

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

Hello, and welcome to Episode 23. Today, I'm talking about what happens when our emotions perpetually hinge on how other people behave. And, how this habit of holding rigid expectations leaves more reactive than proactive.

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.

Well, hello, everyone. I was just sitting here reflecting on the fact that when this podcast first came out, I was sitting in my office where I am recording right now, and it was snowing really hard outside. It was thick of the winter, here in Central Oregon. I remember referencing that you might hear some snow plows go by, because it was early morning.

Now, we are in summer. And summer in Central Oregon, is a really gorgeous time of year. There's still snow in the mountains, and if you go up to certain elevations, you will definitely run into snow. But it is nice and cool in the mornings, 40-50°F degrees, and then it's slowly heats up through the day. Lately, it's been pretty warm, maybe about 70-80°F degrees at the peak temperature of the day. Then, it slowly cools off so that the evening is nice and cool.

One of the things that I've been doing lately in the mornings, is walking out into our front yard, and watering some wildflowers that my husband planted in the very front of our driveway area. There's not irrigation out to automatically water them yet. These little seedlings have just started cropping up, and it gets so hot and so dry in the middle of the day, that they need ample water in the morning, and some water in the evening.

One of the things that I'm really enjoying is just watching them grow and learning what plants do well where; which ones are getting a little too much

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

sun or not enough sun? Which ones could have been better in a different location?

The parallel here, is doing this podcast. I'm also learning so much. I'm learning how I like to think about and create these episodes. I'm learning what process works well for me. What process doesn't work so well for me. How much I like to prepare. How much I like to be a little bit improvised in the moment. I'm experimenting with batching the podcasts on certain days of the week, versus working on them little by little.

Since this podcast is coming almost to its six-month birthday, it's just been really fun to look back on where I came when this podcast was just a seedling of an idea, to where I am today. I've really, really enjoyed sharing the space with you. So, one of the things that you can look forward to through this summer, is I'm going to be incorporating in more interviews so that this summer can be a time of more conversational episodes.

I got such great feedback from the interview in Episode 15, with Rachel Hart. If you haven't listened to our conversation, I highly recommend you go back and listen to that after you finish the episode today. I think there's just so much depth and richness that comes from conversing with other people who are doing work that is either parallel or in other fields. I'm really excited to bring that to you later in the summer.

But for today, let's talk about what happens when our emotional responses are a little bit enmeshed with how other people behave. So, Anne Lamott is famously quoted for saying that "Expectations are just resentments waiting to happen."

Do you ever feel like you're battered around by how other people behave? By how organizations function? By how other people respond? Do you ever feel like you would feel better if people would just act differently? Well, my guess is you do, because this is extremely common. Today, what I'm going to talk about is the idea of a manual, and the habit of responding emotionally from and acting from a manual.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

To do that, I'm going to talk about what exactly a manual is, and what the problem is with having one. I'll give you some examples. And I'm going to explain how when you get clear on when you have a manual, you actually liberate yourself from your emotions being dependent on other people's behaviors. I'll discuss how you can identify manuals, and how you can distinguish them from having your core values. And then, I'll give you some tangible homework so you can work on this, this week.

So, what is a manual? A manual is a concept, and it represents a set of ideas about how others should behave or conduct themselves. A set of ideas about how the world should be or should function, how things should turn out. And when things go according to this instruction manual that we have, then we get to feel a certain way. Most of us have these encyclopedia size manuals. They're filled with rules and guidelines and a long list of 'should's,' for other people.

Now manuals, they can reveal our core values. But having core values is not the same as baking core values into a set of expectations that, once other people follow them, then we get permission to feel a certain way. So, core values are totally different than having manuals.

When we have a manual, a set of ideas about how others should behave so that we can feel a certain way, these manuals don't actually seem like anything crazy. They seem like a list of things that are fair and decent. They seem like just how things in the world should be; manuals often seem like they are common sense.

They sound like; people should be kind, people should hold the door, they should use turn signals, people should communicate what they mean, people should say please and say thank you, people should be honest, people shouldn't lie, people shouldn't cheat, people should put the toilet seat down, people should clean up after themselves, people should finish what they start, put the dishes in the dishwasher this way, people should reply back to my emails.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

Manuals aren't just for individuals, we can have a manual for an organization, for a hospital, for government. We can have manuals for how our partners should act, manuals for our children, for our in laws, for our neighbors, for other drivers, for patients, for friends. Pretty much, you can have a manual or set of expectations for anyone or anything.

The problem with manuals is not that you have ideas for what would be ideal, in terms of someone else's behavior or what would be ideal, in terms of how things function in the world. Discussing manuals is not to suggest that we can't have wishes, or requests, or ideas about what would be optimal; we can always have these.

The key is that if your emotional state hinges on other people following your rules, your emotions will be dependent on things outside of your control.

And unless you're living in a world that I don't know about, in general, people, and organizations, and loved ones they don't always follow our rules. Try as we might to make them, and try as we might to try to control them, no matter how much we wish we could, usually that's not how things go.

So, let me give you an example. If I have a manual that outlines how quickly someone should reply to my text or my email, when they don't text me back, I feel miffed, and hurt, and disappointed, and unheard, I might feel angry. And when they do text me back in the timeline that I like, I feel at ease and connected.

But what's really happening is, in the context of this example, in the context of someone not texting me back or texting me back, I'm having certain thoughts. And those thoughts are what are creating my feelings, not how the other person is behaving.

Here's another example. This one will pertain to my kids. If I have a manual that says, my kids should do what I ask, they should do it cheerfully. They shouldn't have meltdowns about small things. They shouldn't respond in a tone that sounds annoyed when my request is kind and friendly, and when my request is actually something that has their best interests in mind.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

When I have that manual operating in the background, then when my kids are quite cheerful and they don't have meltdowns, I feel completely calm. I feel at ease. And I feel grateful. But when they do the opposite, and they have a meltdown about something small, I don't feel that way. And in the moment, my emotion is very much dependent on how they behave. Whether or not they are following my quiet internal rules, that I may or may not have said out loud.

Now the reality is, I feel the way I feel, not because of what they're doing, but because of what I'm thinking in response to what they're doing. So, when somebody rolls their eyes or sounds annoyed, I'm thinking the thought, "This is not how it's supposed to go and I'm feeling judgmental." But in the moment, I'm not really aware that I'm thinking that thought. What I'm aware of, is that they behave a certain way, and then I feel a certain way.

Now you can see in these examples, when I have a manual for how others should behave, my emotional experience is one where I am essentially, victim to their behaviors. The reality is, the way I'm thinking is what is creating my emotions. But when I have a manual operating, it makes me forget that.

Manuals are recipes for forgetting our agency and creating our emotional experience. And yet, manuals make sense. They make sense in ways that are unique to each of us. So, how do they make sense? Manuals come from parts of us that want things to go a certain way. They want things to go a certain way, because when they do, we get to feel a certain way.

We may have a manual that says, kids should do what I ask. The asterisk to this is, kids should do what I ask not because I'm an authoritarian parent who wants obedient robot-like children. But kids should do what I ask, because a part of me thinks that when a thoughtful request is made, that a sign of love and respect is when the person who hears the request listens, and takes time to understand, and then expresses their understanding.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

In essence, there's a part of me that just wants to be heard. This part of me wants to be connected to my kids. And in the moment of meeting resistance to request, this part of me feels under attack, and responds in a really gruff fashion.

So, for me, I might also keep this manual, about how my kids should behave, because there's another part of me that really just wants harmony and fun in my family. And sees that when we run late or when we go to bed late, our lived result, the consequences of that, are tired, rushed kids and grouchy parents all around.

Yet, the irony of having a manual is this: While they represent our ideals, when we respond from them, we usually interfere with the very ideals and values that are inside of them. So, I might want my kids to do what I ask because I want harmony and fun. But in response to them just being them, when I get snippy and irritable, I actually create the opposite of what I want.

When I walk around, believing that it's other people's behavior that creates my emotions, and makes me act a certain way, this is what I do: I double down on my annoyance with them, or I double down on my efforts to control them, in order to feel better for myself.

When in reality, what they do has little to do with how I feel. The real reason that I feel how I feel, and respond how I do, is because a part of me has a manual; a set of ideas for how things should go and for how other people should think, feel, and act.

Having a manual is another way of saying; I have a set of deeply held beliefs. Which is essentially, a set of thoughts that I have thought many, many times and reinforced such that I believe it to be true, with a capital T.

Take a minute and think, what kind of manuals do you have in your life? What kinds of expectations do you have for how other people should behave, in order for you to feel okay? Let's talk a little bit about how you can identify when a manual may be at play for you.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

One way is when a part of you feels batted around by other people's behaviors. Say you get really, really mad when; somebody doesn't put their laundry where it's supposed to go, or leaves the toilet seat up, or you feel super rejected if a text or an email reply doesn't come in within a certain time, or you walk around feeling lots of resent for how other people are behaving.

I mean, a manual might also be at play if you find yourself blaming others for how you feel, or wishing people would just change how they acted. Or, it might show up when you're working really hard to control other people. So, where do manuals show up for you?

Now, there's a big caveat to this: The answer to the problem of having a manual or using a manual, is not to identify them and then hastily destroy all of them. It's not to drop all of your ideals, or stop making requests, or stop caring, or become passive, or take on this 'whatever will be, will be' stance and stop working for change.

The answer is not to turn the proverbial other cheek. And the answer is definitely not to become quiet, and subservient, and unquestioning, or to accept a set of circumstances that you don't like or that might be highly problematic or dangerous. The answer is not to compromise on your core values.

Rather, the solution to this quandary of manuals, is to simply recognize when parts of you, that are holding to the manuals, are present. And then, to acknowledge and name that, that phenomenon that's occurring; that part that's there holding on to a manual. And, to notice what happens when you operate from that part, from that manual.

As you've heard me mentioned many times before, the solution to many of our habits is some form of awareness. That is exactly the solution here; the solution to perpetually feeling like your emotions hinge on other people's behaviors, is awareness. It's not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, and getting rid of all of your expectations. It's not trying to strong-arm

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

yourself to believe different things or think, and I'm going to do air quotes, "think better thoughts."

The goal is rather, to increase awareness and increase understanding. And ultimately, when you can increase your awareness, and you can bring in compassion and curiosity, that is when you're going to understand so much more about *why* you have the particular manuals in place that you have. And from this place, then, the expectations you have for how others should behave in order for you to feel a certain way, then you can eventually gently release those, and yet keep the core values that you love.

So, here's what this might actually sound like in reality, and I'll give you an example of me so that you can think about your own manuals and kind of walk through this with me, as I model for you what it sounds like when I am identifying a manual for myself.

The first step is always awareness. Awareness, and simply noticing, might sound like, "I noticed I get really frustrated, and really irritated when a request isn't met with a friendly response. I noticed I get really short tempered and really snippy. Or, I noticed I get so angry when there's not a reply." This is the awareness part of me just noticing my experience.

Next, I invoke curiosity on purpose. I just ask myself, "I wonder why that's so frustrating for me? Oh, I'm thinking they should respond in a friendly way. They should not respond in an agitated way." And then, with more curiosity, I ask myself, "I wonder why I think that? I wonder how that could make sense?"

And then, what I hear is, "Oh, there's a part of me that has this role, because I care about my connection with my kids. And I care about harmony, and I care about fun. This part of me takes their snippy responses as an affront to that love and connection. And this part of me takes their friendly responses as an expression of love."

"This part feels attacked, and defensive, and angry in these moments when they don't respond in a cheerful way. And that part of me wants them to

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

behave a certain way, because it believes that's when I can feel calm and connected. Oh, I think that only when they behave a certain way, can I feel that; this is a manual at work." And then, what I'll say to myself is, "Now, I can see this manual and I can see how it operates. Because of that, now I can invoke some compassion."

And, here's what compassion sounds like, "This manual is operating." Every time I hear an annoyed tone, or I see somebody roll their eyes, and I feel instant-angry, that's not a fun experience. That's really difficult to experience, and it's particularly painful to have that experience with people I love the most.

So, the way I act, when this part is at the wheel, is really reactionary, and it leaves me feeling out of control. And when I feel like that, I get grouchy and curt, and then I blame my kids and their behavior. So, what I do now, is I send compassion to this part of me that has this experience.

I say something like, "That's hard, I get that." And then I move towards acknowledgement, I think something to myself like, "So ultimately, when I believe my kids responses create my feelings of ease or irritation. The way I respond creates an experience where I actually limit the very things I want, harmony and fun. And it's me that creates this, not them that creates this. Okay, that makes sense."

And then, with compassion, I just remind myself that the part of me that wants harmony, is doing its best. It's not actually serving me or anyone else to grip tightly to this manual of expectations.

Once I walk myself through this process, what I've actually done is, I've created an observational gap. I've created perspective and distance from my experience so that I can see it more clearly. And once I do this, then I can consider how I might want to alter my thinking, or invite this part of me that holds on to this manual, to just loosen its grip a little.

So, let's summarize: Manuals are a list or an encyclopedia of expectations or rules for how others should behave, in order for us to feel a certain way.

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

The real reason, that we feel as we do in response to how others behave, is how we are thinking. And the problem with forgetting this, is that we abdicate our agency; we put our emotions in the hands of other people.

Frankly, it seems like our emotions are in the hands of other people's behaviors, and our experience is controlled by things that we cannot control, and dependent on how other people act. We then, may feel like we have no control, like we're batted around by whatever comes our way. And we may blame others for how we feel, or we may feel like we must control other people, in order to feel better.

The solution to manuals isn't to burn down all our expectations. The solution isn't to abandon core values, that our manuals actually reveal. The solution is actually recognition of when a manual is operating. And then, once there is recognition, then we can invoke curiosity and compassion. Here's something tangible that you can try, if you listen to this and you notice that manuals are a prominent part of your experience.

This exercise works best when you have a sheet of paper or a journal. What you do, is you choose one person in your life that you have a lot of thoughts about. Or, you pick an organization that you have a lot of thoughts and emotions about. And then, you write down everything that you wish this person, or this group would do, or change, or stop doing. You can make it as long and as detailed as you would like.

Once you write down everything that you wish that this person would do, or change, or stop doing, go back and review what you wrote. Note what core values, that you can see, that are infused into this manual.

And then, there are four questions that you ask yourself. The first one is how do I feel when this person does not do the things on my list? How do I feel when they don't do this stuff I wish they would do?

Question number two; what am I thinking about them and their behavior, when they act in this way? When they don't do the things I wish they would

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

do? So, what am I thinking about them and their behavior when they go against my manual?

Question three; how would I be able to feel if they did abide by my rules? If they did everything on my list, how would I feel?

And then, the money question: Question number four; what would I be thinking that lets me feel that way? So, if they did all the things that I want them to do, what would I be thinking that would create those emotions that I listed in question number three?

This is very simple exercise, but I encourage you to take some time with it. And once you do it, then you get to contemplate what it would be like to keep your core values, but release your manual. Once you see your manual for one person, you will start seeing your manuals all over the place.

In a future episode, I'm going to expand on this concept and talk about how we even have manuals for ourselves and our habits. These manuals really shape our relationship with ourselves and our identity.

I hope that you found this episode really helpful. If you want to connect you can find me at HabitsOnPurpose.com or join our Facebook group, which is called *Habits On Purpose*. And, you can find me on Instagram at [Kristi.Angevine](https://www.instagram.com/Kristi.Angevine).

I will talk to you in the next episode. Take care bye-bye.

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

Ep #23: The Secret to Emotional Freedom: Your Manual

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.