



How To Smother Perfectionism With A Timer!

Three Month Vacation Podcast

Sean D'Souza: This is the Three Month Vacation and I'm Sean D'Souza. When you think of the greatest killer in the ocean, one thought comes to mind, and that is the great white shark. Until quite recently, the great white shark was considered to be the ultimate predator. They grow up to a length of 15 feet and they weigh about 5,000 pounds, which is about 2,500 kilos. We consider the great white shark to be the ocean's ultimate predator.

But in fact, the ocean's ultimate predator is not a fish at all, it's a dolphin. Well, it belongs to the dolphin family and it's called the orca. Orca are known as killer whales, but that's wrong because they're not whales at all. They belong to the dolphin family. The reason why they're probably called killer whales is because at some point in time they were called whale killers, and somewhere along the line it got inverted and now they're called killer whales. The greatest predator in the ocean, that's it: the orca, the whale killer.

It's called a whale killer because they routinely gang up on whales, especially baby whales. Yes, that's breakfast, lunch and dinner sometimes. But no one had ever seen an orca attack a great white until it happened. Then in October of 1997 there was this whale watching tour. They were out on a routine whale watching mission and they got this call that there was some activity. They rushed to the scene and what they saw had never been seen before. They saw an orca attacking a great white.

There they are, this whale watching tour, off the Farrallon Islands, which is just off San Francisco. There's complete quiet, complete silence in the water for about 15 minutes. No one knows what is happening. They know that the orca and the great white are out there but no one knows what is happening.

Then out bursts the orca with the great white between its teeth. Now a great white, as fearsome as it is, is about half the size of an orca. It's about 15 feet, whereas an orca grows up to be about 32 feet. The weight is different as well: about 5,000 pounds for the great white and 22,000 pound for the orca. Still, they'd never seen an orca attack a great white before.

Why was it so quiet for 15 minutes? What kind of attack would involve quiet? What they found out later was how the orca attacks. Sharks, as it appears, are only fearsome right side up. If you flip them over they go into a state of almost being unconscious. It's called a state of tonic immobility. What this orca did was it attacked the shark and flipped it over. For all those 15 minutes it held it in a state of tonic immobility.

Now a shark that is held in that position, it cannot breathe. After a while it just drowns. That's what the orca knew. Somehow they had figured out that if you held the shark in a state of tonic immobility, they would not move again. They would be stuck forever. This is how it feels like when we're trying to deal with perfection. So many of us call ourselves perfectionists, but we're in this state of tonic immobility. We're struggling to get things done. How do we get out of this state of always wanting to do things perfectly? How do we get out of this state of tonic immobility?

As usual, we're going to cover three things and then you're going to get an action plan. You know something? I think I forgot to give an action plan in the last podcast. That was podcast number 35, I think. Anyway, we'll have that action plan this time around. The three things that we're going to cover are first, the external deadline. The second is the concept of a timer, which is an internal deadline, and finally, the understanding of how versions work.

Let's start off with the first one, which is the external deadline. In October of 2014 I decided that I wanted to write a book on pricing. I put it down and got everyone to look at it and did a plan. Then November came along and then December came long, and then Jan and then Feb. Then around the middle of February we sold it, as in pre-sold it. We did an offer. I didn't do a sales page, just did a trust the chef offer, which by the way, I picked up from restaurants, because I'm always eating.

We did a trust the chef without the sales page. That's when I started writing. Before that I was just playing perfectionist. I was sitting there trying to get the whole system together, doing mind map after mind map, writing notes, talking about all kinds of things but getting the job done.

The moment we had our sale and the moment the first person bought the product, the game was on. I couldn't afford to be a perfectionist anymore. We said we were going to release it on April the 13th. It needed to be ready on April the 13th. Now you might think that a lot of planning went into that date. No, it got plucked out of thin air. We just said it's going to take three or four weeks. Let's go for it. That's how you pick an external deadline. There is no precise something that you need to figure out. There is no alignment of planets before you can work out the exact external deadline.

I've wanted to do a bunch of stock cartoons, not the usual stock cartoons that you get but just lavish cartoons. More so in the pricing book because I've got better over the years, but in every single book that you get from Psychotactics there are 40, 50, maybe even 100 cartons. They're very lavish, and I wanted to do a series of stock cartoons, maybe 100 or 200, that people could use in their marketing, in their books, on their covers.

I first had this idea back in 2010. We were in California and I wanted to do it. I'm being the perfectionist. I've done all the planning. I've done the sales page. I've interviewed the customers. Like a plane that's circling the airport, I go round and round and round and nothing gets done. How do I resolve this perfectionist issue?

When we get back from Sardinia in June, I'll just sell it. We'll have an external deadline. Then the job gets done. It's that simple. I'm saying it's simple but there is never anything in life that's simple. You will run into a bunch of obstacles, late nights, early mornings, all kinds of problems. Eventually you get there. It's almost like the Olympics. When the Olympics is supposed to start on a specific date, it's not like they can push back the date. They just have to start on that day. That's the day of the opening ceremony and everyone has to be there. Everything has to work the best it can possibly work. That is the power of an external deadline.

What we have, however, is a backup system. For instance, when I wrote the pricing book they were three separate books. I get into my perfectionist tendency and I wanted to do even finer cartoons so it took a little more time than I expected. I wanted to do some graphics. I went hunting for some fonts and other stuff. That all took a little time, so on the date what did we do?

We gave two of the books and then four days later the third book. We have this backup system. If you're running the Olympics there's no backup system. You have to be ready on the date. You as a business owner, you always have a backup system. If you can deliver most of the goods on the day, then the external deadline works.

This is very important for us because we feel this pressure. All of us feel this pressure. If all your information is not ready, if you're writing a book that is, you can send in an update later. If you missed out some of the slides in your presentation, you can send the information later. If you're in a consulting program, same thing. Everything can be done three-fourths or four-fifths and the remaining can be sent later.

The external deadline really helps us get rid of that perfection, because otherwise we're just going round and round and round and we're constantly stuck. The external deadline is one thing. There are situations where we don't have such a big project and we just have to write an article or maybe we just have to do a cartoon, or maybe we just have to do one little thing. For this we need the power of the internal deadline, or rather, a timer.

In the second part we'll look at the timer, just a plain, ordinary timer. Whenever we've trained people to write articles or draw cartoons or do just about anything, what we see time and time again is they spend an inordinate amount of time just trying to perfect their work. Let's say you're writing a book and you have to write a chapter. Now, even if you're writing the introduction that might take you an hour or two hours. What people do is they start editing and cleaning it up and then it takes three, three and a half hours.

The question is: By adding 30% or 40% more, did it become 40% better? The answer is it never does. It has never been 40% better. Whenever I look at the work of other people, whether they're writing or drawing or dancing or cooking, the extra time doesn't add up. The only way you can solve this problem is to use a timer. You have to figure out how long you're going to take to finish a project. How much time do you have to finish your project? Let's say you've got two hours. Well, set a timer for two hours. Because if you sit down to write something or draw something or cook something, invariably you will take more than two hours. When you take more than two hours you're getting tired all the time and your work is actually getting a lot worse. Spend the two hours, and when the timer goes, it's done.

Now we may think that we're improving it. This happens when you're editing an article or you're improving your cartoon or doing a watercolor. In most instances it actually gets worse. If you've ever tried to overcook something or paint a watercolor, it gets worse every single time. It seems to get better. You try to make it better, but the overwork doesn't really help. You're getting more and more exhausted. At the point that you're trying to fix it, you're at your weakest. You're exhausted. You're just unable to do whatever you think you're doing. Having the timer just allows you to rest, to go away from it. Then if you want to come back to it later, that's fine, but don't overwork it. Get the timer in place before you start a project. That's it.

With that ding, we go to the next part, which is treating everything as a version. Now there is an external deadline, there is an internal deadline, but what about a version? Most people when they're doing big projects, they have to follow this method where they do version one, which is a draft. Then we do a second draft. Then we do a third draft. All the time you're getting rid of the perfectionist system. You're still working towards that external deadline but you're treating it as a draft.

We're now on episode number 37 of this podcast, and if you go back to, say, number 3 or number 6, or number 10 for that matter, you will find that there is a huge difference. There is a huge difference in delivery and confidence and style and everything. How can that happen in just 36 episodes? If you go back all the way back into, say, 2010, which is when I first attempted podcasts and gave up, it's terrible. Even though there is so much content out there, I don't need to put that out anymore.

The point is that we're always improving. If you just treat your stuff as if it were a version, then it really helps with big projects because then it becomes a draft, and the second draft, and the third draft. Then finally, on your external deadline, it's ready. For smaller projects your work is going to be better tomorrow. No matter what you do today, no matter how much you work at it today, it's going to be better tomorrow and the day after and the day after. It's much better than just sitting there and hoping that it will get better, that it will get perfect. Do the job. Call it version 1. Then move along and then fix it later.

Now a lot of people say, "Well, but I am a perfectionist." The truth is that all of us are perfectionists. Every single one of us are perfectionists, but we could not live in a perfectionist world. Think of going through school. Did you always score 100%? Think of your driving lesson. Would you be able to drive a car if they expected 100% from you? Think of all the things that happen in today's world and you'll notice one thing consistently: there is no such thing as perfectionism. It's a complete myth. It is in your head, and the only way to get it out of your head is to have these three things.

Let's just summarize what these three things are.

The first thing is an external deadline. You cannot get out of an external deadline. You can push it like we have, just a little bit, but you cannot get out of it. That's really good. It's pressure-building but it's really good. The second thing is the factor of an internal deadline. No one can control you except that timer and that little ding sound that shows up. Finally, it's the version. No matter what you do today, it's going to be crappy tomorrow, so you might as well get used to it, and you will get better tomorrow if you continue going.

This podcast sounds good. I think it sounds really good, but it's going to be better next time, and it's going to be better in episode number 40, and 45, and 50. Your project, your artwork, all of your stuff, it can be the best in the world but it doesn't matter. From the depths of the water comes an orca and poof, it gets you. The moment it gets you, you go into tonic immobility. That's what perfection is. It's tonic immobility. You're stuck. You can't move ahead. So use one thing. What's the one thing that you can do today? Drafts are a good thing and external deadlines, well, you might get down to that, but a timer: all of us have a timer. All of us have a clock, a phone, something on the computer that will go ding. Use the ding to your advantage.

That brings us to the end of this episode. Now if you want to go through these steps, one of the books that really helps people is outlining. This is especially when you're writing books or writing articles. We have a book on outlining. Another book that really helps is the factor of storytelling.

How do you build that story? Look up outlining and storytelling on the Psychotactics site. About this podcast, if you want all the links and all the information, the transcripts, it's all at psychotactics.com/37.

You can find this for any episode except for 18. 18 is the great mystery. We cannot put in psychotactics.com/18. Anyone wants to help us on that, you're welcome to try. Finally, if you want to contact me I'm at psychotactics.com, sean@psychotactics.com, or twitter Sean D'Souza, and then also on Facebook at Sean D'Souza. If you haven't told your friends about the [Three Month Vacation podcast](#), do so today. That's me, Sean D'Souza, saying bye for now. Bye bye.

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