

Is Great the Enemy of Good?

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by Jodi Hume and Susan Olson

This is an email conversation between Jodi Hume and Susan Olson about writing an article called, "Is Great the Enemy of Good?" that turned out to be the actual article—un-buffed, unperfected, in honor of the subject.

JODI: Susan, I started laughing at how long I've been trying to write this single paragraph to start our article. LOSER! Remember what the article is about?!?!?! That said, I still want to do a really great job and can't seem to shake the feeling that it has to be nearly perfect. Hence, the blank white page in front of me.

SUSAN: I'm feeling a little "it's got to be great" too. Very funny. And embarrassing, given that we're trying to be the imperfection experts. I read this Goethe quote recently, *"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it, boldness has genius, power and magic in it."* I like that philosophy. Too often we think we have to have it all figured out before we even begin. Our culture values the slick pitch, the well-thought out presentation, the perfectly realized painting. There seems to be an over-emphasis on experience and credentials and, frankly, on perfection. Where is there room for beginners, for failure, for real risk-taking? How do we expect to be great when we're not willing to walk through good—not to mention, be willing to suck?

What would be different for you if it was impossible to be great?



Coaches, Jodi Hume and Susan Olson, spend a lot of time emailing each other—sometimes about something important. They are also creators and leaders of the Blue Room Sessions, a group coaching workshop that challenges participants to step out of their comfort zones and into their dreams.

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JODI: Frankly, that would be a little depressing. There's something really juicy and seductive about doing a super fantastic job. I find motivation an issue if I don't think of it in terms of "making it great."

SUSAN: I find "make it great" the anti-motivator. It's a holdback from my advertising years where greatness was held as the standard no one could reach.

JODI: Maybe the question is, "what gets cheated when we aren't willing to be awkward and stumble?"

SUSAN: Well, greatness for one. And originality. If we fear being imperfect then it's tough to venture into new territory. It's much safer to stay with what is already deemed as great than it is to take a chance and create something embarrassing. We get afraid to put our unique thumbprint on the world. The trick is developing the stomach for it.

JODI: True. But that's a pretty tall order. I like the idea of finding a way to remove the sense of measurement all together. Like, what if we adopted a first draft mentality, just in the interest of developing some momentum? I had a client once who used this mantra about everything just being a scribble to relieve her anxiety about getting it right.

SUSAN: Great idea. I use the "done, not perfect" mantra a lot. It's permission to start before we feel ready. And while I do agree that building the muscle to not have to look good is a tall order, being in the uncomfortable place of uncertainty and failing is so necessary. After all, it's proof that we're stretching in new ways. The fact is, we may never be ready until we start. This may sound odd, but I love witnessing women I respect being good, not great and even downright not good. It gives me permission to be that too. To try. You know, there's also a life balance piece here: Embracing good enough in one area frees you up to be great in another.

JODI: When you said "we may never be ready until we start" another whole piece occurred to me. And that is that once you take a step on the path, the entire landscape changes. You may find your choices, opportunities, obstacles and expectations change with each step you take. So trying to get your ducks in a row before you begin also cheats you out of finding the undiscovered coves and crannies along the way. And it doesn't really help prepare you either, because you might encounter an entirely different set of complications. Essentially, all that

time preparing and procrastinating in pursuit of perfection is a complete waste of time. And there's nothing GREAT about that.

SUSAN: Trust the process.

JODI: Yeah. Savor what unfolds along the path. Loosen the grip on the rudder, just enough to allow the magic to show up.

SUSAN: I love that. What is so good about letting go of great is the chance to get something even better than our original expectations. Not be confined by our limited experience of what great is. A life beyond our wildest expectations.

JODI: Exactly! I'd love to end our article with a fearless challenge to the readers to let go of great and just get going. To start moving and see where it leads. Can you imagine the impact if 16,000 readers gave up their paralyzing focus on the perfect end result and just simply launched their dreams into action?

SUSAN: That would be something.