Perfectionist or Healthy Striver?

*Where are **you** on the continuum?*

Mark where you fall on the continuums below between being a perfectionist and a healthy striver:

PERFECTIONIST	HEALTHY STRIVER
I set standards for myself beyond reach and reason	I set high standards for myself, but just beyond reach
I am never satisfied by anything less than perfection	I enjoy the process as well as the outcome
I become dysfunctionally depressed when I experience failure and disappointment	I bounce back from failure and disappointment quickly and with energy
I am preoccupied with fear of failure and disapproval which may deplete my energy levels	I keep normal anxiety and fear of failure and disapproval within bounds and use them to create energy
I see my mistakes as evidence of unworthiness	I see mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning
I become overly defensive when I feel criticized	I react positively to helpful feedback

Strategies for becoming a healthy achiever:

- Increase your awareness of the self-critical nature of your all-or-nothing thoughts, and how they extend to other people in your life. Try to see the "grey" even in really small decisions or tasks.
- Be realistic about what you can do.
- Set strict time limits on each of your projects. When the time is up, move on: attend to another activity even if the project is not complete or "perfect."
- When someone offers you feedback, don't automatically assume it's criticism. Remember, the healthy achiever can integrate this feedback, but also knows when to take it with a grain of salt!
- Watch out for "should" statements like, "I should never make mistakes" or "I should always be able to predict problems before they occur." "Should" comes with a lot of value judgment. Instead try saying things like "I would like to complete this project today." Or "I have put in my best effort."

Further reading: Basco, R.M. (1999). Never good enough: Freeing yourself from the chains of perfectionism. New York: Free Press