



WHAT'S THE OPPOSITE OF PERFECT?

BY DAVID GORMAN

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There is a web version of this article at: learningmethods.com/opposite_to_perfect.htm

I want to ramble a bit about *trying to be perfect*, that is, those uncomfortable moments when we are trying hard to be perfect, or at least trying to be better than we are. The important thing here in this "*trying hard to be perfect*" is not the "*perfect*" part, but the "*trying hard*" part. The language is appropriate because there is effort in trying to be better than we are. After all, if we really were perfect, there'd be nothing to do and no effort at all, wouldn't there?

Actually, there is also another issue here, which is the flip side of the perfectionism habit. That's the habit of doubting ourselves and fearing that we're not good enough. The two work together this way:

- since I'm not managing to be perfect, therefore I must not be good enough, so
- in order to be good enough, I have to be just about perfect.

Notice how this whole habit is *framed*. To be perfect, to make no mistakes, to get it right, would be a *good thing*. To make mistakes, to get it wrong, to not be good enough, is definitely a *bad thing*. In other words, we have it framed so that *the opposite of perfect is imperfect*. Perfect: good — imperfect: bad.

No wonder we hate being less-than-perfect, and no wonder we want to strive for perfection. After all good is GOOD, and who wants to be BAD?

But there's something a little fishy with this. Can we suddenly become perfect just because it's good? I mean, nice idea, but, unfortunately, it doesn't seem to work that way. No matter how much we try, over and over, to become "perfect", we very rarely succeed. And no matter how bad we feel when we are "imperfect", we seem to keep on ending up there. No wonder we can end up doubting ourselves. And no wonder it's so easy to stay stuck in the same framework and end up interpreting the fact that we keep being imperfect as actual evidence that, in fact, we ARE inadequate and not good enough.

In other words, the framework seduces us into continually striving for an unobtainable "good" in order to escape from our continually experienced failure, and the problem is that we rarely question the framework itself. We keep trying to get better at being more perfect and we keep failing at it. But does that make us stop? Not on your life! Most of the time we just try to find new and different ways to get better at getting better. Again, what a lovely idea if it worked, but decades can go by without us recognizing that each time we find a new way to be perfect we're actually still just doing the same old habit, in new clothes, and reinforcing it more deeply. It's a bind and a vicious circle to be sure.

Luckily for us, what we are doing here in this work is honing a secret weapon — the tools to unravel and escape from these sorts of binds by looking closely at what is going on, by getting enough details out on the table so that we can see past the specific content of the habit and *actually bring the framework itself into focus*. Once we recognize the framework, we can do something we could not do before. We can *call it into question*.

This particular framework can be boiled down to the simple phrase, "*perfect is good, not being perfect is bad*." And what's fishy about this "striving for perfection" habit is that we only have to look moderately closely at our own experiences when we are caught in the habit to realize that this trying to be perfect is NOT a good experience at all. In fact, it's downright miserable — full of tension, effort and fear.

Well then, if striving for perfection is bad for us, could it be that the opposite might be good for us? The old habit would have us believe that the opposite of perfect is imperfect and that being imperfect is a bad thing. Does this mean that we should now try to see being imperfect as a good thing? You could try that, but it doesn't sound like much fun and it probably wouldn't be much fun if you tried it. And the main reason it wouldn't be very effective is that you would still be seeing the whole situation within the terms of the old framework. You cannot escape from a habit by operating within the same old framework.

What would it mean to entirely step out of the old framework where perfection is good into an completely new framework where striving for perfection is not a good thing to do? From within this new framework what would be the opposite of striving for perfection?

One simple and direct way you can find out is by putting yourself into the moment where you've recognized that the striving for perfection is no fun at all and you are about to choose not to do it. What would you be doing instead if you didn't get caught up in trying to be perfect? If you stopped trying to be better? Well, of course, if you weren't trying to change yourself, you'd just be the same as you were before. You'd be just being yourself.

Thus the opposite of the habit of striving for perfection is in fact, *acceptance*. Acceptance of myself just the way I am. If I'm not reacting as if something is wrong with me, as if I'm less than okay, I'd be operating as if I'm already okay. I'd be operating as if just being myself and doing what I can do, is enough.

To put it a bit differently, I'd be letting fall away all those other universes where I should be more than I am and where I'm not what I should be, and instead I'll be choosing to inhabit just this one universe where I happen to be exactly the unique person I am.

Notice a little something here. The old framework is set up so that "perfect" and "imperfect" seem to be properties of me. "I'm trying to BE perfect", "I fear I AM imperfect." It makes me think that it's me and my inadequacies that are being described. And, gradually, I begin to identify with it — this IS ME. No wonder I react so much.

However, when I look a little more closely, I can see that these are not properties of myself at all. They are only things I am trying to do. "Trying to be perfect" is an action. In fact, it is a very effortful and difficult activity as my experience clearly shows me. I'm *trying* to be perfect, and this makes me *react* when I'm not.

But wait, it gets more interesting... Accepting that you are what you are (which is the opposite of this bad and effortful "striving for perfection" habit), takes no effort at all. You're there already. It is the very definition of easy; there's nothing to do... except maybe enjoy yourself. Furthermore, no trying is needed because you'll always succeed at it; you can't fail at being yourself — you already are!

The old framework tries to fool you into thinking it's telling you something (bad) about you, when it's actually just getting you mistakenly caught up in doing. But the new framework really is showing you about you. You accept yourself and YOU ARE just myself; no reaction is needed.

We got so deeply stuck in the old habit because its framework gives us real experiences. The striving for perfection seems so undeniably good and we feel so obviously bad when we fail at it.

These repeated experiences reinforce the framework because there's nothing like feelings to make something seem real. The way we see things creates the feelings we have, and the feelings we have in turn give reality to our way of seeing things. It's a classic vicious circle.

When I see through this illusion I reconnect with the fact that my actual experience of trying to be perfect feels very bad. I was experiencing the bad feelings before but I was *misattributing* them. I was mistaking where they come from.

The bad feelings are NOT coming from my inadequacy and my failure to be perfect, they are actually coming from my NOT accepting myself and my TRYING to be perfect.

Of course, that becomes more and more obvious as soon as I do truly start accepting myself and then get to feel how simple and lovely it is to be myself.

However, the old habit is pernicious, and in order to succeed at this change we need to see through another misattribution. It's important to recognize that when you attempt to change, *for a while you will likely still be operating partly from the old point of view*. From the old habit's point of view you're asking yourself to accept something that isn't very nice, namely being imperfect, and the first thing that comes up for most people is that this is very hard thing to accept.

But here again something is fishy. How can it be hard to accept myself when just being myself is so easy that it takes no doing at all? Well, it's that framework thing again. It only *seems* hard to accept because I am still partly in the old framework where accepting myself would be accepting that I am less than perfect, not good enough, etc..

"*It's hard to accept*," we say. But I put it to you that no one has ever had an experience in their life of acceptance being hard. You can test this yourself against any of your own experiences if you only take a moment to recall them. Ask yourself what has happened for you every single time that you actually did accept something? Was it not that at that moment of real acceptance the struggle fell away and the ease began?

When we say that it is hard to accept something we are speaking as if the act of acceptance is somehow difficult. This is a misattribution. If you look closely you will see that those moments when you are experiencing the difficulty are precisely when you are NOT accepting. Not accepting is certainly full of difficulty, and fight and struggle, but the moment when true acceptance happens is the very moment when all that fight and struggle disappears.

This is why it takes an active choice to choose not to try to be better than you are, and instead to just accept that you are what you are. Which, of course, makes sense. If there wasn't a lot of smoke and mirrors keeping the illusion of the old habit in place, and if there wasn't such a challenge in actually accepting yourself, then everyone would already have escaped from the trap. Only AFTER you meet yourself in that moment of reluctance to accept your imperfections, your limitations and your unique humanness, and go ahead anyway to make that choice, will you then experience what it's like to be to you without judging yourself and without trying to change yourself.

And you will feel something different. How could you not?

Since you are no longer reacting as if you're imperfect and need changing, you'll no longer feel any reactions. Since you are no longer trying to change anything, you'll no longer feel any trying or effort. Since you are no longer engaged in puzzling through all the complexity of what you have to do to be better and how you have to do it, you'll be more present with what is happening around you and more capable of responding. With all this change, why wouldn't you feel so much better than you felt before?

And — simplistic to say, but it is so true — once you start to allow yourself to just be, you will start getting back in touch with yourself. Back in touch, literally, with *the real you* — the one who is there when you're not busy reacting or trying to change yourself. Or to put it the other way around, the worst consequences of the old habit is that you end up so thoroughly *out of touch* with yourself —again in the most literal way.

If you keep at it, it won't take long until you'll no longer be experiencing things from the old habit's point of view because you'll have a growing set of experiences from the new framework's point of view.

On the one hand, you'll have the memory of how bad it felt to try to be perfect and how bad it felt to judge yourself. This will make it more and more unthinkable to get caught up in that crap again.

And on the other hand, you'll have more and more present-moment experiences of how much better it feels to dump all that and just be yourself.

These new experiences will reinforce your new (and more accurate) way of seeing things, and in turn your new point of view will make it easier and easier — and more and more delightful — to just be yourself.

As you get good at it, of course, everything gets easier.

You'll just BE you...

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## About the Author



**David Gorman** developed the LearningMethods work out of over 30 years of research and teaching experiences. His background is in science and art and a fascination with exploring human structure and function. In the mid-1970s he spent many nights dissecting in the lab and drawing furiously. In 1980 he published a heavily illustrated 600-page work on our human musculo-skeletal system called [\*The Body Moveable\*](#) (now in its 5th edition) and in 1966, a collection of articles, [\*Looking at Ourselves\*](#).

He happened upon the Alexander Technique in 1972 and was immediately intrigued by its power for change; and has been teaching that work since 1980, becoming well-known worldwide for his innovations to the work and notorious for challenging the orthodoxy of the profession. He has been invited to teach all over the world in universities, conservatories and training colleges, at conferences and symposia, and with performance groups and health professionals.

In 1982, his teaching was revolutionized by his discovery of a new model of human organization — [\*Anatomy of Wholeness\*](#) — with its profound implications about our in-built natural tendency toward balance, ease and wholeness. He extended these insights into a new way of training teachers of the Alexander Technique and from 1988 to 1997 in London, England he trained 45 teachers.

His experiences with his own students and in other training groups made it clear that a huge part of our chronic problems lay not in the 'body' but in our consciousness and habitual way of seeing things and how we misinterpret our daily experiences and then become caught in reaction to these misunderstandings. At this point it also became apparent that his discoveries revealed new premises which in turn implied new teaching methods, so David developed the LearningMethods work to teach people how to apply their in-built intelligence and clarity of perception to their daily experience in order to understand their problems, solve them and successfully navigate their lives.

Since the beginning of this new work in 1997, David has trained a growing number of LearningMethods Teachers, many of whom are now teaching the LM work in universities and conservatories, and he is now planning a new Toronto-based [modular training program](#) for LearningMethods, Anatomy of Wholeness and the Alexander Technique. He continues to [write more about the work](#), and give workshops to performers, teachers and the public in North America, Europe, and Asia ([see his teaching schedule](#)), as well as raising another young son.



## About the LearningMethods work and how to find out more...

This is one of many articles and essays on various topics of the LearningMethods work. Some are written by David Gorman and some by other LearningMethods Teachers, LearningMethods Apprentice-Teachers, or students.

In these articles, you will find out more about the LearningMethods work and how extraordinarily effective it is at helping people learn for themselves how to be liberated from problems, how to better understand themselves and others, and how to navigate their lives more successfully.

The articles in the LearningMethods Library are available in multiple formats: some as PDF files formatted for printing like this one; all of them are also on the LearningMethods web site as web pages -- go to [www.learningmethods.com/lmarticle.htm](http://www.learningmethods.com/lmarticle.htm); and most of them are also available as downloadable e-books at: [www.learningmethods.com/ebooks.htm](http://www.learningmethods.com/ebooks.htm).