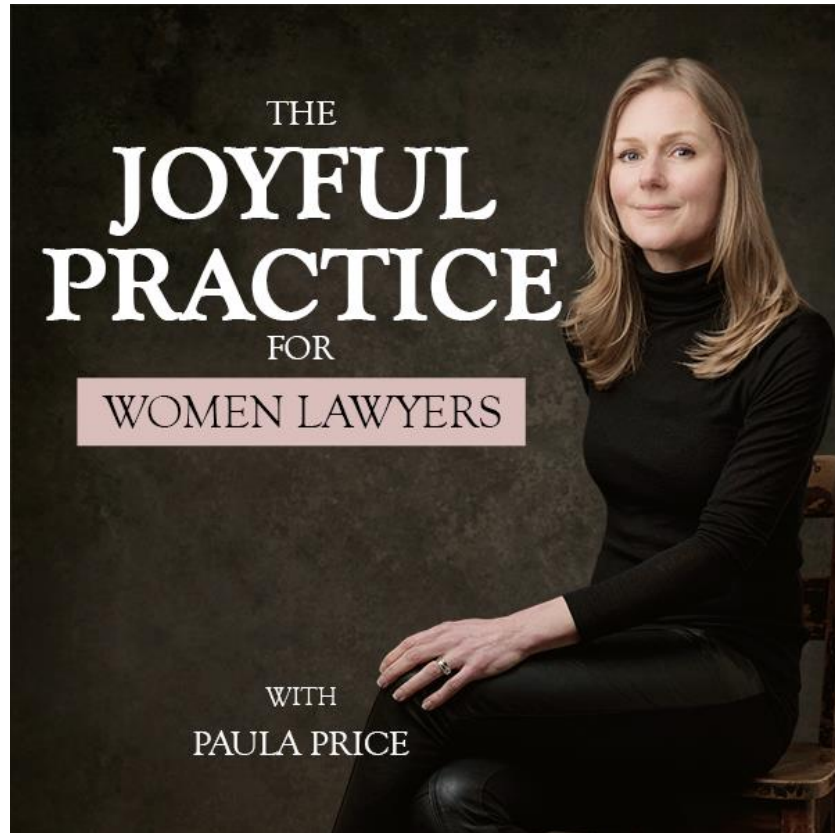


Ep #4: What Perfectionism Is Costing You



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Paula Price

Ep #4: What Perfectionism Is Costing You

You are listening to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* podcast episode number four.

Welcome to *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* Podcast. I'm your host Paula Price, litigator turned certified executive coach. This podcast was created to empower women lawyers just like you to create a life and practice you love. It's your time away from the daily hustle to focus on taking care of you. To see where you're stuck, figure out what you truly want, and learn coaching tools that will help you define and create success on your own terms.

If you're over the overwhelm, done with putting out fires, and ready to create a life and practice that brings you more joy, you're in the right place. Ready for today's episode? Let's dive in.

Hello my friends. Welcome back to the podcast. For those of you who are joining me for the first time, my name is Paula Price. I'm a lawyer turned certified executive coach. I now have a coaching practice where I coach lawyers on all sorts of different topics, one of which is today's topic perfectionism.

I decided to record a podcast about perfectionism because I have had my own struggle with perfectionism throughout the course of most of my life, but notably over the past few days. Interestingly part of that struggle was around recording this very podcast. I sat down yesterday to record the podcast. This is the fourth episode. What you may not know behind the scenes is that I did the first three episodes. They will be released for the first time ever tomorrow. This episode will follow next week.

As I started thinking about the podcast, I felt this almost like a heaviness. Like I wanted to put off recording my podcast. It wasn't because I don't want to do it. I can assure you I have spent the last several months dreaming about this day, dreaming about this moment, thinking about the

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messages that I want to share in the world with you. But when it came down to actually recording the podcast, I felt this wall of resistance.

When I thought more deeply about what was really going on, I discovered that it was really perfectionism showing up as procrastination. So we're going to talk about that a little bit more as we go through today's episode. But what I really want you to focus on as we go through the episode is what perfectionism is, what role it's playing in your life, in your practice. Where does it show up for you?

As we look at that, I would invite you to think about how you are going to maybe address perfectionism going forward so that you can create results that are more in alignment with what you truly desire. So the format of today's podcast is I'm going to talk about perfectionism. I'm going to talk about what it's costing you. And then I'm going to offer three suggestions that can help you move away from the perfectionist mindset into one that is more allowing of growth and pushing through that discomfort to get to what's on the other side.

So with that, I would ask us to first think about what it means to be a perfectionist. If I describe perfectionism to you, maybe you'll see yourself in some of these examples. So one of the most notable ways that perfectionism shows up is putting off tasks until you feel like you are ready. So this was me yesterday. I didn't want to record the podcast until I was perfectly ready.

Every lawyer knows preparation is king, especially if you're going to court or you're going to a meeting, and you want to know that you've dotted your I's and crossed your T's. There's a point at which being ready is an academic exercise. There is no more preparation that you can do to get to that point.

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So this may be in your practice, you may be trying to draft a legal memo. Or maybe you're making a phone call to opposing counsel. Or maybe you're going to go speak to that lawyer that you know is always watching you, that is critical of the things that you say. When you put things off before you're ready, that might be a sign of perfectionism.

It may also be that you're not finishing things because they're not perfect. So you're in the middle of drafting an argument for court, and it's good enough. But you never really feel that way. So you keep going back to the same document. You keep rearranging the words. You keep changing the punctuation. If this has happened to you—it has certainly happened to me—you may find that instead of your work product getting better, it actually gets more dense. It actually gets more convoluted.

I mean there really is a threshold where the amount of editing and revision that you do reaches its peak. All the time you spent after that is actually taking away from the product. So if this is happening, you may ask yourself if what you're trying to do is create the perfect product.

Another place where perfectionism shows up is when you put a lot of pressure in yourself to be perfect. What this really does is it really puts you in a mindset of fear. If you are, for example, giving a presentation and you're focused on being perfect. You're focused on not making any mistakes, then you can actually start to put yourself into this fight or flight state of being where now all of a sudden, you're acting out of fear instead of out of creativity. Then what ultimately happens is that then you are ironically more likely to create the very outcome that you're trying to avoid.

Perfectionism shows up in many other ways. It may be self-doubt. It may be feeling of imposter syndrome. You may feel like you lack confidence. Sometimes that lack of confidence comes because you're so afraid of trying new things because you're not going to be perfect at them that you

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don't try them. The longer that you wait, the less likely that you are to feel comfortable doing it.

Perfectionism is very closely related to people pleasing and procrastination. So you may find yourself trying to be perfect in order to please others. If you've ever tried that as a long-term strategy, you'll know it doesn't work. Because it is absolutely impossible to please everybody all of the time. It may be that you are highly regimented in the way that you do things. At work it may be that you have a very specific way of doing your research, and any other way is not acceptable. Or maybe it's the way that you report to the client.

At home, I know that I am quite finicky about how I load the dishwasher. I know where every dish and every glass and every utensil is designed to go in our dishwasher. If anybody else puts a dish in another place, when I see it it's like this internal reaction. To me, it just doesn't feel right, but it doesn't necessarily mean that it's wrong.

Procrastination may show up in difficulty letting go of past failures. So if something doesn't go exactly to plan, you may find yourself ruminating over it, perseverating over it, wondering what happened, beating yourself up over the result. It could also be that you find yourself prioritizing unimportant or busy work in order to avoid doing something that you really don't want to do. It could also be that you're overthinking things. When you overthink things, you tend to get a little bit muddled, or you get a bit overwhelmed, or maybe you're getting confused.

Finally, another area where procrastination might show up is if you're creating too many goals for yourself. Maybe you're overcommitting yourself to doing things. You want to come across as perfect. You want to be perfect. So you've committed to all these things, but then you find yourself overextended.

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Now these tendencies, perfectionistic tendencies, are likely to come up here and there. They may come up more in certain areas of your life than others. But there is a cost to having these perfectionistic tendencies take over in a sense.

Number one is that it can leave you exhausted. If you are constantly trying to be perfect, if you are constantly trying to do everything. If you are constantly putting things off because you don't want to get started on them or dragging things out because you want them to be better than perfect, then you may find yourself getting really tired. That kind of exhaustion ultimately leads to burnout, and it ultimately drains you of your energy.

Another thing that you may find perfectionism is costing you is opportunities. One strategy that some people engage to prevent perfectionism is to not do those things where you feel really uncomfortable, where you feel really challenged. In your professional environment, it may be that you're shying away from opportunities that would help you grow.

So I would encourage you to ask yourself right now. If you look at some of the opportunities that are open to you or that you think could be open to you if you pressed for them and be honest with yourself. Are you not going after some of those opportunities because you're afraid that you're not there yet?

I have clients that I work with who are looking for a new job, for example. They know that part of that process is going to be reaching out to expand their professional network. They put off making phone calls, they put off making emails because they are afraid of having a conversation with another person where they don't yet know exactly what it is that they want to say. Yet by not engaging in those phone calls, by not writing those emails, by not engaging, they are not learning the very information that could bring them to the place where they discovered what it is that they want to do next.

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Another area where you may see that perfectionism is costing you is in terms of your time. So going back to procrastination. If you're putting things off, that's costing you time that you could be spending working. If you're taking too long on tasks, again, that's more time that you're not spending doing active work in the world.

Another area where procrastination is costing you is your relationships. It's your relationship with yourself. If you're talking to yourself in a negative way, if you're constantly beating yourself up over your imperfections or comparing yourself to others. You know you may be looking at others, and you're looking at the image that they're portraying in their social media feed, the way that they show up in court, the way that they show up at the office. What you're seeing is the polished final product.

You're comparing what you see out there to what is going on inside of you, which is really not your final finished product. But you're drawing that comparison, and then you're beating yourself up over it, which is not productive. The time that you're spending doing all of that is jeopardizing your relationship with yourself, and, again, it's time that you're not out there putting your work into the world.

Other ways that procrastination may be costing you is you may feel rushed all the time. With this lack of time and all these commitments, you may feel like you're constantly rushed, and you're never really able to enjoy what you already have. You're never really able to jump into the opportunities that you have, enjoy the relationships that you already have because you're always worried about that next thing.

You may feel overwhelmed by decisions. You may decide that you just don't want to make a decision about something because you're concerned that it won't be the right decision. So instead of making a decision, you put that decision off until a point when it's too late. At that stage, you may be engaging in self-sabotage. Because let's say it's an opportunity that's open

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to you, and you decide not to take it. Or you decide to not act in time. That opportunity comes and goes, and you miss out on your chance to seize it and to learn from it, to grow from it, and to move forward.

It may also be if it's procrastinating on a paper for example or a draft argument or a contract that you're drafting, and you don't leave yourself enough time to do a good job. The work product has lower quality than it would if you were able to simply start on it earlier than if you start it later. So in a sense, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You procrastinate on something thinking, "Well, I'm not going to do it perfectly." Then you leave yourself so little time that you are unable to do it perfectly or you're doing it rushed or something happens at the last minute.

Another area that perfectionism may be costing you in is in your relationships. I mentioned your relationship with yourself, but it's also your relationships with others. So, for example, if you're thinking about work. If you're busy obsessing over something that's happening at work, creating the perfect argument, or something negative that happened at work—a mistake or a difficult conversation with a client. You may be busy thinking about that when you are with your friends or with your family, and you're not truly present. So that could be costing you in your relationship.

It may be that you start to resent your friends and your family because the time that you're spending with them is time that you're not spending in your work getting things just right. It could also be that you're alienating others with your perfectionistic tendencies. I know I've done this where I have a certain way of doing things. Sometimes I unconsciously impose that on others, and it can lead to tension. When I see it after the fact, I realize what has happened there. I try to make up for it, apologize for it, but you could see how that could have a negative implication on your relationship.

If you're bringing that same perfectionistic thinking and those standards that you have on yourself. When you start to impose those on others

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whether it's consciously or not, it can really undermine the integrity of that relationship.

Another area where it can happen in relationships is when you put things off until the right time. So if there is a conflict that's brewing with somebody that you care about, and you decide that you're just not ready for that conversation. That there is a perfect moment to have that conversation, you can put it off to the point where you end up not having that conversation at all. Or by the time you end up having that conversation, it's too late.

Maybe you can think of examples in your personal life where some of these situations have come up. Maybe when you look at it now through the framework of perfectionism, you can see how that was a factor that was at play there.

Finally, perhaps the thing that is most costing you when it comes to perfectionism is that it becomes a habit. I believe that I spoke at an earlier podcast about neuroplasticity, and the idea that our brain forms stronger connections in the areas that we continually practice. So if you continue to practice perfectionism in areas of your life, then that becomes a habit for you, and you start to reinforce these behaviors. They become more prominent in the way that you act, and the habit becomes more difficult to change.

So these are all reasons why all things that procrastination is costing you. It's your energy. It's opportunities. It's growth. It's your time. It's your mental health. It's your relationships. So when you start to look at what it costs you, all of a sudden it becomes really apparent that it's something that may be worth addressing in your life.

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So let's take a step back for a minute and imagine what life would look like if perfectionism was not part of the equation. Or if you were able to take perfectionism and manage it better. So what would that look like for you?

So imagine what it would be like if you could be detail oriented, but without being a perfectionist. Imagine if you could communicate better. If it was freer, if it was easier, if you weren't holding yourself and others to these high expectations. Imagine what your relationships would look like at work and at home and with your friends. Imagine what it would be like if you were able to say no to a project or an assignment or a person or a social engagement without feeling a sense of guilt or beating yourself up that you couldn't take it on. Imagine that freedom.

Imagine having confidence in yourself that goes deeper than feeling like your worth depends on doing something perfectly, getting a 100% score, writing the perfect brief, winning the case. Imagine if your confidence went deeper than that. Imagine if you spent your life working towards your greatest potential knowing that no matter what happens, whatever comes your way, you're always growing. That growth really is the goal.

Imagine if you were able to create excellence without all the drama that you're experiencing right now. Imagine if you were able to get things done faster, more efficiently. Imagine if you were more productive. You were able to carry out your tasks without all the procrastination, without all the nitpicking. What if you allowed yourself to have setbacks without beating yourself up and without ruminating over them, but instead use them as material you can learn from that can help you move forward.

Now, I know that all of you are intelligent women. That you have come through law school. That you are practicing. That you have challenges every day in your practices that you are solving. When it comes to perfectionism, my guess is that you are already trying strategies to overcome that too.

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For example, some of the strategies that you're using might be to work harder, right? Maybe you see the memo that you're writing, and you know that if you spend that extra time on it, it's going to be that much better. So you're spending more time doing things.

You may even be spending time on things that become non-billable. You know that there's that threshold where you're working on something that is a billable task, but then you find yourself in the weeds and you're no longer recording your time for it. That's probably a good indication that you've started to venture into the land of perfectionism. You're no longer focused on excellence. You're now focused on the 20% of the 80/20 rule.

It may be that you have combated perfectionism, perhaps at a subconscious level, with all or nothing thinking. So if there's a task that you have ahead of you, an opportunity, a presentation that you could do, a case that you could take on, a new partner that you could work with, a new client that you could work with.

There may be this wonderful challenge that lies ahead of you, but instead of allowing yourself to enter into a situation where you don't know what you're doing, where you risk not being perfect, you talk yourself out of it. If that's you, then you're avoiding challenges. You're not really dealing with the underlying problem, which is the perfectionism.

Another strategy that I've seen people try to use to overcome their perfectionism is willpower, right. To just sort of force your way through the performance. Just will your way forward. I know I have engaged in this strategy for years. It's only in recent years that I've really caught onto myself and been able to address it more fully.

So these are all strategies that you can use, but unfortunately none of them will really bring you to the place where you want to be. Number one, these strategies are exhausting. Working all the time. Trying to avoid

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opportunities so that you don't feel like you're not perfect or trying to exert your willpower over time. All of these things will eventually wear you down, and this is the kind of exhaustion that can lead to burnout.

The main reason it doesn't work though is that you're not addressing the real problem. It's not the factum that you have to write. It's not the interview that you're about to go on. It's not the phone call to opposing counsel. These are not the things that are causing problems for you. It's the discomfort that you feel around those things. The discomfort that you feel is rooted directly in the way that you're thinking about it, in your beliefs about it, and your mindset.

The problem is that you can try to use these strategies to move yourself forward, and sometimes you will get results. Sometimes you'll be able to will yourself to create the perfect memo or to go on that job interview, but it's hard to make those results sustainable over time.

So in today's episode, I'm going to offer you three suggestions that I hope you will implement in your day to day that will help to bring your shift away from perfectionism into excellence, something that's a little bit different. Something that doesn't require you to be 100% all of the time, but something that allows you to focus more on growth and progress.

So the three suggestions start with number one, which is to recognize perfectionism. Now for all of us, perfectionism will show up in a different way. For you, I would invite you to start noticing where perfectionism shows up in your life. Start noticing the pattern. Start noticing what you're thinking. You might be surprised at what you learn about yourself.

You may find that perfectionism rears its head when you are assigned a new project at work. You'll know it's perfectionism by the messaging that's going on inside your mind. Maybe it's, "Oh, I can't take this on. I'll never do it well enough. I don't know how to do this."

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It may be that you are brought to a place of perfectionism when you are networking. Maybe you're looking for a new job or you are trying to create more opportunities in your existing practice, and that involves reaching out to new people. You may find there's a real concern about that. That you don't know what you're talking about. That you're going to come across a certain way that you don't like. That you need to prepare more.

If these are thoughts that are coming up for you, it may be that you have perfectionistic tendencies in this area. If that's the case, I'd invite you to pause and just start noticing that and asking yourself what the thinking is behind it. It may be that perfectionism shows up in your personal life. I know this happens with me where I may have a relationship where I really want to address something, but I'm scared to address it. So I tell myself there must be another time to bring up this topic. There is a better time. There is a better opportunity. I just need to wait for X, Y, and Z to happen.

It may be in a professional context. It may be that you need to seek feedback about a project that you're working on, but you're scared that the feedback that you're going to receive isn't the feedback that you want. It may be that you have a difficult relationship with somebody in your office. It may be a client who keeps on treating you in a way that you do not appreciate, and you want to have a discussion to renegotiate that relationship so that you feel more respected going forward. These are all examples of putting off a conversation out of fear, out of wanting it to go perfectly and knowing that it probably won't.

Another area where you might see this is in making a big decision. It may be a decision in your professional life. Maybe it's a career decision that you want to move into a different role, that you want to take on more responsibility. You want to change your practice area. But instead of being proactive, you put off the decision because you don't want to make the wrong choice. You're afraid of it not being perfect.

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It could also happen in your personal life. You can think of lots of examples. Maybe it's moving houses. Maybe it's changing cities. Maybe it's, again, going back to some of the relationships that you have in your life. Maybe it's taking control of your health. There are a lot of decisions that you might be putting off because you're concerned that the decision that you make will not be the right one.

This is unfortunate because there is no right or wrong decisions to be made. In the end, you make decisions. Then you make the best decisions that flow from that decision. If you live in a position where you're afraid to make that decision in the first place, then you're depriving yourself of that opportunity to continually grow.

Finally, when you start to recognize perfectionism and when it shows up for you, you may realize where you simply aren't doing things. I had a wonderful friend. I was 19 years old. I had moved to Switzerland to be a nanny for the year. I had this wonderful friend named Anne from Norway. She and I would get together in the evenings, and we would joke about things.

One day we came up with this idea of Munsday. That's right. Munsday. Munsday became a running joke between the two of us because it was that day when we would do the things that we said we were going to do. So getting back on to our physical workout routine or other aspirations. We would always say, "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll get to it on Munsday. We'll get to it on Munsday." I'm inviting you on this podcast today to stop putting off your dreams until Munsday. There's no need to wait for things to be perfect for you to get started.

The second suggestion that I have for you today is to ask yourself what perfectionism is costing you. I spent a few minutes at the beginning of this podcast talking about all the ways that perfectionism shows up, how it can

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show up in your practice, how it can show up in your personal life. Also, what it's costing you in your professional and personal life as well.

So I would ask yourself what is it costing you? Where are you losing time because of perfectionistic tendencies whether it's procrastination, refusing to make a decision. Whether it's taking too long on the tasks that you have. Maybe it's costing you in terms of opportunities. Maybe you're shying away from projects because you're afraid of what's going to happen if you don't get it right.

Maybe it's growth. Maybe you're not allowing yourself to experience challenges that are going to be difficult. Maybe you don't trust yourself that you're going to be able to get through those challenges and come out stronger on the other side. Maybe it's costing you your confidence. Again, by refusing to put yourself in a position where you may fail or where you may not be perfect, you don't give yourself that chance to build your self-trust, to build your self-confidence.

The consequences that flow from that can be huge. It may be that you're experiencing your relationships. So you might ask yourself, "What is it costing me in terms of my relationships? What is it that is going to happen if I don't do something about this?" So when you ask yourself what perfectionism is costing you, I would invite yourself to look at it not just from the perspective of today and what it's costing you, but what it's going to cost you over the long run.

So if you put yourself five years out, if you haven't challenged yourself to take on those more challenging files, what does that mean for your career? If you don't have those conversations with the people that are close to you, what does that mean for your relationships?

Once you've identified the costs of perfectionism, I would invite you to take the third step. The third step is to ask yourself what you would be doing if

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you weren't waiting for perfection. The purpose of this question is really to allow yourself to imagine what your life would look like if you allowed yourself to do the things knowing that you wouldn't be perfect at them.

Imagine if you were okay with things not being perfect, what would you be doing right now? What opportunities would you be going after? What conversation would be having? How much faster would you be working through the work that is on your desk? How much more quickly would you be able to make those phone calls? Think about that. Think about how much time and opportunity that would get from you.

Again, not just looking at it from today, but look at it five years from now. If you allowed yourself to simply move ahead, test and try, and learn and grow, what would that mean five years from now?

We talk ourselves out of doing things all the time, and then we find evidence to support those decisions. So, for example, you may tell yourself, "I shouldn't go to court because we might lose." Then you'll draw from an example in the past where you went to court, and you had an unsuccessful outcome. You'll use that as evidence against yourself to keep yourself small.

Or maybe you will refuse to go out and seek a new job because you'll think, "Well, there was that time when I went for that interview, and I was not successful." Again, you're only reinforcing that type of thinking and not taking on those challenges.

Maybe it's a matter of speaking up in a meeting or public speaking or taking on a presentation. Maybe you tell yourself, "I shouldn't do that because whenever I speak in public, I get flustered. I get embarrassed, and it's really awful." You can convince yourself not to do those things by finding evidence to support the decision that you're making.

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I would invite you to flip that around. To make decisions and then find evidence to support the reason why you should make that decision. Maybe if it's the court example, you think, "Well, I should go to court. Yes, there was that time where I had that really negative outcome, but I learned from that. I know this time going into it what I need to do differently. Or it was a completely different case. These facts are different, and I know how I'm going to win this time."

In the case of looking for a new job, maybe you didn't get the job last time you went for an interview, but now you're on the radar. Now you've got more experience interviewing. Now you know what you can do differently next time. Finally, if it's speaking, for example. Yes, maybe you got embarrassed. Maybe you got flustered. But guess what? You lived to see another day. You've now learned from experience how you can do better next time.

So when it comes to this question, what would you be doing if it wasn't for your perfectionism? What are the opportunities that you would go after? What are the things that you would do more freely? If you do those things and you continue to do them overtime, what is that going to change for you? What is your life going to look like?

Now the reason that this is going to work for you, the reason why exploring the perfectionism, seeing where it comes up, asking yourself what it's costing you, and asking yourself what life would look like without it. The reason that this is going to work is that you're not just putting a band aid over something meanwhile allowing yourself to suffer on the inside. When you take these steps, you take your perfectionism, and you drop it onto a platter where you can see it. Where you can examine it.

What this allows you to do is to access your internal expertise. You get to see where you're getting tripped up. You get to see the patterns. Now that you know what you're looking for, you can prepare for it. If you keep on

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practicing this, and it is a skill that you will practice, then you start to see patterns. You can start to unpack what's really happening. It allows you to better access your internal motivation.

As humans, we're motivated by fear and by pleasure. So on the one hand in the pleasure department, you have identified what's important to you about pushing past your perfectionism. What can be gained here. Similarly, you're also being motivated by the fear. The fear of what happens if you choose not to do anything about it. This isn't a band aid solution that's going to come off in the shower. This is an inside job. This is getting into your mindset, into the way you think, what you believe, and how you see yourself.

Once you solve for this, you can push through perfectionism more easily. I'm not saying that it will go away forever. I think it will always be a part of you if it's something that you struggle with, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. What you want to be able to do and what you will do if you do this work is to develop a relationship with it where you can now work with it instead of allowing it to always work against you. As you develop this practice, we talked before about neuroplasticity, rewiring the way that you think. As you develop this practice, it will become your default. It will become your go to. So the perfectionistic thoughts will no longer reign over you without your say, without you having a say in them. You actually get to have more control.

So in summary, if you're holding yourself back with perfectionistic thinking, I invite you to try these three things. Recognize perfectionism, ask yourself what it's costing you, and ask yourself what your life could look like if you stop letting perfectionism call the shots. Do these three things, and I promise you that perfectionism will start to loosen its grip on you. You'll start living into a future where you feel more motivated to move forward than you feel fear that let's perfectionism hold you back. There is no

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perfect. We all know that. If you listen to episode number three, I talk about why the fact that there is no perfect is actually a wonderful thing.

If this message in this podcast resonates with you and you want to learn more about the work that I do with lawyers, I would be delighted to speak with you. I'd invite you to contact me by going to thejoyfulpractice.com/contact and sending me a note. I work with lawyers just like you to overcome challenges in their practice including perfectionism. My goal for each of my clients is to help them see their potential, to help them move past obstacles to create something that is great in their practice.

Thank you so much for joining me today. It's been a pleasure delivering this podcast. I'm so glad I got over my own perfectionism so that I could share this with you today. I hope this message really resonated with you, and that you're able to take the tips that I suggested and incorporate those into your practice and into your personal life. I'm so excited to be doing this podcast for you. I really look forward to seeing you all next week when we're back to episode number five. Thanks again.

If you enjoyed today's show and don't want to miss an episode, subscribe, and follow the show wherever you listen to your podcasts. If you haven't already, please leave a rating and review. Your feedback will help me create a podcast that's tailored to your needs and goes straight to the heart of what matters to you. For instructions on how to subscribe, rate, and review the podcast, visit www.thejoyfulpractice.com/podcastlaunch. See you next time.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *The Joyful Practice for Women Lawyers* podcast. If you want more information, visit www.thejoyfulpractice.com. See you next week.

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