

# How to **ESCAPE** the vicious triangle of **PERFECTIONISM**, ANXIETY & DEPRESSION



so you can be...

## CRAZY **FOR** **LIFE**

BY VICTORIA MAXWELL

# Hello There!

I'm so glad you're here! Really. I'm doing a very excited, office chair wiggle dance right now because you're choosing to spend your valuable time reading this.

In this **CRAZY FOR LIFE** cheat sheet you'll learn SIMPLE STEPS to escape the vicious triangle of perfectionism, anxiety and depression. I use these tools to keep myself not just sane (literally – I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder), but, on a bad day, less miserable and on a good day, happy.

We are (consciously or not) always moving towards more joy and ease in our lives. Or at the very least we're moving away from pain. We do this with varying degrees of success during different times in our lives. I know I do.

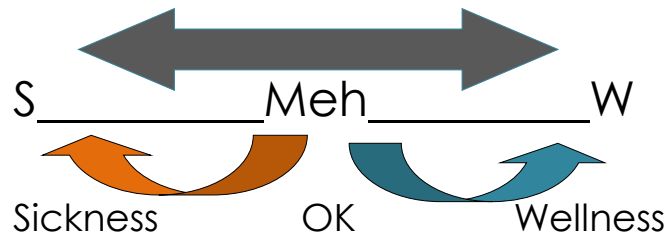
Everyone is on a continuum of wellness. We can't help but be if we are alive. We can be sick, we can be well. But...

**Most of us are not sick, but we're also not well.**

**We're just ok. Meh.**

**Picture it like this:**

### The Continuum of Wellness:



We each travel back & forth along this spectrum during our lifetime.

We traverse back and forth along this wellness continuum throughout our lifetime. We can pass through these areas over the course of a week or within a day even. I've trekked (read: stumbled, tripped, face-planted, what have you) through all these terrains many times. And still do.

**The trick is to get better and better at  
moving from illness, past 'okay' into wellness.  
THEN it's about learning to stay longer in wellness.**

**PERFECTIONISM. ANXIETY. DEPRESSION.** I've struggled, to a greater or lesser degree, with this triangle throughout my life. I got my official 'crazy papers' back in 1992: Bipolar disorder with psychosis and anxiety.

Over the course of several years, as I scrabbled my life back together after two involuntary and one voluntary (sort of) stays at club medication (the psych ward), I learned tools to manage the triangle. Tools I use to this day.

My hope is that you use this **CRAZY FOR LIFE** cheat sheet to bonk perfectionism, anxiety and depression on their collective head and cultivate a little more joy and a little more peace.

These CRAZY FOR LIFE steps are:

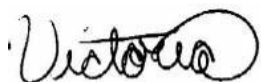
- Simple (I promise).
- Low cost (You betcha – no cost really)
- Quick to do (Giddy up! Our time is our most valuable possession)

Oh yeah and...

- FUN (Personal growth while uncomfortable can still be enjoyable)

I invite you to read on and see how these simple steps will help you, slowly but surely, help you be **CRAZY FOR LIFE**.

Warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

HERE WE GO...



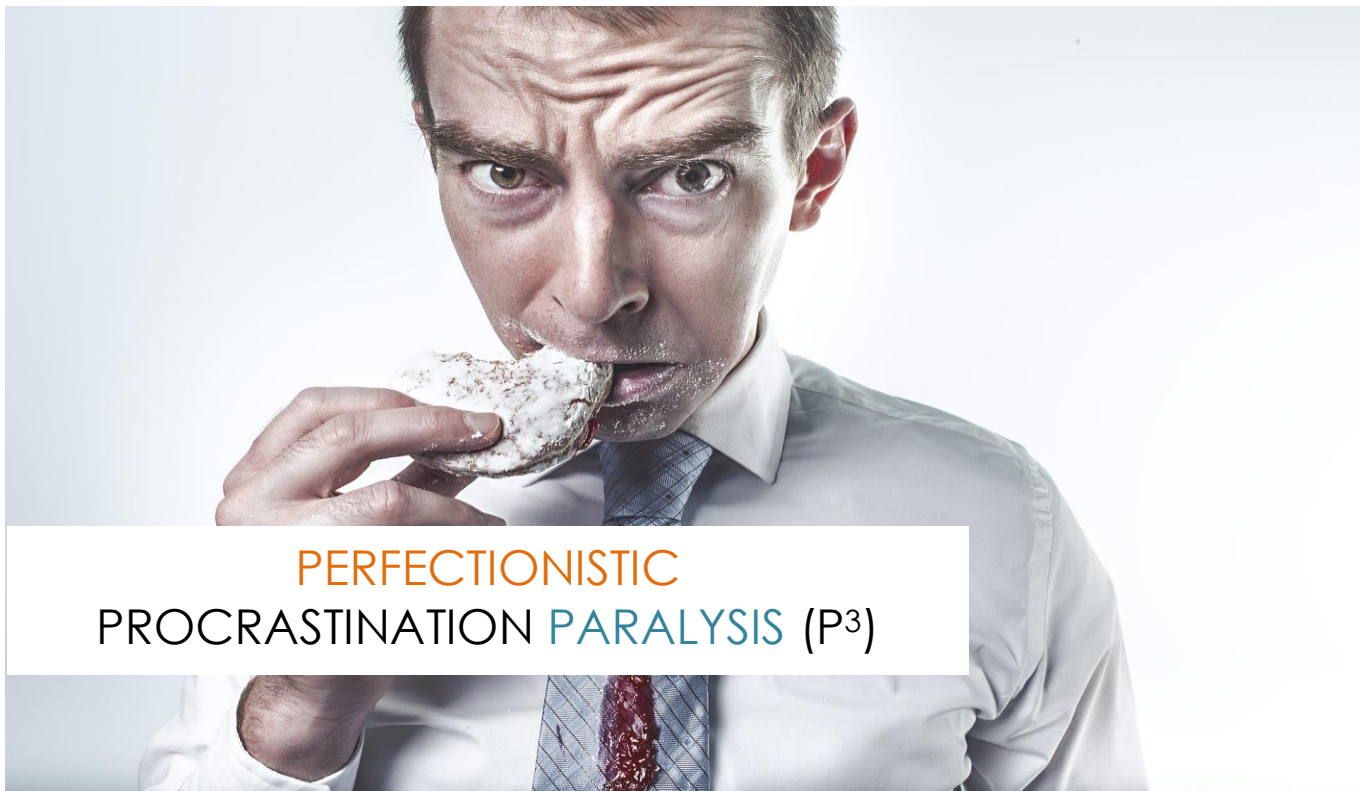
## HOW TO ESCAPE PERFECTIONISM, ANXIETY & DEPRESSION

These are the basic tools to counter the wiggly demons we're looking at:

1. Identify your perfectionistic procrastination PARALYSIS (P<sup>3</sup>) issue
2. 'Name that FEAR'
3. ASK 'Then What?'
4. Counter with 'GOOD What Ifs'
5. Pinpoint Your MENACING Mantra
6. Create a New KICK-ASS MANTRA
7. PRACTICE your Kick-Ass Mantra

But first a bit of context....





## PERFECTIONISTIC PROCRASTINATION PARALYSIS (P<sup>3</sup>)

### OUCH! Can You Relate?

Have you ever experienced a healthy...err...unhealthy dose of perfectionistic [procrastination](#) paralysis (aka P<sup>3</sup>)? Well that's my term for it.

The inability to start a task or the consistent delay of starting said task because of the need for the outcome of that task to be perfect. (Don't ask me how long it took me to write that. I am still panicking because I know it could be better.)

**Perfectionism fuels procrastination which fuels anxiety which fuels depression which fuels MORE perfectionism which fuels procrastination which...etc etc. You get the picture.**

I dealt with [perfectionism](#) in therapy many years ago. I should say for many years in therapy I dealt with perfectionism.

But deep-seated issues tend to be well...deep-seated. They come back to haunt and hunt us in many forms over the course of our lives. Think of it like the universe's video games levels.

My [generalized anxiety disorder](#), and [bipolar disorder](#) (especially the depression side) co-mingled nicely, if not destructively with my need for everything to be beyond excellent. The result for me was [horribly cruel self talk](#), [piercing feelings of inadequacy](#), constant free-floating worry and [on-going depression](#) that wouldn't lift even if I did complete something well.

**My MENACING MANTRA was "it's never good enough...it's never good enough...it's never good enough".**

Over time though, with counseling and my own wellness tools, my need for perfection has diminished.

But perfectionism has greeted me once again and is preventing me from accomplishing tasks. Recent situation: fear of publishing an imperfect [blog post](#). Result: procrastination of writing said blog post because I want it to be perfect.

**Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to...**

Try the following 7 steps I use to counter perfectionism, anxiety and depression and assess the results for yourself. I promise you will feel some kind of positive shift. If you feel so inclined email me about the process and the results {[victoria@victoriamaxwell.com](mailto:victoria@victoriamaxwell.com)}. I would love to hear from you!



## 1. IDENTIFY THE (P<sup>3</sup>) ISSUE

Think of a situation where you're in (or have been in) **PERFECTIONISTIC PROCRASTINATION PARALYSIS (P<sup>3</sup>)**. Are you aware of any anxiety and depression at play within this paralysis puzzle? Mine: putting off writing a blog post. Write down one of your P<sup>3</sup> issues.

**\*YOUR TURN\*** My perfectionistic procrastination paralysis issue:





## 2. NAME THAT FEAR

Perfectionism, anxiety and depression feed on secrecy and silence. They count on us not talking about them so they can grow in the darkness where they're most at home. **NAMING** our fears in relation to our specific perfectionistic procrastination paralysis **ALLOWS US TO TAKE OWNERSHIP** of them. Talking about what we fear will happen, gives us the upper hand.

So...**WHAT ARE YOUR 'WHAT IFS'**? Don't worry if they aren't rational. 'What ifs' thrive on irrationality. By listing 'what if' fears, you make them concrete and not just a vague feeling of foreboding. With this you can examine how likely they are to occur and if needed problem solve.

Here are some of mine - What if...

...I write my blog and nobody likes it?

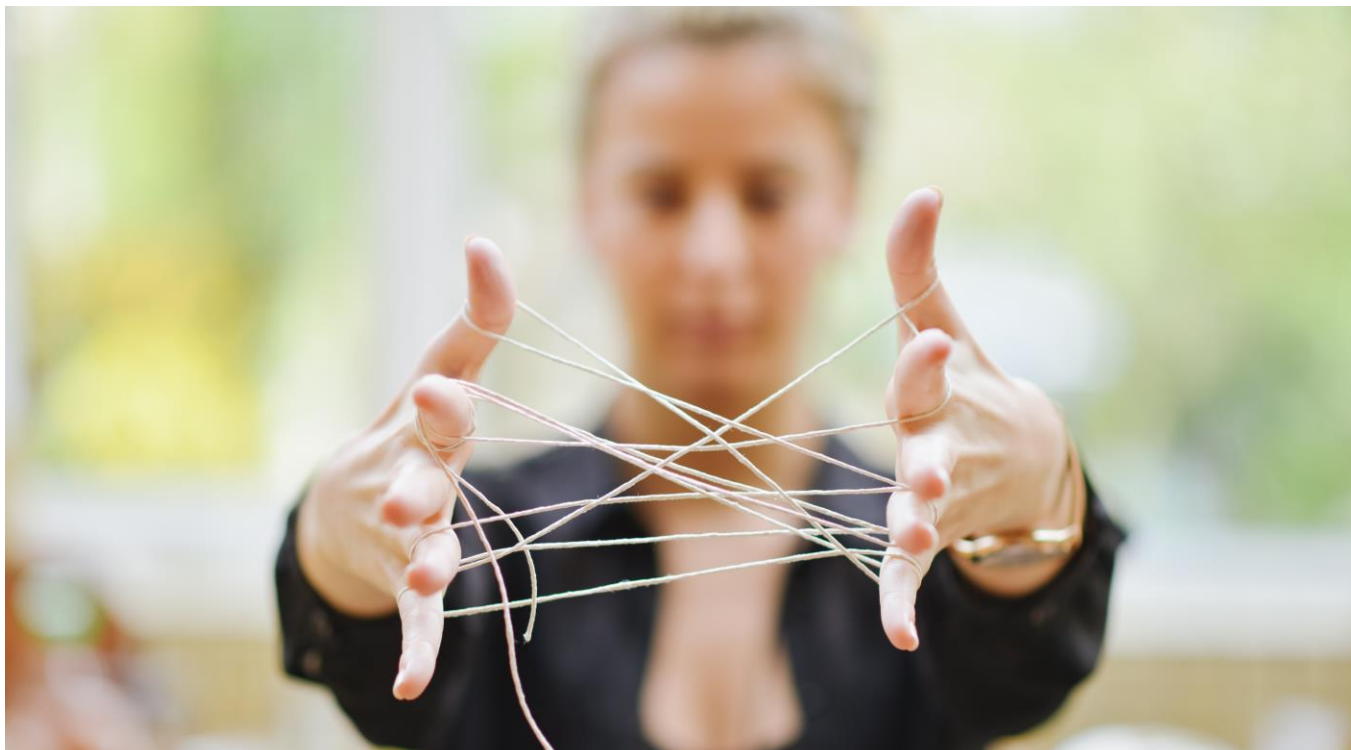
...the post isn't as good as my others?

...I offend my readers?

...people laugh at me, ridicule and ostracise me?

What are yours?

**\*YOUR TURN\*** What if...



### 3. ASK THEN WHAT?

Now take a closer look at your fearful 'what ifs'. How likely is it these fears will occur? Not very. But if they do, then what? Take the fear to its very end and look at how you would deal with it. Because the good news is you have coping skills. And if you don't, you can reach out and discover some.

For example: What if ...people laugh at me, ridicule and ostracise me?

As unlikely as this will happen, what if people DO laugh at me? Then what? I'll feel sad, perhaps lonely. THEN WHAT? Well, I can call a friend who does care about me. Then what? I likely will feel less alone. Then what? I won't care as much that people laughed at me. Then what? If I still feel upset I can talk with my counsellor, write in my journal, go for a walk, breathe. I can 'deal' if my worst 'what ifs' come true.

Take one of your 'what ifs' and ask 'then what?'. Each time write how you would respond – keep asking until you feel you've come to completion. If you feel you don't have adequate coping tools, whom could you ask; where could you go for help to discover some tools?

**\*YOUR TURN\***    Then what?



#### 4. COUNTER WITH GOOD WHAT IFS

My tendency (if you haven't already noticed) and possibly yours is to anticipate the worst. 'What ifs' usually work that way. We're wired to be on the alert for danger – even if there isn't any. 'What ifs', in some circumstances are useful. They help us plan for possible pitfalls. But when out of control, 'what ifs' keep us fixated on fear. So to counter these boogey men we need to consciously redirect our thinking to positive 'what ifs'. WHAT IF GOOD THINGS HAPPEN? What a concept.

What if:

...my post is well received?

...I get lots of positive comments?

...I feel good about my finished product?



Perhaps not so surprising, positive scenarios happen far more frequently than negative ones. And if you don't believe me, keep track of a 'what if' situation and see what results. Usually the negative imaginings stay just that – phantoms of our minds – not realities in our lives.

Write your positive 'what ifs'.

**\*YOUR TURN\*** What if...



## 5. PINPOINT MENACING MANTRAS



Remember my menacing mantra 'IT'S NEVER GOOD ENOUGH...it's never good enough'? That refrain was the subtle but constant undercurrent in my mind during most of my daily activities and interactions. Again we need to bring awareness to what's happening in order to create different outcomes.

So what's YOUR MENACING MANTRA? You may have more than one. I know I do. Pick the most predominant and debilitating. You can spot it because you hear it most frequently. And because it easily throws you off your game even (and often especially) when you're feeling good.

Pinpoint your menacing mantra.

**\*YOUR TURN\***    My menacing mantra is:

## 6. CREATE A NEW KICK-ASS MANTRA



Being aware of our menacing mantra can be helpful. But awareness is only part of the process. CREATING and practicing a new more REALISTIC mantra are the other parts. Mantras (like affirmations) can be powerful, but not if we feel conflicted about them. I needed a new mantra, but more importantly I needed a new mantra that I could get behind 100%. The one I picked up decades ago fit the bill.

I learned it from a counsellor I worked with in my early 20's and it's been one of the most liberating realizations I've ever had:

**Good enough is good enough.**

Good enough REALLY IS good enough. I can't say it enough. Literally. To this day I say it to myself (out loud sometimes) when I am paralysed by perfectionism, anxiety and depression. It's a reset button for my brain. Repeating it silently to myself, reading or saying it aloud is like rewiring my neural circuitry, rerouting my synaptic pathways and entire body to absorb that good enough really is good enough. I can stop at good. Phew!

I invite you to put pen to paper and brainstorm ideas for your **'I-can-totally-get-behind-that' KICK-ASS Mantra**. Let your heart open and the words find you. Your mantra is meant to help you feel expanded, supported, loved and in my case, relieved! Take mine if it speaks to you. Your mantra can be obvious or impenetrable, original or borrowed. It's yours. And no one else's.

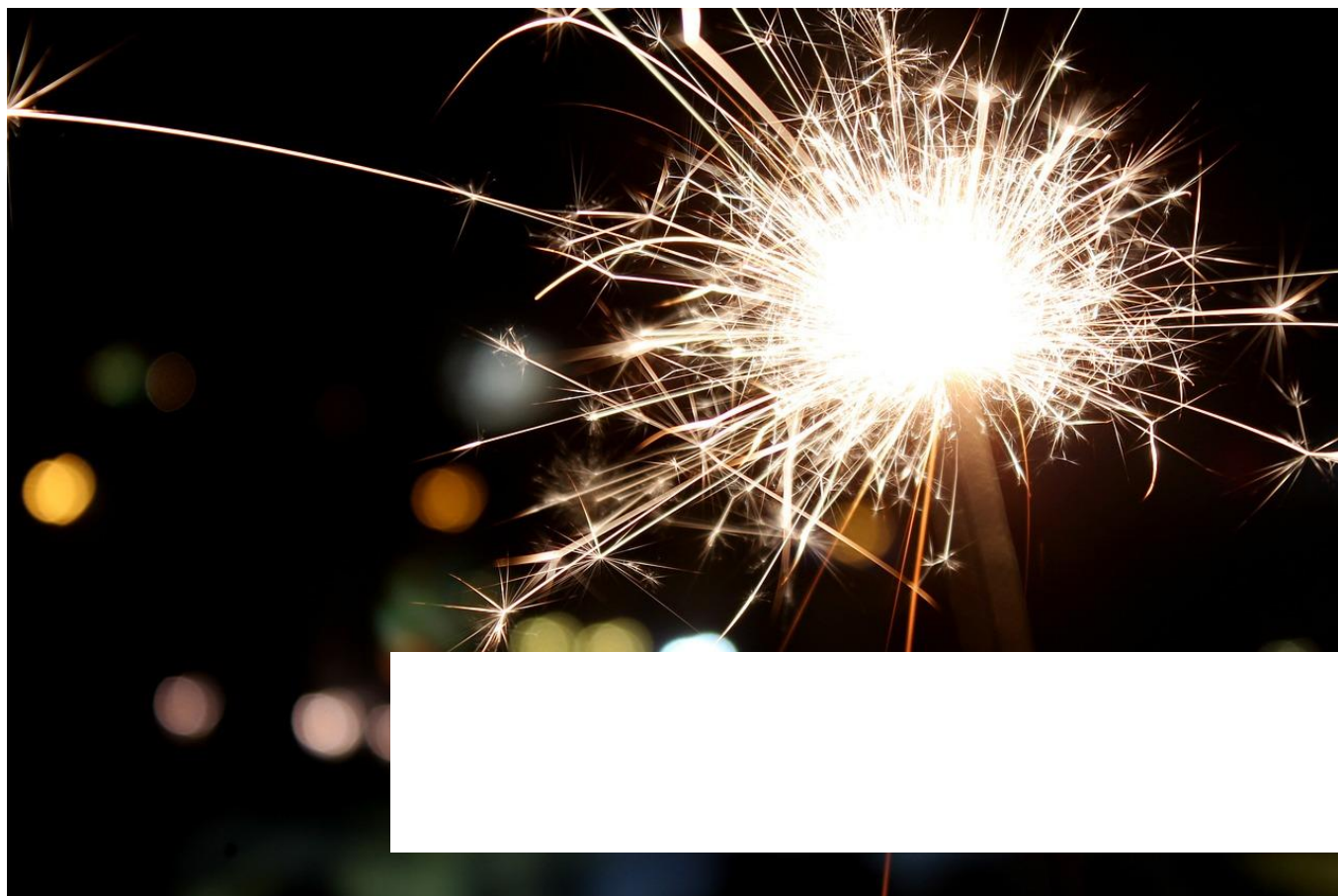
Then, if you like, print the photo on page 19, 'ink' in your mantra and put it somewhere you'll see regularly.

What's your new, 'I-can-totally-get-behind-that' KICK-ASS Mantra?

**\*YOUR TURN\*** My New KICK-ASS Mantra is:



MY 'I-CAN-TOTALLY-GET-BEHIND-THAT' KICK-ASS MANTRA:





## 7. PRACTICE YOUR KICK-ASS MANTRA

After creating your mantra, it's important to PRACTICE it. I practice my mantra as frequently as possible when I'm in the grips of porcupine anxiety or gnashing depression. When an activity triggers a negative mantra, I notice it, thank it for sharing and then repeat my new one a few times aloud or silently in my head. How and when will you practice your new mantra when negative ones rear their ugly heads?

**\*Your Turn\***      I choose to practice my KICK-ASS MANTRA (how & when):

# CRAZY FOR LIFE CHEAT SHEET

## How to Escape the Vicious Triangle of Perfectionism, Anxiety & Depression

1. IDENTIFY your perfectionistic procrastination paralysis {P<sup>3</sup>} issue
2. Name that Fear {list your 'what ifs'}
3. Ask 'Then What?' {list how you will respond}
4. Counter with 'Good What Ifs' {list potential positive 'what ifs'}
5. Pinpoint Your Menacing Mantra {pick the loudest one}
6. Create Your 'I-can-totally-get-behind-that' KICK-ASS Mantra
7. PRACTICE your KICK-ASS MANTRA {plan when + how}

HERE'S TO YOU BEING...

# CRAZY FOR LIFE



## ABOUT ME

I'm a mental health speaker, wellness warrior, performer and researcher. But more than anything I'm a **CHEERLEADER**. My job, mission, passion – what have you, is to help you embrace all parts of yourselves: the bland, the messy, the beautiful. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, anxiety, psychosis, disordered eating and a spiritual emergency. I learned to get through challenges and flourish, we need to embrace (then let go of) shame and accept ourselves and our lives with our whole heart. That is how to be **CRAZY. FOR. LIFE.**

For 14 years I've 'hit the boards' (that's actor talk for performed) my one person shows and workshops about recovering from mental illness and creating wellness across Canada and the US. I get my 'nerd on' by working as a peer researcher with [CREST.BD](#), a research team that studies bipolar disorder. My writerly self gets to play when I post on my Psychology Today blog: [Crazy for Life: Escapades of a Bipolar Princess](#).

Whether you have an 'official' diagnosis or not, we can all be **CRAZY FOR LIFE** and flourish. To find out more and to have me do my very excited office chair wiggle dance check out [www.victoriamaxwell.com](http://www.victoriamaxwell.com)