

Why Perfect Is The Enemy Of Good

The quest for perfection also leads to dithering: the endless reworking of a sentence or a melody or a sculpture from its original form until it comes full circle back to the form in which we originally laid it down. That trying out other possible forms may be the only way we become convinced that the original was, in fact, best, it wastes time and feels more like an itch we need to scratch than an effective creative process. And this, of course, presumes we're able to make it back around to a form we even consider good, so confused is our judgment often made by this ruminative process. More commonly, we don't so much finish a project as abandon it, not knowing what else to do to salvage it from the wreckage our own obsessive tinkering has produced.

And when we finally return to it later, we often find time away from it was the only thing that actually had the power to grant us what we most need: an improved ability to judge its quality objectively. And if we're lucky we see, sometimes in a flash that lasts only a split second, not how to make it perfect but how to make it work.

Our development as a creator of good works must at some point involve us learning how to leverage our desire for perfection to impel us toward quality without becoming trapped in a miasma of permanent dissatisfaction with everything we create. At some point, we must remind ourselves, any changes we make to a creation no longer make it better but just different (and sometimes worse).

Recognizing that inflection point—the point at which our continuing to rework our work reaches a law of diminishing returns—is one of the hardest skills to learn, but also one of the most necessary. Sometimes our first attempt truly is best; sometimes it takes seventeen attempts to really nail it. But overworking something is just as bad as failing to polish it.

What helps to release me from the compulsion to create perfection, I've found, is striving to put into proper perspective the importance of the act of creation itself. When I'm immersed in the creative process, nothing feels more important to me at that moment than the thing which I'm creating. And though that sense of importance is what drives my passion and discipline (which in turn is what makes creating it possible at all), it also represents the source of the painful sense of urgency for the final result be perfect. Forcing myself, then, to recognize that in the grand scheme of life no one thing is so important to me or anyone else that failing to make it perfect will permanently impair my

ability to be happy is what frees me from the need for it to be perfect. Freed then from the need to attain the unattainable, I can instead focus on enjoying the challenge of simply doing my best. Because if we allow ourselves to remain at the mercy of our desire for perfection, not only will the perfect elude us, so will the good.

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