the actions on the day after something went not well that separate the quitters from the achievers. Did you skip the gym and sleep in instead? Did your diet go out the window after you devoured a box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts one afternoon?

The day after imperfections like these are when you need to accept that life is complicated, messy, and push on with your goals. Don't fool yourself into thinking that excellence can only be achieved through perfection when, in reality, perfectionism is the killer of excellence.

Developing tolerance for imperfection is the key factor in turning chronic starters into consistent finishers.

Evade being overambitious, and make higher your chance of finishing by cutting goals in half.

Perfectionism isn't the only roadblock to finishing; we also put limitations by creating overly ambitious goals.

When Jon Acuff was a college freshman, he dreamed of being a field-goal kicker for his college football team – this despite the fact that he was short, out of shape and had never played football in his life. So it's no surprise that Acuff failed to turn this dream into a reality.

While this example might seem frivolous, most people do set goals that are unrealistic. Scientists refer to the tendency to be excessively optimistic as the planning fallacy, and it's the main reason current statistics say that 92 percent of us fail to achieve our goals.

The concept of planning fallacy was pioneered by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. They found that people typically reveal a bias toward optimism by constantly underestimating how much time and effort a task will take to complete.

Essentially, this means that you are so good at some things, great at some other things and bad at many. However, to resort to Daniel Kahneman's psychological expertise once again, you're overconfident, and you think you're an expert in everything.

For example, one psychologist asked his students to give an estimate of how long it would take them to complete their thesis papers. On average, students predicted they would be ok 34 days to finish, but the reality was an average of 56 days – nearly double their estimates!

A reliable way to avoid both planning fallacy and perfectionism is to cut your goal in half. This will greatly reduce the chance of quitting due to being overwhelmed or getting more than you can handle.

Jon Acuff runs a "30 Days of Hustle" program, which is designed to help people set and achieve goals, and on the ninth day of the program, he asks everyone to cut their goals in half. By doing so, participants routinely find their performances go up by an average of 63 percent, and 90 percent of the participants report feeling more motivated since their goal suddenly feels more achievable.

So with this technique alone, you can stop falling short and start finishing what you've started.

Being bad at some things is ok. Reduce the pressure on you.

Nobody has fun producing bad work, but sometimes letting yourself be lousy at one thing allows you to finish more important work.

Jon Acuff's case it was his front yard, which was an unruly, overgrown mess that was being taken over by weeds. He could have taken on the chore of cleaning it up and making it look good, but it would have required a lot of time and work, two things he needed to reserve for his kids.

This brings us to the next pitfall of productivity: thinking that we need to be perfect at everything, when in fact it's beneficial to be bad at some things. While Acuff was bad at gardening, he could rest easy in knowing he was being a good father.

Our optimistic and perfectionist streaks will try to convince us that every single task and chore can be taken care of, without a problem. But this is just another way of setting unrealistic goals.

Instead, you need to practice strategic incompetence; admit that you don't have time to do everything and let things go, or give it the less amount of effort and time required. There is no need to complete all things unnecessary.

While Acuff was finishing his new book, he had to use strategic incompetence when answering his e-mails. There was no way he could answer them all and finish the book at the same time frame. Therefore he decided to limit himself to dealing with 10 percent of his inbox.

Obviously, there are some things we can't ignore, but many of these can be simplified such that they don't interfere with the more important stuff.

One of the author's friends is Lisa, a goal-oriented mom who gets a lot done by simplifying chores like doing the laundry. Sometimes, having the clothes washed and dried is enough, and her family has to get by with wrinkly clothes since there just isn't enough time for ironing and folding.

Luckily, there's plenty of help these days with simplifying, as apps and online services can help us take care of things like shopping and banking. She delegated some of her works.

When the fun associated with the things, we could do more

When you think of the word “goal,” do you associate it with enjoyment? Think the opposite. Do words like, “pain,” “discipline” and “grind” sound more appropriate?

You would certainly be better off having fun the work you do since you’re more likely to accomplish your goals if they involve something you like doing.

This is something many people discover when they take on a goal like exercising more. They might start jogging for a couple times, but will then give up because they never asked themselves, “Do I have fun?”

This kind of question is so important, as researchers have found that the two decisive factors in setting a goal are performance success and satisfaction. These refer to how satisfying you find the work itself, and what it is you’re actually achieving. So, when your ultimate goal and the work it requires are two things you really enjoy, you have a recipe for success.

During his “30 Days of Hustle” programs, the author found that when participants had a goal involving work they found satisfying, their performance went up by an average of 31 percent. And when they chose an enjoyable goal, this increased their performance by another 46 percent!

It is a simple equation: fun = success.

Have fun. Enjoy. Do the work because you want to. If success comes as well with it – then great. If it doesn’t – it’s not like you spent your life doing something you don’t like, right?

We don’t always get to pick our goals, they are given to us, but we can often turn them into work that is fun.

Let’s say a person’s goal is to lose weight. Now, a goal like this can either be motivated by fear, which isn’t fun, or reward, which can certainly be fun. You can think up prizes to add at the end of every week when short-term goals are reached, like taking a long lunch on Friday and going to see a movie.

Deadlines can also be turned into a fun motivator. A lot of people dread deadlines, but they also provide a certain rush. So, instead of one weekly or monthly deadline, you can have multiple deadlines every day to get that recurring thrill that keeps you going.

Know your own perfectionist rules and discover your true motivations.

Do you know the deceptive tricks of the cuckoo bird? It's a unique bird in that it manages to lay its eggs in the nests of other species, tricking the other birds into feeding and raising its baby. This is very similar to the deception that perfectionism plays as it nests in our minds and mislead us into thinking things that aren't true.

One of the biggest lies about perfectionism is that we can be perfect if we follow certain rules.

Now, these rules can change from person to person, and they can make it impossible for people to finish their projects, so it's helpful to figure out your own perfectionist rule.

A couple of the author's classic perfectionist rules are, "If something is easy, it can't be worth doing," and "If it's not successful in ten days, it's a failure." He identified this second rule in 2008 after he experienced some early success in writing a blog.

The immediacy of the positive feedback made him think that if good results didn't come within ten days, a project was a failure. Not surprisingly, this rule made him give up a number of projects far too early.

Often, we aren't conscious about how we follow these rules, but they can be identified if we stop and question our motivations.

When the author was speaking with a woman trying to lose weight, she thought her perfectionist rule was to get down to a particular number on the scale; if she didn't hit this number, she wasn't successful. When she feels like she isn't moving forward, checked her numbers. The woman believed that since this unrealistic goal had become her primary

motivation, she was having problems reaching her goal. But then she asked herself the one question everyone should ask themselves: “What do I really want?”

Once she did this, she was aware of that her real motivation had nothing to do with attaining the perfect weight; instead, behind her desire to lose weight was a will to be healthy and avoid heart disease and diabetes. After this realization, she could finally take the focus away from perfectionism and start getting good results.

It’s not a coincidence that “cuckoo” is synonymous with “crazy;” these perfectionist rules will drive you nuts if you let them.

Get rid of last-minute downfalls that play into your fear of an unsuccessful end.

Let’s say you’ve begun work on a new project and you’ve done all the tasks right so far. You’re doing something fun and find satisfying, you’ve accepted the imperfections, you’ve cut your goals in half and have handled your perfectionist rules.

If you’ve gotten this far, you might think it’s smooth sailing from here, right? Not really. Perfectionism will hit once more, on the day before it is done.

One of the tricks of perfectionism is to think ahead to “what-if” scenarios, and as the finish line draws near, these thoughts can turn to fears that will cause you to stumble right before the end. If you’re writing a book, you might close the end and start thinking, “What if the people hate it? What if no one likes it?”

The easiest way to avoid frightening scenarios is to just ditch the work and start something else. After all, critics can’t criticize something that is never published! But if you do this, you’re bound to be bitter and hard on yourself for giving in to your fears. As the heroic author, Stephen King once said, “People are extremely hard to live with when they have a talent they aren’t able to use.”

So, instead of thinking “what-if” ideas, see what happens – and don’t waste time and energy worrying about things that haven’t happened yet.

You should also be honest with yourself about the reasons you have for dragging your feet on finally finishing a project.

People can feel ok when others see them as a martyr, selflessly putting their dreams on hold to care for their kids or someone else in their family. Face your motivations, and if this kind of situation applies to you, it's probably time to reassess your fears and rewards, so that you can give yourself that final push to the finish.

Remember, no external praise will compare to the personal joy and satisfaction you'll get when you follow through and keep the promises you've made to yourself.

Book Review

Ignore perfection when it tries to predict that something won't be good enough – because no one knows the outcome until after. If we are ok that nothing will ever be perfect, we can start to have fun the rewards of productivity and accomplishment. One of the perfection's sneakiest tricks is to tell us we're "not making good progress," when actually, we've never defined what good progress looks like! When you feel like you're not good, check your numbers.

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