

# Ep #14 : Listener Q&A: Thoughts About Time, Ruthless Self-Criticism & Compulsive Phone Use



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

## Ep #14 : Listener Q&A: Thoughts About Time, Ruthless Self-Criticism & Compulsive Phone Use

Welcome to episode 14. I'm Kristi Angevine, and today, we're going to do a listener Q&A.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits and feel as good on the inside as they look on paper. You'll get practical strategies for mindset shifts that will help you finally understand the root causes of why you think, feel, and act as you do so you can learn to create habits that give more than they take. And now, here's your host physician and Master Certified Life Coach Kristi Angevine.

Hello everyone. Today is a little different because today, I'm going to answer questions that you've sent in. And it feels a little bit like Dear Abby or Dear Sugar, but with a focus on mindset and habits. And I'm just really excited to be able to do this episode.

There were many great questions to choose from, so if I didn't choose yours, it's not because it wasn't a delightful question or really a useful one to answer. But for today, I chose ones that represented sentiments that several of you sent in, or that are common ones I hear from my clients.

So as you listen, I want you to consider how the answer I'm giving to this particular listener's particular question, how it might apply to you and your life. So the topics we're covering today are thoughts about time, constant phone use, and a few more things.

Now, if you have a question that you want answered in a future episode, the survey to submit a question that can be done anonymously if you'd like is linked in the show notes, or you can just post your question in the Habits On Purpose Facebook group.

Alright, so question one. I'm going to read the question and then I'm going to answer the question from a few different points of view. Here's what this listener wrote. "Your podcast is introduced as being for those who want to feel as good on the inside as they look on paper. I look like shit on paper and I'm working through it the best I can. Is this podcast for me?"

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So first of all, sweet listener, I am so grateful for how courageous and how proactive you were to reach out and send me this question. So, those of you who don't know what she's referring to, in the intro to the podcast, the intro as it stand right now includes that phrase, "This is for those who want to feel as good on the inside as they look on paper."

So let's go through this piece by piece. The language we use including generic idioms is really important. This is because the words we use have meanings and connotations. And they really do relate to how we feel. When the wording of the intro was originally decided on, I didn't actually appreciate the implications of the phrase in the way that this listener shared.

So reflecting on that idea of good on paper verbiage, I now realize that it doesn't actually fully convey what I want to convey, which essentially is that this podcast addresses that discrepancy or that gap that can exist between the way we feel on the inside and how other people might see us from the outside.

So on the inside, we could be quietly, secretly out of view of most people, consumed with perfectionism, consumed with self-doubt, insecurity, anxiety, inadequacy. But if you asked some random person who didn't know us, they might say, "Yeah, that human's life looks amazing."

But if you're of the point of view that things on the outside don't actually look that amazing and there's not this discrepancy between how things look on the outside and how things feel on the inside, that phrase may be a total turn-off.

So thanks to you, I get to consider how I might want to align the copy in the intro with the podcast's true purpose. So I'm answering this here because I think it brings up a really important topic. Many of my listeners are really hard on themselves. Perfectionists are excellent at ruthless self-criticism; ask me how I know, and with comparison.

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And what one person thinks of as “good on paper” may be totally different from what you think of as good on paper. So the short answer to you listener is yes, this podcast is especially for you, and let me explain why.

We live in a world with dysfunctional, unjust systems across the board. In healthcare, in law, in politics, in law enforcement, in race, with gender. And my thought is it's pretty much guaranteed that if you're human on this planet, you are going to encounter stress.

If you are paying attention, you are going to feel emotions like devastation and anger from time to time. If you're a surgeon, you may have a surgical complication where a patient is harmed. If you're a parent, a friend, a partner, you may experience heartache or grief.

The awareness of how our thoughts impact our feelings and drive our actions is one of the most impactful skills that you can ever learn. When we better understand how the way we think about ourselves in the world, how it impacts how we feel and how it impacts how we show up in our life, it's really important.

This is because when we do encounter something difficult, be it a mistake we make, a lawsuit, a peer review, a difficult conversation, we can be better aware of how the way we're thinking about the difficulty might be making it even harder on ourselves than is actually necessary or beneficial.

So, you know the quote, pain is inevitable, and suffering is optional? So in this life, we cannot avoid pain and negative emotions. But when we learn how to observe our thinking, be curious about our thoughts and feelings, instead of harshly critical, when we learn this, we can curate our experience and reduce the extra suffering that is layered on top of pain.

So to use your words, if you look like shit on paper, the skills that you learn here are really useful ones to learn and to practice. Now, I would be remiss if I didn't address the specific phrase that you wrote in. That one of, “I look like shit on paper.”

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Now, I'm not here to debate what it is that's on paper that you're referring to. And I get that there are some things "on paper" or that happen to us on the outside that none of us would ever want to deal with, that we wouldn't order off the menu, to have as something in our life, that we wish we could just erase.

I think almost everyone listening can totally relate to thinking something like this. So for everyone else who's listening, bring your version of this phrase, "I look like shit on paper," bring that to mind. It might be, "I'm not credentialed, I'm not board certified, I screwed it up, now everyone knows."

Whatever your version of this phrase is, bring that to mind and see how what I'm going to say next applies to you. So sweet listener, what I'm most curious about is how do you feel when you say, "I look like shit on paper?"

Now, since this is a one-sided conversation and I'm just speculating without your live input, what I'm going to say could be totally off base. But I would guess that when you think the thought, "I look like shit on paper," it probably doesn't feel good.

I'd wager that that thought makes you feel pretty awful. What would be interesting for you to be curious about is how you feel when you think that thought, and then how you act when you feel that way. So if you feel discouraged, do you shrink in some way or over-edit yourself?

If you feel hypervigilant, do you tend to brace for catastrophe, even when things are going well? Since the way we think drives how we feel, and how we feel shapes our behavior, that thought likely has a downstream impact to the result that you're actually experiencing when you're living.

No, I'm not suggesting that you simply stop thinking that thought. I'm just offering that it has an impact to be curious about. Now, only you know what that impact is. But it might be that when you think to yourself, "I look like shit on paper," that it could cultivate a fear of anything short of perfect.

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I can imagine how the ultimate result of thinking that may be a tendency to be more acutely aware of all the ways things could go wrong, and to preferentially see all the ways that you look like shit, at the expense of all the ways that you don't.

And this just sounds like a really, really hard experience. Now remember, only you can determine what resonates from what I say, what's useful, and what is complete garbage. So if something does resonate, then that's your work. That's the place to get really curious about.

So sweet listener, this podcast is most definitely for you and for everyone who's encountered something really hard. I really hope this answer was useful, and if there's a follow-up, you know how to find me, so just let me know.

Alright, so question two. "How do I get past the thought of 'it's too late' or 'I'm too far behind to catch up' which lead to feeling demoralized and defeated?" So first off, let me tell you, I can completely relate to having these thoughts of it's too late and I'm too far behind to catch up.

So in fact, when I was preparing to record this podcast, I was also running behind on a deadline that I had for myself. And in getting ready to sit down and look at the questions that I was going to answer, I had some things come up that very much derailed my plans.

I thought I had an uninterrupted 45 minutes to an hour to do some of the work and what came up was a very messy mess that needed to be cleaned up. So if you're somebody who gets squeamish about the idea of someone throwing up, maybe just don't listen to this part.

But basically, my little boy was doing a class online that was some acrobatic stunts. And it was a little bit too soon after his breakfast and he comes out and says, "Mom, I threw up." And where he had a little bit of vomit was onto this goatskin little blanket that's on his floor.

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So as you can imagine, cleaning this kind of had my head spinning a little bit because I was trying to figure out the best way to clean all these little specs in this very dense fur in a period of time that I originally thought was going to be completely and serenely available for me and only me.

And you can basically bet a thousand bucks what I had running through my head was, “I don’t have time for this. This is not what I planned.” And some version of, “I’m too far behind to catch up. It is way too late.”

What I’ve learned from doing this work is the presence of these type of thoughts is not actually a problem. But there are a few things that can really help you when you’re working on getting past them. So let me go over those.

So first of all, acknowledging that the presence of these thoughts isn’t problem is huge. Remember, these thoughts are just sentences. The sentences or the thoughts, they create feelings when we repeat them and when we believe them, and basically, when we stew and marinade in them.

But having the sentence cross my mind, that part is not actually inherently a problem. Now, the second piece to this is sometimes the thoughts that cross our mind, thoughts like, “It’s too late,” or, “It’s too far behind to catch up,” sometimes they’re actually true.

There are times it is literally too late to do a thing that we planned on doing. So if I planned on being in another town at five o clock and it’s 4:30, but it takes an hour and a half to drive to that other town and I don’t own a helicopter or a private jet, it is literally too late for me to get there by the time that I wanted.

And likewise, sometimes I’m too far behind to catch up on a certain task. But just because these statements aren’t true doesn’t mean that they’re necessarily helpful. It doesn’t mean it’s necessarily useful to basically chant them like a mantra in my mind.

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So think of a thought like a pill. If every time you took that pill, for five minutes afterwards, you felt demoralized, then repetitively taking that pill would theoretically create feeling demoralized on demand. And for anybody in clinical medicine or in pharmacology, we're obviously not talking about real pharmacology here.

But for me, washing that goat rug, if I was to frown and fiercely whisper under my breath, "Damn it, I'm so far behind, I don't have enough time," some of this is true, but it's not helpful. So why isn't it helpful?

Well, because it makes me feel frustrated and overwhelmed and discouraged. Because when I feel like that, what do I do? I beat myself up, I blame my time situation on things that I cannot control, I stew, I fret, I worry. I time travel to the future where everything is all messed up.

And ultimately, I make myself more miserable than I need to, just because I'm believing that thought. Now, usually when we think there's not enough time, no matter our unique feelings and behaviors that come from that sentiment, in some way, we usually end up not using the time that we do have as well as we might.

So just like I mentioned earlier, that quote of pain is inevitable, and suffering is optional, in this situation, the emesis event was inevitable. But my suffering afterwards, that was optional.

Now, the third thing to keep in mind with this is it really helps to have a plan ahead of time for what to do when thoughts like these present. So since they're repetitive for you, having this plan will be really useful. And essentially, your plan needs to include how to get yourself grounded and centered and not swirling in the Chicken Little experience of, oh no, there's not enough time.

And to do this, you have to practice being aware of that thought-feeling duo. That, "It's too late, I'm feeling demoralized," or that thought of, "I'm too far behind to catch up," and feeling defeat. Then you get to decide in advance that when you notice either the thought or the feeling, that you're

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going to do some sort of grounding practice, some sort of way to interrupt what's going on before you follow through with all the regular behaviors that happen.

Now, a grounding practice can be something simple like a few deep breaths, taking a stretch break, listening to a song, doing anything to basically shift your point of view out of demoralized and into something that's a slightly more neutral.

Now, once you do this, there are many different options for where you can go from here. But two simple ones that I really like are, number one, to ask myself a question like, what would make this easier right now? Or one of my favorites is what else might also be true?

The second thing you can do is figure out what you need in this moment by asking what do I need right now? Is it reassurance? Is it focus? Is it comparison? Is it a drink of water? Is it some space? Whatever it is, find a way to do that. So that's my recommendation for you for getting past that thought and I look forward to hearing what your experience of doing that is.

Alright, question number three. "How can I talk to myself as I'm starting to change some habits?" Now, I think I'm going to do an entire episode around this question, but for now, so that you have something to chew on, I'm going to give you a few very short things.

First of all, I recommend that you listen to episode 12, which is all about how we talk to ourselves in the aftermath of things not going as planned, and the parallels to what you're asking are really clear. The next part is I want you to answer this question.

When you're starting to change a habit, what are the unhelpful thoughts and feelings that you're noticing right now? What are the feelings that you would find effective? Maybe feelings like kindness, maybe dedication, maybe pride, maybe compassion. Maybe for you, it's just a no nonsense business-like feeling.

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Once you identify the feelings you think would be effective, what I want you to do is to work backwards and take each feeling you listed and answer for each one, what would I need to be thinking to feel that? Then the next step that exists is to notice all the objections to these new intentional thoughts.

Now, usually there are always objections to intentional thoughts that we're practicing thinking because otherwise, you would already be naturally be thinking this way. So the work becomes noticing all the objection thoughts and beliefs, and then you know where your next phase of work is. It's with investigating and being curious about and questioning all the objections.

So stay tuned and we'll go into more depth with this topic in the future. Okay, so now, time for question four, which will be the final question. "How do I stop the urge to constantly use my phone?" So in thought work terms, this question would translate to how do I stop having this feeling that drives me to persistently take this action?

Now, episode nine will be a great one for you to listen to. It's all about making decisions ahead of time, so I totally recommend you listen to that one because it's really relevant here. But I also want to tell you just thank you for asking this question because so many of us have this in our life.

The desire to constantly use our phone, or the habit of actually constantly using our phone, and then questioning, what could we be doing with our time if we weren't, and wishing there was a way to figure out the riddle of compulsive phone use. So I love that you asked this because so many people who are listening to this really want to hear the answer to this as well.

Now, before I go too far with this one, I want to be really clear that there is nothing inherently wrong with using your phone, with social media, with surfing the web, with playing games on your phone, with doing whatever you do with your phone. You could use your phone 15 hours a day and if it suits you, you like your reasons for it, and you like the results of doing that action, there is no problem.

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But if your phone use is more than you'd like, or it feels like something that you can't quite control, or it's happening despite your best wishes, or it's something that's really hard to be deliberate about, then it's a beautiful thing to investigate.

Now, no discussion of phone use would be complete without addressing the purposeful way that phones and the internet are designed to be addictive to humans. Phones and the apps and social media platforms and the internet in general, they are specifically designed to keep us wanting more.

The more time we spend on a site, the higher chance we will purchase something. There are entire specialized teams who understand how the human mind works, whose jobs are to deliberately structure and design the apps and websites and social media platforms so that they give us little hits of pleasure, little hits of dopamine from all the gorgeous colors, who generate a sense of desire to see just one more thing, as well as purposefully try to get us to feel a sense of scarcity, like we must learn more, or buy the thing in order to feel happy or to fix some problem.

So with this said, addressing the urge to constantly use your phone is no small feat. Now, let's break this topic down into some bite-sized bits. First, I'm going to address what an urge is, why stopping them isn't what you actually need to do, how urges are reinforced, and then I'll give you some concrete things to try.

So first of all, an urge to do anything is the feeling of wanting or desire for something. And as such, it comes from what we think. Even if it seems like the feeling comes first, spontaneously, without any thought. This is where you'll find yourself on your phone without realizing that you even picked it up, or you'll see your phone and instantly just want it without noticing a thought like, "I wonder what's going on."

So urges can be really fast feelings. They can seem to happen without any thought because the thoughts are subconscious or unconscious, but they

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are related to how we are thinking. So to stop the urge is not the best question when you're first starting this work.

The better thing to address is how to respond to an urge when it actually comes up. Think about it. If every time an urge arose, you noticed it, let that feeling be there, and then made a conscious decision for what you wanted to do with your phone next, the presence of the urge to use your phone would not be a problem.

The problem comes only when the urge arises, and it's answered with the object or activity of desire. You have a desire to use your phone, and you use your phone.

So another thing to keep in mind is that our urges to do things or our urges to not do things are reinforced when we answer those urges. So if I want a cookie and then I eat a cookie every time I want one, I will get the pleasure from the cookie and I will learn that wanting a cookie equals reward from a cookie.

And this is how I might learn to emotionally eat. Because I might not be hungry or even really want a cookie. But if what I want is to not feel stressed, in the moment, a cookie helps the stress briefly be tempered by the pleasure of the sugar and the fat.

So with all this in mind, how do you stop the urge to constantly use your phone? You don't stop the urge. What you do is you learn why the urge is there. You learn what the phone use is solving for. You learn how to respond to the urge differently. And then you get to implement making a decision ahead of time.

So keep in mind, the urge is likely there from repetition and the addictive nature of things related to our phone. And it's also there because of something that you're thinking that creates that urge. It may be as simple or as childlike as, "Hmm, I wonder if they replied. Facebook sounds great right now. Just a few minutes won't hurt. I'll get to my charts in a little bit. I need

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a break. I deserve a break after the day I've had. I just want to check this one thing. It'll only take a second."

These simple thoughts usually create desire, create permission, or create deserving. Next, your phone likely solves for some emotion. If you are restless and bored or irritated and overwhelmed, just like the cookie or a glass of wine can deliver a reward that temporarily soothes, our phone can do the same thing.

Knowing what's happening before you have the urge to use your phone is key. And you do this by playing detective and paying really close attention to what's going on in the moment that you want to use your phone, or in the moment right before you desire to use your phone.

Now, the last piece is learning how to respond to the urge. Now, this is a skill. It's like a muscle that you develop and strengthen with repetition, with messing up, with trying again.

Now, you can respond to an urge in a few ways. You can respond by obeying, by answering it, you can respond by resisting, by distraction, or by allowing it. So to obey is to basically answer the urge. To want to use your phone and to use your phone.

To resist the urge to use your phone is to push that urge away by using willpower, or telling yourself that urge shouldn't be there. Distracting yourself from an urge is kind of like hiding your phone somewhere, or telling yourself, "I'm just going to go for a walk and put my phone away."

In contrast, allowing the urge, this means pausing, naming that you're having an urge, just like, this is an urge to use my phone, and then noting how that feeling feels in your body. Episode six and episode seven are a two-part series that describe the process in detail.

But essentially, when you add time in between the urge to use your phone and actually using your phone, you're interrupting the pattern as it usually unfolds. And once you allow that urge to be unanswered, and you feel it in

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your body, then usually, you'll get to a more neutral headspace where you can then decide on purpose if using your phone is something you truly want to do in that moment or not.

Now, this is a topic that we could spend hours discussing, and I'm going to do more with it in the future. But this is something just to get you started and if you run up against any sort of wrinkles in doing this work, you know where to find me and I'd be happy to answer more questions.

So everyone, I love the questions you sent in. I loved answering these questions, and I hope you all found the replies to be useful, even if the replies were about things that are slightly different than whatever habit you're currently working on.

I'm going to do more of these episodes in the future so keep your questions coming. Like I mentioned at the beginning of the episode, you can find the survey to send in an anonymous question linked in the show notes.

And if you try the things you heard in today's episode and you run into questions or ideas or something doesn't make sense, please don't hesitate to speak up. Just email me. You can email me at [hello@habitsonpurpose.com](mailto:hello@habitsonpurpose.com).

You can find me on Instagram under [@kristi.angevine](https://www.instagram.com/kristi.angevine), or you can join the Habits On Purpose Facebook group where we will talk about all the things. Have a beautiful rest of your week and I'll see you in the next episode.

If you want to learn more about how to better understand your patterns, stop feeling reactionary, and get back into the proverbial driver's seat with your habits, you'll want to join my email list, which you can find linked in the show notes, or if you go to [habitsonpurpose.com](https://habitsonpurpose.com), you'll find it right there.

And if you're serious about taking this work deeper and going from an intellectual understanding to off-the-page implementation, I offer coaching two flavors. Individual deep dive coaching with a somatic and cognitive approach, and a small group coaching program.

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The small group is currently for women physicians only and comes with CME credits. You can be the first to learn more about both the individual or group coaching options by getting on the email list.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit [www.habitsonpurpose.com](http://www.habitsonpurpose.com). Tune in next week for another episode.