

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

This is Kristi, and you're listening to Episode 20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment.

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. I haven't found a catchy catchphrase that I love, for what I say at the beginning, to welcome you to the podcast. Those of you who follow Kara Loewentheil know that she has a membership called, THE CLUTCH™. And so, in her welcome, she says, "Hello, my chickens." I've heard other people say, "Hello, my friends. Hello, lovely listeners." I don't quite have a thing, yet.

For now, I think just a simple hello, or a double hello, is what comes most naturally and what I'm going to stick to, but it'll be fun to see what comes out of my mouth next year.

Today, we're talking about the habit of self-judgment. On this episode, I'll elaborate on what it sounds like and how it shows up. I'll touch on the problem with it, and then what the antidote is and how to use it. So, as I record this right now, it's late afternoon, and my family and I we've had a busy last few weeks.

After lunch, my kids retired for a little siesta. My daughter took a nap and my youngest couldn't sleep, so he just played in his room. When my daughter woke up and my son came out, I told them that I was going to go record this episode, so that, in theory, you're not going to hear them come in the room and start chatting to me on this episode.

But before I left them to come record, since this episode is about self-judgment, it occurred to me to ask them a question. I asked them both, how they felt about their time resting and playing. I think at first, they were genuinely confused at my questions, but I, often, ask them questions or

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

seek counsel with them, and so, they politely played along and just answered me.

My son said that playing, “Was so fun.” My daughter said, “Resting felt amazing.” At least at this particular age, about this particular activity, there was zero self-loathing, zero self-criticism for how they'd spent their time and for their actions. They didn't say, “Ugh, I overslept. I'm so lazy. All I do is play with Legos. I never color my coloring book like I should.”

Now I realize this might sound really silly, because what kid makes themselves wrong for doing something that they enjoy doing? Well, this tiny interaction stands in stark contrast to one of the near universal habits that I see in so many of my clients; their propensity to judge themselves. And not just judgment about rest or productivity, but to judge themselves at any opportunity that pops up.

It can happen with small things; it can happen with big things. And because we're often surrounded by other people, who may have a similar habit, it can be very easy to miss when they're doing it. Their self-judgment is often quiet and happens insidiously. So, is relentless self-judgment a habit that's insidious for you?

This is what it sounds like, “I wasn't as productive as I should have been. I have nothing to show for my day. I should be further along. I know better. I should be doing X, Y, Z instead.” “Good doctors, good moms, good daughters, good,” whatever role, you fill in the blank, “They do this, and so...”

“They don't do what I'm doing. Good doctors, they don't fail their boards. They don't forget things. They don't make mistakes. They're not behind on their charts. Good moms want to be with their kids all the time. They don't snap or get flustered. Good coaches don't struggle with the very things they teach and coach about. Good mentors never feel anxious and never feel isolated. They don't ever feel stuck. They always know what to say to their mentees.”

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

Or, it sounds like this, “If I were capable, I would have figured this out by now. If I had my shit together, this wouldn't always happen.”

Self-judgment is not a neutral, business-like observation of something factual, like, “The deadline is tomorrow, and my plan was to have more time left than I currently do.” It's a judgmental interpretation of what the facts mean about you. “The deadline is tomorrow, and it's so sloppy and disrespectful of me to have waited so long.” Notice the difference?

Self-judgment is infused with should's, criticisms for how things should be different, and a tendency to make yourself wrong, bad, or lacking. Now, it's worth mentioning that there is a very big difference between self-judgment that very insidiously whittles away at self-esteem and erodes basic self-worth, and self-evaluation.

Self-Evaluation, in contrast to self-judgment, is the act of assessing the quality, the value, the pros and the cons of things about ourselves. This can include an assessment of our mindset, an assessment of our emotions, an assessment of our actions or inactions. In order to see what's beneficial, what's problematic, what works, what doesn't. In order to consider what we might want to change going forward.

An evaluation begins with a foundation of neutrality. The difference between self-judgment and self-evaluation is this; self-judgment finds negatives, makes damning generalizations, and pokes holes in who you are, as a person. Versus, self-evaluation looks more generally at pros and cons of aspects of ourselves, or of our actions, and doesn't use negatives as indictments about worth, or the quality of you, as a person. You can evaluate yourself without being mean about it.

Now, to some of you, this is totally obvious, but to many of you, it's a very important distinction, because when you're used to being really critical and really judgmental of yourself, the idea of changing self-judgment may seem really foreign and problematic.

Why does it seem problematic? Changing self-judgment can seem problematic, because if you blended together self-evaluation with self-

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

judgment, like if those two things are married for you, to stop the self-judgment can sound like you're going to let the pendulum swing all the way the other way.

And then, you'll find yourself blindly loving everything about yourself and what you do. You'll be essentially throwing the baby out with the bathwater. You're going to say goodbye to high standards. You're going to stop caring about excellence. You'll become sloppy, unreliable, irresponsible. You'll stop improving, stop evolving, because you'll never pay attention to room-for-improvement, to mistakes, to things that aren't going well.

Now, this is a classic all-or-none approach, where either you judge yourself harshly all the time, or you have no standards. So, if you needed to hear this, I'll say it again, self-judgment is not the same as self-evaluation. You can evaluate yourself and always be interested in learning and improving, without judging yourself harshly.

As Balroop Singh says, "Self-judgment clouds our mind with inescapable indictments." The main problem with these inescapable indictments comes down to how you feel and what you do, when you feel wrong or bad. Think for a minute, how do you feel when you are criticized? Ashamed, defeated, maybe discouraged? Alone, incapable, maybe defensive or hypervigilant?

It could be a variety of different emotions, that are unique to each of us. But usually, it's something quite unpleasant. And it's in the emotional family of stress. When you feel like this, what do you do? If you're like me, and like most of my clients; you might withdraw, retreat, shut down, you might compare and despair, beat yourself up even more envision things getting worse, and never being able to figure things out.

These emotions and behaviors aren't generally very helpful. And they grow from the root thought or root belief that, "There's something wrong with me. There's something wrong with who I am, with how I am, with what I'm doing, with what I'm capable of."

The end result of self-judgment in your thoughts, is to walk through life believing that you're wrong in some way, and that you're not where you

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

should be, and you're not okay as you are. And yes, we can rise like a phoenix from life's challenges. We can learn precious lessons from experiences that we would never ask for. But when we believe that we're inherently wrong, or defective, problematic, or broken, there's no room for learning, healing, or growth.

The way I think about self-judgment is self-judgment is an opportunistic habit that pretends to be necessary. And when we judge ourselves harshly, it doesn't usually stop with us. This habit of harsh self-judgment often extends to harshly judging others that are in our lives as well. Maybe it's one of your kids, maybe it's a colleague at work, your students, your partner.

So, if your habit is to speak harshly to yourself, to think harsh, judgmental thoughts to yourself, to judge yourself ruthlessly, and perhaps judge others ruthlessly, and maybe not even notice that you're doing it until someone else points it out; ask me how I know that...

Curiosity is one of the best antidotes. Let's think about what happens when you're naturally really curious about something. Maybe it's when a friend of yours goes and does something, like a big trip or makes a big decision, or tries something new. And you cannot wait to hear about all the things.

Or, you learn there's a new book coming out by your favorite author. Or, your child has some sort of adventure, or project, or a game that you didn't get to go to, and you're so eager to hear about all of it. Or, say you were to get the opportunity to spend an hour with someone you admire, maybe a leader, a mentor, a celebrity, an author.

Bring to mind the feeling of curiosity and fascination that you might have in these situations. When you're naturally fascinated, what do you do?

Curiosity and fascination drive us to ask questions. Wide open questions, and specific questions that drive us to wonder, hypothesize, muse, examine, explore, dig underneath the surface, they drive us to learn.

When we feel curious, we ask questions without an agenda for what the answer should be. We investigate, and inspect, and turn things over in our

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

mind. When we're enthralled, we marvel. When we're curious, there's no rush, there's no need to fix anything. There's just a drive to brainstorm, experiment and learn. When we feel curious, it's like we're part-scientist, part-researcher, part-philosopher, part-anthropologist, part-documentary filmmaker.

When curious, notice what you don't do. When you're curious, you don't ruminate, catastrophize, shut down, or do any of the things that go with self-judgment, no overthinking, no replaying things, no forecasting doom.

Now, as an ex self-judgment champion myself, I know this song-and-dance really well. Pick anything and I could use it as fuel to indict myself. I cannot tell you how many times something totally innocuous would happen in residency or med school, or while waiting tables in college, and I would interpret it to mean there's something really wrong with me.

I would feel discouraged, or feel defeated, or feel shame. And then, I would want to hide or escape in whatever way I could; with exercise, with overworking, with sleep, with a beer, with food, with surfing the internet, or getting lost in a TV show. I wouldn't even realize I was being harsh to myself, because I saw my self-judgment as an inevitable part of striving for excellence and doing good solid work.

Ironically, all self-judgment does, is slow down progress and stymie our efforts to grow and learn. So, when it comes to habits, the one thing that makes change so much harder, is starting from a baseline of self-judgment.

So, check it out. Imagine for a moment that your main reflex emotion to anything, that you would usually judge yourself for, was curiosity instead of criticism. I want you to take a minute just to think about this; what would be different? How would your view of your habits change if you were curious about them? How would your relationship with yourself change? What would shift, in what you would make things mean, when you had negative emotions? What would open up for you, if you're infinitely curious instead of ever ready to judge yourself?

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

Quite often, curiosity is the path toward a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. From a place of curiosity, wonder, and openness we can learn so much more than when we feel pummeled by our own internal critical commentary.

So, one of the things I teach my clients is that curiosity is an emotion. And it's also a skill. As an emotion, it comes from our thinking. As a skill, it's something we can cultivate, practice and hone. Now, one of the first things that I hear when I teach this idea is this, "Isn't curiosity like an innate personality trait? Like, some people are curious, and some people are judgey, right?" The answer is, no. No, it is not like that.

Curiosity is a state of mind. It's an emotional and bodily experience. And it's a skill set that can be learned, remembered, and then proactively cultivated. We were born knowing exactly how to be curious. And back when we were really, really, really young, curiosity was something that came with ease.

But when decades go by, where we practice self-judgment more, and we are less practiced at curiosity, there is some work involved in remembering how to be curious. By the way, there's no downside to being curious. I know some of the all-or-none catastrophists out there listening might say, "Well, but what about when a car is about to run over your leg? Is that a time to be serenely curious, or is that a time to move yourself out of the road? And what about when your intuition tells you that someone or something seems really dangerous, wouldn't curiosity just get you into trouble?"

So, I promise you, you are not at risk for overusing curiosity. Curiosity does not hinder your ability to make lightning-fast decisions in life-or-death situations. Getting really good at the skill of curiosity, does not blind you or make you into this blissfully ignorant Pollyanna figure. It does not make you lower your standards or become overly lenient, or sloppy.

Curiosity is the doorway in to more deeply understanding yourself and your habits. And as soon as self-judgment converts into curiosity, habit change is so much easier, funner, and faster.

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

The way I teach it to my clients is this. Curiosity is like one of those calm looking warriors that you see in a film like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. You know what I'm talking about, those warriors, they might seem really unassuming at first glance, you might just even overlook them, but in fact, they are fierce, they're efficient, they are courageous.

Curiosity is similar to that. It seems like this unassuming, soft emotion. But in reality, it's an exquisitely effective tool. In contrast, self-judgment... I like to think of self-judgment, as like a middle manager on a power trip, you know, the type. They think that harping on minutia, and being a bit of a bean counter is supremely useful, but in actuality, it's not.

So, how exactly can you start to channel ninja-like curiosity towards yourself or toward other people in your life, instead of the uptight middle manager self-judgment? To feel curious, and to channel your inner inquisitive anthropologist self, you first have to know what you'd have to be thinking, to feel curious. And I'm going to tell you a very powerful way to figure this out.

Now, if you have pen and paper, and if you have a little bit of time, or even just the note section on your phone, you can do this exercise live, right now. If you don't, you can do it in your mind. But I do really recommend that later on, you get something that you can write with or type with, and take a few minutes to actually do this.

I want you to recall a time or a scenario where you felt really, really curious. Take a little time with us, and really invoke that feeling. So, if you need to press pause, to remember a scenario, or remember a situation, or to really bring that feeling up, just press pause for a second and come back.

Once you have that feeling present, I want you to use the notes section in your phone or get out a pen and paper, and I want you to write down everything that you're thinking. You can even set a little timer and just do this for thirty seconds or sixty seconds.

What you'll notice, when you do this, is the thoughts that you discover will be the ones that you can use to invoke curiosity in the future. You might

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

find phrases like, “I can't wait to find out... I wonder how that works? I wonder why that is? That is so interesting.” You might notice questions like, “What will I learn? How did this come to be? Why? When? How? What's it like? What else is here? How's that connected?”

Once you discover what thoughts create the emotion of curiosity for you, then you get to go about practicing thinking them. Now, if you want a refresher on how to practice and believe a new thought, you can listen to episode 13.

But basically, what it boils down to is articulating a sentence that when you read it, and when you think it, you believe it. And, you know you believe it, because you feel something, and it doesn't just totally fall flat. And then practicing it like you would practice lines in a play; basically rehearsing. Thinking that thought as many times as possible.

I recommend that you practice thinking your desired thought when your inner critic chatter is not present before you go about practicing it as an alternative to self-judgmental bots.

So, here are two examples for what this could look like in real life. First of all, let's use the example of your habits. Say you have a habit of scrolling on your phone more than you like. And usually, you just scroll and scroll and scroll, and you procrastinate, you stay up later than you planned. And then, you get mad at yourself for doing it. You've been working on this for a while. You understand buffering and numbing. You think you should know better, and yet you struggle to stop.

When you have curiosity, as a tool in your tool belt, as soon as you notice that you're on your phone and you've been scrolling a bit longer than maybe you'd like, you get to practice wondering, “Why am I on my phone? What is my phone solving for me, right now? What's going on, that makes this numbing behavior makes sense? What might I really be looking for right now, that I think my phone gives me? What do I really need? How could I stop using my phone and fill that need in a different way?”

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

Notice how all of these questions are just wide open. There's no agenda. There's no knowing in advance, the answer to the question. They're just open, inquisitive, and receptive to whatever answer might be there.

Now, here's your second example. Let's use the example; someone in your life, that you notice you habitually find yourself being judgmental of, and you wish that you weren't. Just bring to mind a person in your life that you might have this with. And, picture that person does whatever it is that they do, that just totally gets under your skin.

They come in and they leave their backpack on the floor. They don't reply to a text in the timeline that you think they should. They forget something. If your usual knee-jerk response is to internally stew, to get really snippy, to be passive aggressive... Instead, as soon as you notice that feeling that you have, when you're being really judgmental, or as soon as you notice yourself being internally or externally critical, pause and find something to be curious about.

It might sound like, "I wonder what's going on for them? I wonder why this thing they do, makes sense to them? What would be different if I trusted them, and I trusted myself in the situation? What would love do here? What might they need and how could we have a conversation about it? I wonder what would happen if I..." fill in the blank with something other than doing what you're doing, when you're judging.

So now, you better understand how self-judgment, and its cousin habit of judging others, is a habit that increases stress, slows down change, and slows down growth. The antidote to the cloud of personal indictments, that self-judgment creates, is curiosity. Curiosity is an emotion that comes from your thinking. And as such, it's a skill that you can develop, and you can develop it on purpose.

When you develop this skill and cultivate this practice, it calls on you to drop the habit of beating yourself up, in exchange for, or in favor for investigating, exploring, and asking more open questions.

Ep #20: The Antidote to Self-Judgment

So, I hope you find all of this information about self-judgment and curiosity to be tremendously useful. If it was, and if you haven't yet left a review or rating for the podcast on iTunes, it would mean so much to me, if you did.

And if you want to stay in touch, there are two main ways that we can do so. If you go to HabitsOnPurpose.com you'll see a spot on the main site where you can join the email list, which I think you should do immediately, if you're not already on there.

I send emails out a couple times a week that have helpful tips, advice, ideas, questions, prompts. And, you get announcements about future events, trainings, classes that are going on. The other way that we can stay in touch is on social media. You can find me in the *Habits On Purpose* Facebook group, or you can find me on Instagram at [Kristi.Angevine](https://www.instagram.com/Kristi.Angevine).

That's all for today and I will talk to 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 www.HabitsOnPurpose.com you'll find it right there.

If you're serious about taking this work deeper and going from an intellectual understanding to off the page implementation, I offer coaching in two flavors: individual deep-dive coaching with the somatic and cognitive approach, and a small group coaching program. The small group is currently for women physicians only, and comes with CME credits. You can be the first to learn more about 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. Tune in next week for another episode.