

PERFECTIONISM AND THE NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – August 2015 – Perfectionism is embodied when individuals strive for flawlessness and set excessively high standards. The burning desire to be the best can also have negative consequences on the outcome of performance for athletes and business professionals.

“We know that the best athletes, high performers and successful business leaders have high standards and strive to achieve their dreams,” said Dr. Cindra Kamphoff, CC-AASP. “This desire motivates them to keep pushing themselves harder but could lead to severe and negative consequences.”

“Perfectionism can be a major obstacle for anyone trying to achieve peak performance,” adds Dr. Jack Lesyk, CC-AASP and former Past President of AASP. “Some people can’t perform when it really counts because they get too nervous. Whether it’s a big game or an important presentation to the board, they can’t do what they do in practice. They have the idea that if they do one thing wrong, they will fail.” Dr. Lesyk helps performers realize that they probably will make a mistake, but most errors are not too costly. “If they manage to move on, most likely their high level of performance will resume.”

Dr. Kamphoff describes two types of perfectionism that can impact those trying to achieve peak performance. “*Maladaptive Perfectionism* is the extreme dissatisfaction with making mistakes, beating oneself up if you don’t perform at your best or being extremely upset when things don’t go perfectly. This type of perfectionism can really cut an athlete’s confidence. The second type, which is the better of the two, is *Adaptive Perfectionism*, where individuals set high personal standards but have low concern over mistakes or self-criticism.”

Dr. Kamphoff offers these tips to help overcome perfectionistic tendencies and keep perfectionism in check.

- 1. Be self-compassionate.** Being self-compassionate means being warm to yourself when you experience a shortcoming rather than ignoring it or criticizing yourself. Showing self-compassion also means recognizing that failure is part of being human.
- 2. Avoid judging yourself.** Awareness is key is keeping the perfectionism in check. Instead of judging yourself, react like your best friend would and say something to yourself or others like, "It's no big deal – mistakes happen."
- 3. Focus on your enjoyment.** The maladaptive form of perfectionism can accompany an intense concern over what others think like parents, coaches, or friends and letting them down. Focusing on why you like or love what you do, can replace those worrisome thoughts.

“It’s good to have high standards, but we also have to realize that no one is perfect and embrace our imperfections. When we do this, we free ourselves of needless suffering and criticism,” concluded Dr. Kamphoff.

For more information, AASP offers free resources in its [Resource Center](#) from health and fitness to professional development for coaches, athletes and parents.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science, and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Since 1986, AASP has been an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 2,300 members in 57 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

###