

## Ep #137: Taking Messy, Imperfect Action



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**The Maisie Hill Experience** with Maisie Hill

## Ep #137: Taking Messy, Imperfect Action

This is episode 137 and today I'm going to be returning to the topic of perfectionism. So, let's get into it.

If you want to do things differently but need some help making it happen then tune in for your weekly dose of coaching from me, Maisie Hill, Master Life Coach and author of *Period Power*. Welcome to *The Maisie Hill Experience*.

Hello, lovelies. How are you? I am here, just about. It's been an interesting couple of weeks for me. I've had a spell of autistic burnout for the past couple of weeks, which has meant that I haven't been able to do much. I've been quite dysregulated, needing a lot of time alone and to rest. And I stopped being able to speak for a couple of days, which is fairly typical of me when I get to that place and is quite common in autistic shutdown.

But it's important to me to share this with you because I think in the world of self-development there can be an emphasis on stopping these things from happening, that's the goal. And my approach is much more along the lines of well, these things do happen, they will happen. How can we be in them and navigate them? So, I like to be clear that these things do happen to me, I'm not excluded from them.

And yesterday was the first day where I felt like I had something in me. I was able to talk, able to engage with other people, able to do things, which ended up being really great timing because my son became ill last night. We ended up in hospital until 3:30 in the morning. He's doing fine now. He tends to come down quite hard with illnesses, but then bounces back very quickly. And so, although he was very poorly last night, right now he's at home playing Minecraft and eating all sorts.

Paul and I are absolutely shattered, but I really wanted to record this episode for you. So, let's do it and then I shall be heading home hopefully so that I can nap.

Okay, so today we are going to talk about perfectionism again, but with a twist. So back in March I did an episode about perfectionism. It's episode 116, and I really suggest listening to it or listening to it again. You can listen

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to this one without listening to that one first, but I do think that the previous episode is a solid starting point, and then this is a continuation of that discussion. So, my recommendation is you listen to that one first.

Now, many of my clients and perhaps you are prone to perfectionist tendencies. But often they don't realise that's what it is, usually because they think that you're only a perfectionist if your life is perfect and neat and tidy and organised and manicured. But that's not what perfectionism is. Perfectionism is a broad personality style that's characterised by concern with striving for flawlessness and perfection and is accompanied by critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding other people's evaluations of you.

So, perfectionism can manifest in all sorts of ways, procrastination, having high expectations, being overly critical of yourself, hiding mistakes, and also an absence of joy and fun. It's this cycle between high achievement and exhaustion and it can lead to burnout. As I said, this comes up a lot in the coaching that I do with my clients. It comes up a lot in our community and because of its high prevalence among my clients, it's something that I think about a lot.

And I spend time figuring out what I can teach, how I can coach you so that you can stop being so critical of yourself and so that it stops holding you back because it really does hold you back. And one way I've done this is to get you all to be intentional about taking messy, imperfect action. Messy, imperfect action is exactly what it sounds like. So rather than believing that you need to go about things a certain way and being quite black and white in your approach, fearing failure and maybe not even getting started with anything because you worry about what will happen if it isn't right.

And I asked my clients to do it messy instead and to do it imperfectly just as an intentional way of getting going and making things happen. So that can mean taking shortcuts, making mistakes, just doing whatever it takes to get going and keep going no matter how small the steps are or what impact they're having, just get going, experiment, get curious, see what works and keep going from there.

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So doing it messy and imperfectly can be extremely challenging, but it's also incredibly effective because you learn to love and accept yourself and you increase your failure tolerance. You also stop worrying so much about how you will be perceived and stop fearing what will happen if you don't get it 'right'. I'm so passionate about this and it's so rewarding to see my clients unwinding all of this and learning how to do things differently, which is something that's possible for all of you. Please hear me when I say that it is possible for you.

So, my usual approach to perfectionism is to help my clients to take messy imperfect action. And I always laugh when I say this because one of my clients asked me to do a podcast episode about messy imperfect action, and I joked with her, why, so, you could do it perfectly. And we had a good laugh about that. I do love doing coaching calls that are specific to messy imperfect action. They're always amazing to do, really transformative, and we've actually got one coming up this week when the episode comes out because I'm recording this pretty late.

So messy imperfect action is a fabulous antidote to perfectionism. But today I want to offer you another option and take the discussion in a slightly different way. And this episode has come about because a few weeks after the previous episode about perfectionism aired, one of my clients posted in my membership community. Because after listening to that episode, she had challenged her manager at work about something and said something along the lines of, "I don't think perfectionism is helpful."

And in fact, I'm just going to read word for word her recollection of what happened. So, she shared, "A leader challenged me on the fact I was saying perfectionism isn't something to aspire to. He said it was rubbish, that if I needed surgery I'd want a perfectionist surgeon, not one that would do a half assed job." And we discussed it at the time. I offered her some coaching, that was that. But it's one of those things that my brain has kept coming back to like an itch that I have to scratch because this argument of his is so flawed, is so flawed.

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You know when you just replay things in your mind because you can't leave them alone? So, this didn't even happen to me, but I've been replaying it because the foundation of her manager's argument is so flawed, and it's also, I think, a really common misconception when we're talking about perfectionism. So, there is a difference between perfectionism and precision.

Perfectionism is an all or nothing mindset. It's the belief that if something isn't perfect, it's a failure. And that leads to stress, anxiety, burnout, fear of making mistakes and it can prevent us from taking risks or even doing anything at all. It can hold us back from trying new things, experimenting, and ultimately from growing and learning and gaining experience, which is for sure what I would like in a surgeon.

Precision on the other hand, is about accuracy and attention to detail. It's about doing a task to the best of our abilities, given the resources and the time that we have. A surgeon, for example, needs to be precise, not perfect. They need to accurately perform the surgery, but they also need to adapt and respond to unexpected situations. And if they were focused on being perfect an unexpected situation could throw them off and potentially lead to worse outcomes.

And this is something that another client of mine highlighted in her comment that was on this post in the community. And she said, "You can be excellent at something and not a perfectionist by nature. They could be an excellent surgeon, but they could be really disorganised, chaotic at life etc, and not care about those things. So not what I would consider a perfectionist. I also don't think being a perfectionist is about how good you actually are at the thing.

I'd rather have an excellent surgeon who is confident rather than a perfectionist one who was stressing whilst stitching me up. Perfectionism is not a measure of competence or a guarantee of a certain result." I mean, how spot on is that comment? So, my invitation to you, as you're listening to this, is to consider for the next couple of months, how can you strive for precision instead of perfection? I would love for you to really answer that for

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yourself, feel free to hit pause, make some notes of whatever comes to mind. I've got some ideas for you that I'm going to share.

But this is something that you can really be considering, just as you're being aware of what you're doing, how you're going about things. As issues come up for you, are you being precise? Are you striving for precision or are you aiming for perfection and being a perfectionist in the process? Okay, so here are the ideas I have for you.

The first one is, be precise about what you want. I'm just really feeling that in my body right now. Imagine if you did that because I'm willing to bet that many of you/most of you don't do this at all or to the extent that you could. And I wonder how it would be for you to just really dial up the volume on being precise about what you want.

So, if you want to go out for dinner with your friends or on a date, that's all you want, you're happy with whatever option, then say that. But if you know you want a certain type of food or to go to a specific restaurant or a specific location, then say that. How can you practise being precise about what you want?

The second way is to define your goals clearly, because precision starts with a clear understanding of what you want to achieve. So be specific about what the goal is, why it's important, and what success looks like. That clarity is really important.

I was recently coaching someone, and she was essentially comparing a period of time last year to a period of time this year. And I won't share the details, but she had a goal last year and she was working on it. She was highly productive. She really went for it. She took massive action, and it went really well. This year, she's got a similar project on the cards. But there's been other stuff going on that means that although it's a project that's on the cards, it is important, it's not the priority right now, it's not the focus.

But because it's still there, and because it's something that needs to get done it's easy to slip into thinking that it is the priority. And she was

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comparing herself and her results to this period of time that happened last year. So, I reminded her that this project isn't a priority. The priority is this other thing that's going on. And as I'm saying this, I'm realising, yeah, this is what's been going on for me as well the last couple of weeks.

I've had a very important project to get done but my focus has had to be on my health and my wellbeing. And it's been the same as it was for my client, easy to slip into that way of thinking of no, this is the priority. This is what I have to get done. It's like, no, you can't bloody talk right now, Maisie, you have to rest. You have to prioritise resting your brain, switching off, recovering. That has to be the priority.

It really is one of those obvious things when it is not you, when you're having this conversation with someone else and it's them, it's so obvious. I've coached so many people on this and I've had the same thing pointed out to me. We just fall in the trap of forgetting what the goal or the focus actually is. That's why we need to be precise about what the priority is.

Now, if you have a goal that's quite broad as is often the case with internal goals like being more confident, getting better at making decisions, trusting yourself etc. Then the place to be precise is with how you will know that you have met that goal.

So, what does success look like for you in relation to those goals? If you don't do this, then you'll just keep thinking that you're failing and that you're not getting there, and you'll just keep moving the goal post further and further away because that's just what we do as humans. And that's going to be challenging, especially if you struggle with perfectionism. So, get specific with how you'll know that you have met your goal so that you know when you have.

Okay, third way, break your goal down into smaller tasks and milestones, just chunk it up. Focus on one step at a time. It's just about taking the first step and then the next step and then the next step after that. This is such a great way of going against perfectionism. You're just focusing on the step in front of you, that's it. It's about the details that add up over time. This is for

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sure what I'm going to be doing this week. This is what I'm doing today when I'm coming out of autistic burnout and my kid being ill etc. I'm only going to focus on the step that's right in front of me, that's it.

The step in front of me today is this podcast, that's it. I'm only going to task myself with taking one step or I might not take any at all. And yes, in case you're wondering, that can bring up some mind drama for me. And I coach myself on it using the same tools I teach all my clients, or I take it to my coaches. And I'm someone who's really good at resting and taking care of myself, even so, my brain does like to come up with nonsense sometimes.

Okay, the fourth way, if you're prone to perfectionism or you're recovering from burnout because remember there's often that relationship between the two. Then set expectations that challenge you but that are also attainable according to the energy and focus that is available to you. This is where mindset and caring for your nervous system is so important, because the nervous system work aids in recovery and increasing your capacity. And the mindset helps to address the thoughts that lead to the cycle of perfectionism and burnout.

And I find that if my clients address perfectionism and fear of failure, then what they think they need to do is actually far less, which is going to be really useful when you're recovering from burnout and then just going about your life.

Okay, number five, this next one is a bit mm, so you need to be able to discern which is going to be more useful to you with this one. If you're prone to using planning things as a way to avoid taking action and telling yourself that you're not ready and you just need to plan and prepare more. Then be mindful that you don't use this one against yourself because this one is all about planning and prioritising.

So, I ask my clients to come up with one goal per season of the year and then the three things that are essential in order to meet that goal. You can hear more about this whole process on the goals and rocks episode that I did a while back. The whole point of this is to determine what actually



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matters. So, what are the details that matter and what are the details that don't matter? Knowing this and being able to discern the difference is how you can prevent yourself from getting caught up in minor details that fuel perfectionism and actually don't matter.

And you might need to refine your ideas and plans. So be strong with them but be flexible. Things won't always go according to plan, that's okay, that's life. Be prepared to adapt and adjust your plan as needed. So, there's a lot of wisdom here in not getting too attached to your plan because it's less about the how you go about it and more about the result that you create. Sometimes we get too attached to our plan to the how and end up neglecting the result.

So, there can be a really direct way to create results, but your plan might be taking you on the really long route to get there or perhaps it's a plan that won't even get you there. So don't slide into perfectionism with this. You'll know that you're doing that if you're spending too long on tasks or not getting started at all. If you're setting the bar too high, criticising yourself throughout the process in your failures and in your successes and only seeing what you haven't done. So, you're just always finding fault, never celebrating.

Perfectionism is not the same as striving for excellence. Perfectionism is an approach, a mindset that leads to stress, anxiety and fear. Striving for excellence, on the other hand, is about doing our best, being proud of ourselves for trying, especially when we fail.

Okay my loves, that is it for today. I'm so glad I was able to come and do this. It's been a really enjoyable one for me to record. That's me done for the day. I'm going home to be with my family and hopefully get that nap or at least plenty of caffeine. Alright, I'll catch you next time.

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