

**TRANSFORMING THE PERFECTION COMPLEX:  
TWENTY-ONE STEPS TO ACHIEVING SELF AWARENESS,  
ACCEPTANCE, AND MASTERY**

**-by**

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The Perfection Complex is ubiquitous amongst performers and high achievers the world over. It manifests as a gnawing fear that something in us is missing, or not good enough. This subliminal fear keeps us from enjoying the creative moment and celebrating the achievements of both ourselves and others.

When in the grips of the perfection complex we are driven by an overwhelming need to fill a void that feels dangerously empty - the great unknown of our essential selves. Somehow we have acquired the false belief that just being who we are is not enough to merit love and appreciation from the people who matter in our lives. Instead we believe that if only we could be more perfect, then we would finally receive the attention we had always longed for. But perfection is like a drug - the more we achieve, the hungrier we become. Depending upon external perfection and approval from others never seems to fill the gaping abyss.

When we become obsessed with perfection, we abandon the deeper aspects of ourselves, mainly our relationship to the “still, small voice” within - the intuitive, instinctual, feeling part of the self which ultimately leads us to wholeness and self-mastery.

What follows are twenty-one ways of tapping into this sublime, yet subtle part of the self which I believe quite elegantly assists us in transforming the perfection complex and achieving union with the essential self which, ironically, is and always has been perfect.

1. Developing an internal focus through breath awareness, contemplation, meditation, visualization and musical improvisation.
2. Recognizing and changing irrational thoughts, i.e. “I only got a 97 on my music history exam. I should have gotten 100. I’m just not good enough!”
3. Practicing self-nurturing techniques daily, i.e. contemplative arts, yoga, massage, pottery making, relaxation, naps, playing with pets, watching a sunrise/sunset, creative visualization, etc.

4. Establishing regular patterns of eating, sleeping, and practicing.
5. Changing your life orientation from being product-oriented to process-oriented (i.e. being vs. doing; letting go of value judgment).
6. Honoring your strengths and embracing weaknesses.
7. Exploring the body-mind relationship and respecting your body's wishes (i.e. if your body feels tired, allow yourself to rest).
8. Respecting your innate cycles of activity and rest (a/k/a ultradian rhythms) that naturally shift every 1 ½ to 3 hours.
9. Paying attention to your feelings, especially anger and sadness, and finding safe ways of expressing them.
10. Developing personal integrity by reading great inspirational and/or spiritual books (as described in Covey, 1997); this can help with clarifying belief systems, values, and life purpose.
11. Developing a mission statement: *Why am I here? What is my purpose in life?*
12. Self responsibility - becoming proactive: *Between stimulus and response lies our freedom to choose our response.* (Covey, 1997).
13. Altruism - focusing on helping others will take your mind off of your own problems and compulsions.
14. Finding a safe place to explore the hidden aspects of your self (i.e. painful feelings, desires, fantasies; expressing your vulnerability through poetry and/or songwriting, musical improvisation, and psychotherapy).
15. Trusting that you have the power to create your own reality: your thoughts, images, beliefs, and words create your destiny.
16. Overcoming fear of the unknown. We often control our fear of the unknown by engaging in repetitive behaviors or rituals (i.e. compulsive practicing vs. mindfulness). You can detach from fear by becoming the witness of your thoughts and feelings through mindfulness or mantra meditation
17. Embracing paradox - for example, creating structure and discipline in our lives can *foster* freedom and creativity - versus - freedom means *letting go* of the known and/or structure.
19. Living life in color vs. black and white (please refer to the film *Pleasantville*); if one has not truly lived life (i.e. experienced deep emotions, desires, passion) but is playing the

role of the “good” girl or boy in order to be loved and accepted, he or she will never fully embody the self and manifest his or her destiny in this life (from the writings of noted psychoanalysts Alice Miller, Marion Woodman).

20. Letting go of the need to rescue “failed” parents and/or teachers by becoming successful and famous through your creative expression/performance.
21. True success comes from the act of separating from those individuals who objectify the self.

Suggested readings:

***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*** by Stephen R. Covey

***Addiction to Perfection*** by Marion Woodman

***The Drama of the Gifted Child*** by Alice Miller

***Essential Musical Intelligence: Using Music as Your Path to Healing, Creativity, and Radiant Wholeness*** by Louise Montello

“The whole manifestation is duality, the duality that makes us intelligent. Behind the duality is unity. If we do not rise beyond duality and move towards unity, we do not attain perfection, we do not attain spirituality.” Hazrat Inayat Khan