

This Subtle Trap Snares Many High Achievers—Have You Fallen Into It?

Identifying the performance trap can be very enlightening, but tough to unwind, because it is like a thread that has woven itself into every fabric of our lives. Getting free of this web will take an intentional recognition and desire to change; otherwise, the performer will get locked into a never ending “Performance Hamster Wheel.”

1. Lack of Love and Identity

Living a performance lifestyle often begins here. Instead of having an identity as a son who is loved by our Father in heaven, we are left with a void that needs to be filled. The broken heart is the root of most performance-oriented people. They lack the fathering and approval they needed in life. No one spoke to who they are or empowered their identity apart from their works.

2. Rejection-Based Mindsets Enter

Counterfeit mindsets are released by rejection as toxic alternatives. The rejection mindset of performance promotes “law thinking,” where we hope for approval and acceptance based on how well we perform. The drive to “work harder” and “do more,” becomes an internal pressure. These are not inherently evil traits, but they can become that when they are more important than the person’s unconditional acceptance and love from God, where God accepts us because of His Son. The lure is that “works” will get them approval and acceptance. When works override being loved unconditionally, God’s design for life becomes spoiled.

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At this stage, the problem is that rejection has infected the motives of a person. They are now unknowingly chasing after love and performing for it all along the way. Most of the time, they are not even aware of this motivation. They just feel a “drive” or “impulse” propelling them into their daily actions. Throughout this stage, rejection is subtly implanting counterfeit values. If you’re honest with yourself, you may find these rejection-based motives lurking within.

People bound by the performance trap:

- Feel they have to earn the love and acceptance of others.
- Base how they feel about themselves on how well they perform their daily duties. “If I don’t do well, I will not be loved.”
- Spend a lot of time mulling over the worries or pressures of tomorrow and fear not doing well in whatever they do. “I will not be accepted or belong.”
- Tend to strive and live in a works mentality, where situations fall back on their efforts.
- Process their relationship with God in how they can do things to get His attention, versus learning to receive who He is and giving it out.
- Take themselves and what they do too seriously, placing constant pressure on themselves. “I can’t deal with not performing well.”
- Regularly feel the pressure weigh on them when helping others. The results rest on how they perform.
- Spend a lot of time thinking about what others think of them. They over think how they come across to others.
- Have this excessive need to be “successful” and become known for their accomplishments.
- Are not comfortable with vulnerability and weakness.
- Often ignore important relational and identity issues of

the heart, usually just to keep going and moving. Remember, with performance, the “show must go on.”

3. Performance Wheels Begin Turning

The person finds that as a performer, he or she actually receives some affirmation, attention and validation through what they do. The problem is they carry a black hole that sucks in this affirmation like a vacuum, but then quickly return to a place of dissatisfaction. They find that performance is the only way to experience any sense of affirmation, so they invest more energy into becoming better at whatever they do. Their work and activities become their primary source of identity.

4. Performance Backlash

Over the long haul, toxic behaviors manifest in such a way that relationships are hindered, wholeness starts to collapse and health can also begin to wane.

There are many performance “backlashes” that become evident over time, including when a person:

- Comes across as always busy, overloaded and overworked.
- Manifests a deep “need to succeed” at all costs, so the performer becomes immersed in activity.
- Can become a workaholic with driven and perfectionistic tendencies.
- Can have a “win/lose” attitude about life and issues. Can also be called very “black and white” in their thinking, and argumentative.
- Can take responsibility for everything and everyone, carrying the weight of other’s problems, always thinking how to solve things other people need to take responsibility for.
- Can feel the need to be the “grown up one” in the room.
- Can struggle with being a false burden bearer.
- Can give out love but cannot receive it. Can help others

but is uncomfortable with receiving help. Can minister to others but does not present as someone who can be ministered to. Cannot receive something from someone without feeling the need to have to do something back.

- Does not know how to be themselves and just “be” in relationships. Will struggle with relational intimacy, so they just stay busy.
- Quite often complains of loneliness. They have spent so much time performing, that investments in their relationships have not been a priority. Over time, the person has become alone in their narrowly focused obsession with their performance.
- Struggles with anger, either pent up or expressed. In fact, the anger can often be hidden, except to those around who know them. People around him or her will feel the anger, whether it is expressed or not. Family members often get the backlash of the anger.
- Cannot receive healthy criticism and will often be defensive.

Carries deep fabrications that work well in the performance setting, but fall apart in normal relationship interactions. The performer is often not aware as to why these toxic fruits are manifesting, so they just dive deeper into busyness of performing and avoid pausing to deal with their inner brokenness. Therefore, these patterns become more deeply embedded.

5. A Lack of Fulfillment

Even though the performer’s life may be busy, filled with activity and accomplishments, there is still an emptiness that remains at the end of the day. Performers feel lonely and unfulfilled when it comes to love, yet they have no idea how to get off the hamster wheel. They are starving, in desperate need of love.

6. Addictions Enter

In the absence of unconditional love and acceptance in the performer's heart, they will turn to anything in search of fulfillment. Their daily grind of doing, going and performing leaves huge voids that are never satisfied. At the end of the day when the curtain falls, when the people leave and the performer is left alone, the darkness of addiction creeps in. Food addictions and pornography are the most common, but they can certainly manifest in any habit, behavior or pattern that cannot be broken with an act of the will.

Many do not realize that addiction struggles of any kind are often rooted in performance-orientated living. When you live in performance mode, there is little room left for dealing with the brokenness and wounds that are demanding us to tend to them. Addictions offer a false, quick relief. Addictions, however, will find a way to keep the person locked in a secret prison. The person hates them, but attempts to get free through more performance-oriented self-help steps, while missing the root problem of a broken heart.

7. Shame and Guilt

The person is unfulfilled and bound to vices that won't budge. Deep down, the performer feels like a fraud or a hypocrite. The guilt over their addictions creates a shame that covers them like a shroud. Satan has a field day in their thoughts, accusing them in every way possible. The world around them can even be ignorant to the war occurring inside the performer who carries a sense of unworthiness and even uncleanness before God, yet keeps the outside facade intact.

8. More Performance

The biggest problem is that the performer does not know how to get free from this vicious cycle. So they do the only thing they have been trained to do well—perform more. They add extra effort, pushing with greater force and self-effort to achieve fulfillment through more activity. In the church, this is

where hyper-religious activity increases. People think if they serve more, it will make them feel better about themselves before God. The problem is that this method only clips a few leaves and never getting to the root.

9. The Crash

The performer's resources wane and they eventually crash emotionally. They have lived in the hamster wheel of performance for too long and their body screams for relief. Up until this point, the toxic roots of brokenness have been ignored, but now they are flailing. This is usually where phrases like "burnout" and "I am exhausted" become common expressions.

Most of the people who come to me for help are at this stage of the hamster wheel. They did not see the need for help before, especially because they believed the myth that performance living was working for them. Additionally, most of the time, performance people who crash want a quick fix, because that is how they live their life. "Give me a pill, say a quick prayer, do what you need to do to get me back out there." But it doesn't work like that.

10. Back to Performance

This is actually the saddest part of this cycle. Instead of getting some heart-help and restoration, the performer stands up from a burned out crash and gets right back on the wheel. At the crash, the performer was halted, overwhelmed and in crisis. They often stop everything to bring attention to their cracked emotional state. But performers are not comfortable with stillness and inactivity, so as soon as they feel a little energy return, they get right back into the race, without taking the time to heal and make necessary changes.

The cycle repeats itself and over time, relationships are depleted. The performer loses touch with friends and family becomes an unfulfilling place of hidden resentment. It takes

great courage and humility for this performance trap to be confronted and eradicated.