

Ep #22: Why Rest, Leisure, and Play are Challenging



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 22: Today, is all about why rest, leisure, and play might really difficult for you.

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 I'm talking about rest, and leisure, and play.

Why would things like this, things that are so appealing, things that we wait for, things that we plan vacations around; why would these things be so hard for us? Why is it so hard for some of us to rest, to-do nothing, to have leisure time, to play without an agenda or a goal? Why is it so difficult to have fifteen minutes free, and not feel pulled to fill those fifteen minutes with checking email, doing a little chore, scrolling, squeezing in one last task before heading home or before heading to bed?

Maybe you can relate to this. For me, my habit for many years, was to be busy to go, go, go, go, go, and to make sure I was being productive. I think I spent years saying; I really wanted a break, a vacation, a day off, a couple extra free hours during the day. But then, more often than not, when the time came for my day off, or my extra free hours, or my vacation, I would usually fill that time with things that were the opposite of rest.

If you're someone who finds yourself feeling frayed, overwhelmed, and your usual is to go, go, go and you want to have more downtime or white space for turning off your mind from work; or exploring hobbies, or reading, or just being without doing; maybe with yourself or with your family, but when you have the time, you don't know actually how to unplug. If that's you, this short episode is made for you.

Today, I'm going to talk about why rest is sometimes really hard and how to get better at it. Getting better at rest, and leisure, and play will call on you to

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understand what your thoughts are about rest, and leisure, and play. So, that's where we'll start.

Now, when I say rest, I don't necessarily mean sleep, specifically, but I mean anything that is not a purpose-driven work activity. Rest could be sleep, but it could also just be play. It could also just be doing nothing, or a fun hobby, or playing with your kids, or sitting in staring at the trees, or having a fun conversation with a friend on the phone. Rest is anything that's done without an agenda, to check off a box, or complete a task.

Rest and play are things we are born knowing how to-do. But in our productivity-driven, competitive, hustle infused culture, many of us have spent decades learning the opposite. And we actually have to relearn how to rest, how to play, and how to have leisure time on purpose, without feeling like we're battling loose ends from our to-do list invading all of our downtime.

For some of us, we don't know how to have regular rest, recuperation, and replenishment. Our rhythm is more; work like crazy, partially recover, and then keep working like crazy. And oftentimes, we're doing this while telling ourselves that we should do more, we should always be doing something different or better, or more like so-and-so. So, let's dig into this a little bit.

Why, exactly, in a cohort of people who are extremely hard workers, is it sometimes so hard to unplug, and actually get rest and recuperation? Especially, if the same cohort knows there's evidence to support the fact that sleep is critical, and rest, leisure, and play are just as important as work?

It's hard to rest, and to have leisure and play, for several reasons. And, as I go over these reasons, think about which of these specific ones resonate for you. Let's first address being overextended.

If you are overextended, meaning you have more things that you want to-do than you actually have time in which to accomplish them, taking a break and resting might seem excruciating to you because you think that precious

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time, that you are going to be resting, actually needs to be filled with catching up.

So, when there's a chance to take a thirty-minute break to rest, you think, "I can't rest. I need to keep working. I'm behind and the break is just going to make things worse." If resting feels uncomfortable, sometimes that may be a sign that you are overextended.

Now, the next reason rest can be uncomfortable. Perfectionism has a huge role in the challenge of rest. One way it comes to play is, that perfectionism may contribute to you feeling overextended. You might have ten tasks that you want to-do, but each one takes an exorbitant amount of time because you're working on making each thing flawless.

This might look like: rereading, rephrasing, researching but not making decisions, lots of editing, lots of time imagining and worrying about hypothetical feedback. When in reality, all ten of your tasks could actually be adequately completed in less time.

But because of the perfectionism driving things, the tasks on your to-do list ultimately do take more time than you have to accomplish them, because of how much time you spend trying to perfect them. And then, when you are overextended, it feels very uncomfortable to spend any time not working on your to-dos.

Now another way perfectionism makes rest difficult, is the main tenet of perfectionism; that it's always better to be better. And if you've developed a habit of doing more, striving to improve, aiming for an evermoving benchmark of success, then rest will seem antithetical to your goals of being better.

This is why, for many really productive perfectionistic thinkers, rest may seem like it's only allowed in the setting of illness, injury, or if you're taking care of someone else.

Alright, so another reason why rest can be so exquisitely uncomfortable is that for some of us, rest has a connotation of laziness and selfishness. To rest, just for the sake of rest, is slovenly, lazy, and selfish. And so, if you've

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grown up with the messages; that selfishness and laziness are bad, or are unethical or amoral, engaging in the activity, that has that label, is going to be extremely difficult.

Now, in a similar vein, one of the main tenets of a hustle culture is the idea that being busy is noble. The message is, that productivity builds your personal worth, so; the more that I do, the more worthy I am. And the messages we get are things like: I'll sleep when I die. Rest is for wimpy people.

There are glorified accounts of brilliant people, who naturally only sleep three or four hours a night, that we may put on a pedestal and look up to and hope that we could be like. So, of course, in this context, to stop being busy, is uncomfortable, to say the least.

Now, another reason that rest, and leisure, and play can be so difficult is if you think, rest must be earned. If your rule about rest is that it is only allowed after success; or after a job well done, or after a really hard effort, or it is allowed when your to-do list is complete, then rest or play without these things is inherently bad. If your to-do list is never zeroed out anyways, in this equation, there's never a natural opportunity for you to earn rest.

Which brings me to another reason that rest can be hard. If you think that other people have to rest first, and then once they do, then eventually, you're allowed to rest, it's like living your life in the role of the ever-accommodating host that never sits down to eat.

Because the host is always hearing that somebody needs; another glass of water, somebody wants a side of butter, so-and-so would like another piece of bread heated up, and constantly standing up to go get it, and go get that, and go get this.

If everyone around you has to have sufficient rest, and play, and leisure before you are allowed to, rest will be very difficult. This kind of a struggle with rest, is rooted in the habit of putting yourself last on the list.

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Now in a related way, rest and leisure can also be really difficult for you, if your thought about them is that they burden others. If when you rest, you're dumping on your partner, or you're burdening your kids, or you are taking away from someone else in your life, rest is not going to be something that you approach with joy, but with guilt.

The last way, that explains why rest is sometimes difficult has to do with the trifecta of; appreciating how transient our life is, mixed with a carpe diem philosophy, mixed with seeing all the problems to fix, the work to do, and the injustices to right.

When you combine those three things, rest and leisure can be thought of as affronts to our integrity. How can you rest when there's so much suffering in the world? How can you play when there's so much injustice? How can you have leisure time when there are so many wrongs to right? How can you play and be silly when there are bad things going on in the world? And since life is so short, why not squeeze the most out of it?

From this point of view, rest is totally counterproductive. So, if you can relate to any of this, of course when you have a chance for leisure or rest, you might actually prefer to have your skin peeled off, then to disengage, and rest and play.

Of course, it's difficult if it's a guilty pleasure: That if you indulge in it, it means something bad about you. If it means you're going to have to work more later. If it burdens others. If it has to be earned. If it's a sign of weakness. And on top of that, if you're not practiced in regularly doing it, it's going to be wildly unfamiliar.

So, how do you know if you're someone like me, who has had a precarious relationship with rest, leisure, and play? Well, if you are someone who's ever had a day off, and then you end your day off feeling just as haggard as when you started, because you didn't actually take your day off, but you filled your free time with a bunch of depleting tasks.

Or, if when you actually have time for reading, or resting, or a hobby, you end up filling it in with work instead. Or, starting a project that you don't

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really have time to finish, and you didn't really want to do anyways, and you do that instead of actually doing something that you know will fill up your emotional and mental cup.

This may be you if you know that you are wildly uncomfortable when you're not productive. Or, when you do have time for rest and leisure, when the time comes; you feel bored, and restless, and antsy, and edgy. So, if this is you, let me just give you the reminder that rest is not inherently difficult. But it is difficult if you haven't practiced enjoying it in a while. And it's made more difficult if you have thoughts about rest that make it problematic for you to engage in.

So, if this is you, it makes beautiful sense that you might crave rest, yet not know exactly how to get it. Why is rest so important, anyways? I'm not going to go into the literature about sleep, and play, and all the evidence about the benefits of leisure, but just know this:

Without adequate rest to fully recover, to fill up your cup so that you are not running on fumes; without adequate play and adequate fun to energize that side of you that knows that all work, no play truly does make Jack a dull boy; your capacity to be productive and your capacity to connect to yourself and to others, and to hear your own intuition, and your capacity for creativity... All of this capacity is diminished.

Those of you who are in medicine, or nursing, or some clinical helping profession, or just have an interest in anatomy, know that the way hearts work is to pump blood and to fill with blood. These are called systole and diastole. Systole is the contraction of the heart, and diastole is the filling.

Without adequate resting between contractions, adequate filling cannot occur. If adequate filling cannot occur, then the appropriate amount of blood can't be pumped out to the rest of our body.

So, for our life, when we don't have a variety of activities that are in the category of rest and leisure, and replenishment, and recuperation, and play, not only can we become physically exhausted, we can find ourselves emotionally depleted.

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Less satisfied with the work that we do. And basically, just not at our best. Not because there's something wrong with us, but because we don't have sufficient renewal to balance out our efforts. We don't have sufficient rest to fill before we do the work.

So, I want you to just think about, for a minute, what might change for you, if you thought of rest, and leisure, and play as essential; as essential as our heart relaxing to fill, as required companions to productivity, and as inherently productive themselves.

In order to start changing your relationship with leisure, and rest, and play, you have to understand what your thoughts are about these activities. So, my recommendation is that you think about; what do you actually think about rest? What are your thoughts about play? What are your rules for yourself when it comes to leisure?

Once you understand what your thoughts are about these activities, then you're going to know why you feel the way you do, and why you might struggle to incorporate them into your life regularly. You may discover that you have thoughts and ideas, about rest and leisure, that are similar to the ones I mentioned here. Or, you might discover unique ones that are just your own.

So, what I've got for you today, in terms of a concrete action, is one of the fastest ways to figure out your relationship with rest. And once you understand what your thoughts are about rest, you've laid the groundwork for the starting point from which you can make it easier for yourself.

Here's what you do: If you spend five to ten minutes every day, for the next two weeks, doing nothing, you will figure out what your thoughts and feelings are about rest. And by doing nothing, I literally mean five to ten minutes of doing nothing.

This could mean sitting and staring at something. It could mean laying down and closing your eyes. But it does not mean five minutes of walking and listening to a podcast. It does not mean ten minutes to do a guided meditation. It does not mean time spent reading, or scrolling, or taking a

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bath, or doing some high intensity training exercise, or lifting weights, or checking email.

The invitation is that you take five to ten minutes and do nothing. And what you will uncover, if you're willing to take on this challenge, is your relationship with doing nothing, with rest, with leisure. You'll likely find that it mirrors your relationship with yourself and your self-worth.

Some of you, when you do this, you will spend a minute or two doing nothing. And then, you will notice that you are exquisitely restless. You will not know what to do with your mind. You'll not know where to put your eyes. You'll feel like you're wasting time.

Some of you will be really tired and you will almost fall asleep. Some of you will fall asleep. Some of you will have a compelling desire to look at your to-do list, or to check your email, or to stop doing nothing and start doing something.

Now, none of these are compelling reasons to stop doing nothing, but they're all excellent data to collect. It's good to know that if you take five minutes to actually stop being productive, that you're extremely sleepy. It's good to know that it only takes a minute or two for you to feel really uneasy when you're not busy. It's good to know that you have an overwhelming desire to check your phone after five minutes. It's good to know that you feel really restless as soon as you stop being productive.

The point of this challenge, of doing nothing for five to ten minutes every day for the next two weeks, is not just the time that you spend unplugging, it's what you discover when you do it. This is one of those exercises that's deceptively easy sounding. It's very simple. It's easy to understand, but it's actually complex, in what you will discover.

As you do this, and as you get to watch and feel all the things that come up when you challenge yourself to do nothing, take note of some of the themes in the trends, and the objections that you have to rest.

And to make this easy, I've kept this episode deliberately short so that you can start your first five to ten minutes of doing nothing, right now.

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Thanks so much for listening, 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, 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. Tune in next week for another episode.