Are You a Perfectionist?

Lindsay: Hey, guys.

Speaker 3: Hi.

Speaker 1: Hey.

Speaker 2: Hi.

Lindsay: Welcome.

Speaker 1: Thanks.

Speaker 2: Thanks.

Speaker 3: Thank you.

Lindsay: Great. Today's topic is perfectionism. Are you guys perfectionists?

> **Key Vocabulary Words**
> 1. To put yourself out there
> 2. Perfectionist
> 3. To be critical of____
> 4. To be down on oneself
> 5. To procrastinate
> 6. To hit a snag
> 7. To stall
> 8. To be praised

Speaker 1: I am about myself. I'm not so much about other people, (um), but definitely self-directed about my own work, I definitely am a perfectionist.

Speaker 3: I've decided a long time ago that there's no such thing as perfection, but there is excellence, and there's a big difference between the two.

Speaker 2: So I think I used to be in my old life when I didn't live in Boston and I had a lot more time on my hands. But not so much anymore.

Lindsay: Ah, interesting, so when you had more time, you were more of a perfectionist?

Speaker 2: Yeah, I think so and now I'm just too busy to care and I -- for example, my bedroom. Everything used to be very much in order. My bed was made perfectly, when I, (you know), living in a small town and everything's five minutes away. Then you live in Boston and it takes an hour to get anywhere, I don't have time to be a perfectionist.

Lindsay: Makes sense. It's all about the schedule.

Speaker 2: Yeah.

Lindsay: So what does it actually mean to be a perfectionist?

Speaker 1: (Um), for me, it (sort of) translates into, (um), being really **critical of** my own work. (Um), it, it mostly – I'm a writer, so it mostly translates to my writing, but basically anything, anything that I try, I wanna (want to) do right or
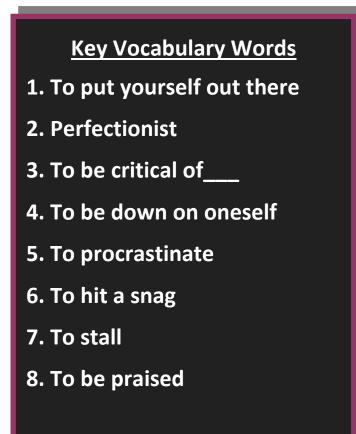
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as close to perfect as possible and **I can be really, (uh), down on myself** if I don't do it well. (Uh), my mom and my best friend tease me about it all the time and they say that I want to be perfect at something the first time I try it and if I don't I get annoyed, which is (kind of) true unfortunately.

Lindsay: So let me ask a question. Does that lead into **procrastination?**

Speaker 1: Absolutely 100%.

Lindsay: Isn't that interesting? 'Cause (because) I never would've thought that the two would go together but they do.

Speaker 1: It took me until I was in my 20s to understand that that, they they were linked and that that was why that I, I would have periods of incredible productivity and then as soon **as I hit a snag**, **I would completely stall** and stop doing anything.

Speaker 3: Aw.

Speaker 1: So, it, yeah, definitely. I was, I was almost out of college until I realized that.

Lindsay: That's so important to realize. It's like a paralysis, right?

Speaker 1: Yeah, it can be really, really scary.

Lindsay: And what are some other traits of perfectionists?

Speaker 1: So…

Lindsay: For example, as you said the critical eye, (right), looking at someone with a sense of criticism or one's own work or someone else's work. What else?

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Speaker 1: Well, (I mean), again, for me, I, I actually think my perfectionism came a lot because when I was young, (um), I was really bright and my school didn't really challenge me a whole lot, so I got used to not having to work very hard, so anything that required (sort of) a learning process, I, when I

was younger, really didn't have any patience for that (kind of) process, (you know), Step A, Step B, Step C. (Like), when I was really little, I was able to (kind of) just jump from Step A to Step D. And I didn't really understand why or, (you know), so I never was taught how to study or how to learn stuff. It took me until I was, I was older to really learn those skills. So the whole process of learning how to do something can be really hard.
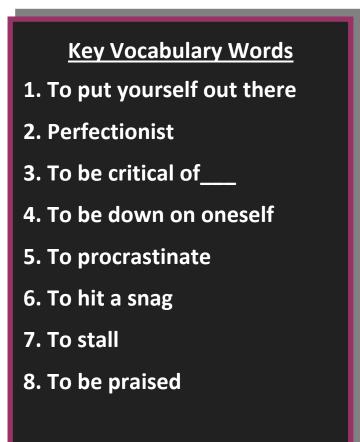
Lindsay: That's interesting.

Speaker 3:   I think perfectionism is unrealistic because I don't really think that anything in the world is perfect. Some, (um), religions will say that there's -- only God is perfect, and so, perfectionists, perfectionism isn't something that mere mortals should strive for. So that's why I've (co-), I guess I've come to understand the difference between perfection and excellence. And if we're doing our, our best or if we're doing excellent work, then that's the closest that we're going to get to perfection and that perfection is unattainable.

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Speaker 1:   That's a really good point too. I actually read an article about, (um), the kind of, (uh), damaging effects of perfectionism on young kids and students and that if a **kid is praised** for being smart or just knowing how to do something well, (um), they learn to place a really

high value on doing stuff right and a really negative value on getting stuff wrong and so they become afraid to try, whereas if you praise a kid for trying hard, they learn that the process is the important thing and doing your best is what is worth praise, (um), and that definitely really hit home to me. 'Cause (because) that definitely was (sort of) what affected me when I was younger. I was always praised for doing stuff right and not for trying hard, so I never learned the value of trying and failing.
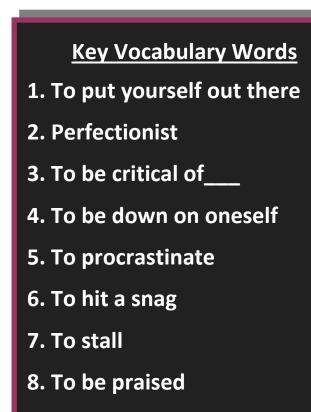
Lindsay: Oh, that's so important. That's so key. Wow, I like it. What about, in terms of language learning, have you guys all struggled with learning languages or tried to learn languages?

Speaker 3: Yes. Right now I'm trying to learn Chinese.

Lindsay: Ooh, how's that going?

Speaker 3: Oh, well, it's very, it's very difficult. And, (you know), I've always prided myself in thinking that I could speak four languages. And so when I tried to take on Chinese, I never thought it would be as difficult as it is because it's a tonal language and it's something that I'm just totally not used to. So I, (e-), I wanted to get the tones right, to be able to say the word the right way so I wouldn't be misunderstood. But it's very difficult...

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Lindsay: Oh, yeah.

Speaker 3: …it's very difficult.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Lindsay: (Um-hm).

Speaker 1: I actually ran into the same thing. (um), I took a year of Russian in college and, (um), that was really difficult in the same way. (Um), a lot of the sounds in Russian, are, (um), just the sounds that we don't have at all in English. And, (um), so it, it was a learning process to, (ju-), just so slow to learn how to literally shape my mouth to make the sounds and then string those sounds together to make words. (Um), and I – one of my college roommates actually was, (uh), almost fluent in Chinese. She had studied it since she was a kid. But even still, I know it, it was crazy. (Like) I would listen to her trying to pronounce words and, and (like) struggling to learn the characters and, and I would say, "Haven't you been studying this since you were (like) eight?" And she'd be like, "Yeah, but you don't understand. There are 2,000 characters in this alphabet."

Lindsay: Oh.

Speaker 1: So it really put it in perspective. I was (like), well, I can't be upset about Russian anymore, there's only 30 letters in that alphabet, so.

Lindsay: So what's the answer when it comes to language learning, overcoming perfectionism? As you said, defining good, defining it in

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terms of excellence rather than saying it doesn't exist or maybe just showing up every day and doing the work and grading yourself on that. Just showing up.

Speaker 2: I think for language learning, you definitely have to be willing **to put yourself out there** and try and accept that it's something brand new that you haven't done since you were born and know that you're not going to be perfect probably ever. So…

Speaker 1: Even Native speakers of English…

Speaker 2: Exactly.

Speaker 1: …are not perfect in English.

Speaker 2: So just putting yourself out there and trying is definitely the most important part.

Lindsay: Ooh, I like that. Let's end on that note. Great idea.