

# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 1282 Perfectionism Does Not Lead to Progress

As a recovering perfectionist, I know very well how trying to create perfect work can be a problem for an individual and a team. I'm Jerry Roberts, and we'll talk about that next on The Extra Point.

A few moments ago I referred to myself as a "recovering perfectionist." It's quite possible that anyone afflicted with that disease will never be fully cured. That being said, I think I've made progress.

In another lifetime I published a business magazine called Directions. In those pages I wrote a monthly opinion column, somewhat in the same style as The Extra Point and my WorkZone column in the Guam Daily Post.

I would write it, then touch it up with a few changes, then let it sit for a while, and find my way back to it...more changes. You know, a small improvement here and there. No big deal, it only took a few minutes. Now it was good.

Well, almost. Just before we sent the digital files off to the printer in Taipei, I'd probably tweak it a little — just a little! That was it. Done.

Until I flew into Taipei to finalize everything at the printer. I was there for two to three days, and — you guessed it — I'd almost certainly make a change or two...or more.

This didn't happen in every part of the magazine I worked on (thank God) and I don't think I was obsessive in anything else I did, but it certainly happened with most of the issues we published over 15 years. It seemed I couldn't just write the column and be done with it.

Don't get me wrong, I tried for excellence in every part of my work. However, in this one small thing, I was bit by the perfectionism bug.

I used the word "obsessive". That was the verdict in an article I read on the topic, and it was mildly disturbing. I mean, all I was trying

to do was make it a little bit better for the readers. Come on. They deserved that, didn't they?

The reality is, people who obsess over things always have a reason, which they see as a good reason for their behavior. You can file that under the heading of rationalization.

Slowly but surely, I was able to get a handle on my writing. I ended up with a system where I wrote the article, then allowed myself two revisions. After the second set of changes, I signed off on it and that was it.

If you're wondering, I write The Extra Point in roughly 45 to 75 minutes, and there are rarely any revisions. Over 95 percent of the time, it's one writing session and nothing more.

If you know someone who has a perfectionist issue and struggles to meet deadlines, I've got a few ideas.

1. Be understanding. A perfectionist is just trying to do better.
2. Acknowledge that their attention to detail and desire for perfection comes from a good place — a desire to deliver quality work.
3. Communicate the need for balance. High standards for the work are good, but so is productivity and hitting deadlines.
4. Set clear goals and objectives before starting the task. This involves understanding what is expected of the work when you need it done. The expectations have to be addressed so the worker isn't locked into endlessly striving for an unattainable ideal.
5. As the manager, don't lose track of the situation. Check in regularly to make sure the worker is on track, and hasn't fallen back into their perfectionist ways.

(Con't.)

By focusing on the goals, prioritizing tasks, and seeking feedback, a perfectionist can determine when their work is good enough, release it as completed, and move forward with confidence into the next job.

I'm not a big fan of the general concept that work is "good enough," because that can lead to lowering standards and under-delivering to customers. However, in this case, with perfectionism, I see an advantage in using the term.

That's it for perfectionism. Tomorrow, we'll take up the topic of control freaks.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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