

Ep #53: The Skill of Making Things Easy



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode #53, making it hard versus making it easy. Listen to this episode and learn how you can operationalize the habit of bringing in ease even if your default up to now has been to do the opposite.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits that give more than they take. 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. And now, here's your host, Physician, and Master Certified Life Coach, Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello, everyone. If you are listening to this when it's released live, it is early February 2023. I've been so giddy with the fact that the sunset is later. In mid-December, where we live in Central Oregon, it was setting around 4:30 In the afternoon, and now it's setting a little bit after 5 pm. It just makes such a big difference to have that extra light.

So, before we dive into the topic I have for today, I do have one announcement. The podcast is just about one year old, and to celebrate... Well, first off, I think I'm going to actually have a party with my family, and probably either make or get a really lovely chocolate cake and probably some balloons and some music. P.S. My family doesn't know about this yet.

But this is the party that I'm going to create for us and just celebrate the fact that I created a podcast when I had so much self-doubt, and it's almost a year old. And how fun is that?

But the other thing I want to do to celebrate is I would like to get 100 more reviews for the podcast. Getting these reviews is really important so that when somebody is searching for a podcast on their favorite application like iTunes, it comes up in their search feed a little bit higher.

Or, if they are looking for things in their podcast "Suggested," the more reviews, the higher chance that it's going to land in their line of sight and be something that they take a chance with listening to and putting their precious time towards.

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So, in order to get the messages here into as many ears as possible, I would love to increase the reviews. I know this takes time, and this is precious time that you could be doing something else. So, to make it worth your while, I'm gonna give away two Day Designer planners. These are really nice but simple planners that you can either keep for yourself or you give to someone else in your life.

I'm gonna give them away in a drawing, and the way you enter the drawing is you leave the podcast a review on iTunes. And then, you let me know that you did so by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/review. Many thank-yous in advance for helping me make this possible.

Back to the topic at hand, one of the things that I've noticed lately is that I have not been walking and exercising, and moving as much as I would like to. There have been lots of reasons: I've been busy with work. I've been busy with kids. I've been busy with travel. There has been a lot of ice that has landed on the sidewalks and the roads near where I live, and walking in the dark on the ice has felt a bit precarious.

I haven't come up with a plan B for how else to get my exercise. And last week, I decided I was going to remedy this. What this looks like is I decided on a minimum baseline for weekly movement. And I also came up with a plan B, and frankly, a Plan C, for how to get this minimum baseline of weekly movement.

Then I asked myself, how can I make this plan as good as done? What would make it a total no-brainer and as easy to do as possible? And as I was thinking about this, one thing I realized is that I do have this chunk of time that's actually quite perfect for doing a short workout. About two days a week, my kids have a swim class at this local gym. And for about six bucks, I realized I can get a little punch pass. So, I can go up to use the exercise facility while the kids are swimming.

I kind of have to book it, and if I want to get anything done, I have to focus; I can't just lollygag around. I have to use that 40 minutes really well. So, I started doing that, and it feels great. And it feels great because I have a part of me that really enjoys moving and lifting weights and jamming out to

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Small Town Titans or getting lost in a coaching podcast while I'm walking. It also feels great because of how I'm choosing to think about it now.

I could think, “Well, who knows if this is going to last? It’s really lame. I move so little. At this rate, I'm never gonna get back to my old fitness level.” And if I thought that, I would feel really beat down and discouraged, and frankly, that is kind of my default background soundtrack. But what I'm doing instead is I'm thinking on purpose things like, “Damn, I did awesome. I totally could have not followed through, but instead, I committed. I decided to do things differently. Every bit matters more than I might realize.”

Now, this might sound like a no-brainer, but these thoughts are essential. My thoughts about my movement plan are actually critical to my goal of moving more. They are the mental exercise that has to accompany the physical exercise. Because if left on autopilot, that old dreary soundtrack, the one that I've repeated so many more times than the new one that I want to think, it would be the easiest path to take, the path of least resistance.

So, in order for me to be deliberate about moving more, it requires that I think differently, as well as do things differently. I share this little anecdote with you so that you can see the importance of a few things when it comes to executing a plan.

Number one, I made a decision; I simply decided I'm going to make this happen. And the act of deciding is absolutely so important. I'm actually going to do a future episode or episodes all about this.

Number two, I deliberately curate thoughts to think on purpose. I do the mental heavy lifting in addition to the physical heavy lifting.

And number three, I made sure to consider how I could make this easy on myself. And that's what we're going to dive into today. Today's episode is all about the skill of making things easy and bringing in ease on purpose.

So why am I going to talk about this? I'm talking about this because it's something I've personally actively worked on. And it's something I see so many of my clients grapple with. When my clients see how much agency

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they have to create more ease on purpose, it is like watching a fog lift. They set down the metaphorical heavy backpack that's filled with a bunch of heavy rocks, and they step out of the proverbial quicksand onto sturdy ground.

So, it might be your pattern to make things harder than they need to be. And this may be a quiet habit that you don't even detect. Or, you might be on the other end of the spectrum, and you may know full well that you are really great at it. In today's podcast, I aim to help you see if this is a habit you have. And if it is a habit you have, help you really notice it more. And then, show you that there is an alternative and explain what that could look like and how you can create it.

Let me give you an example of making things unnecessarily harder. One of my favorite sports is biking. I have done road biking for a really long time. But mountain biking wasn't really something that I took to. So, when I was learning how to mountain bike, I was riding on flat pedals. Which if you don't know anything about biking, flat pedals are just the regular pedals that you can wear any sort of sneaker on, and you can pedal, you can lift your foot, and you can put your foot down.

And clipless pedals are pedals where you actually wear a special shoe, and you click in or clip onto the shoe, and your shoe is attached to the pedal so that your feet don't fling off when you're going over rocky terrain. When you do really good effective circles on your pedals, you can move your pedals in a way that maximizes the power transfer, and you can actually, on the backstroke, you can lift the pedal as well as push down on the pedal.

There are all sorts of things you can do with clipless pedals, not to make this about the geeking out of pedals on bikes. I use clipless pedals on my road bike all the time; it's no problem. But I wasn't doing it on my mountain bike. And when I was learning how to do it, it was really, really, really difficult for me. And when it was difficult, I didn't actually realize how I was contributing to making it even harder than it needed to be.

In hindsight, it is abundantly clear. So, let me explain what was going on. As I was learning mountain biking, I did a lot of my riding with my husband,

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who is really familiar with it. I wasn't really familiar with how to move my bike and my body to safely get over rocks and roots and get around curves with the ease that he had. And with my flat pedals, I was used to setting my foot down without having to do anything to make that happen.

With clipless pedals, these new shoes, new pedals, there's just a new technique involved. And this new technique is automatic today, but probably about 20 years ago, when I was learning, it was not. So, not realizing that it might be hard.

Because I thought, "Well, if I can do this on my road bike, I'll be able to do it on a mountain bike, no problem," not realizing that would be difficult. I took my new pedals and my new shoes, and I went on a ride with my husband on these really tight, twisty, singletrack trails near where I was going to medical school in northeast Tennessee.

Well, within minutes, I was falling because I couldn't do my usual dabs and take my foot off the pedal and set it on the side of the trail to balance myself. And after I fell about two or three times, I was really frustrated. I thought it should be easier. I felt embarrassed. I was thinking, "What must my boyfriend," my then boyfriend, "Be thinking of his clumsy girlfriend, falling and crying and unable to keep it together?"

Meanwhile, my husband quickly realized that this experience was going nowhere good. He saw the skill gap, the technical terrain, the emotional distress, and he very gently made the suggestion that we turn back, get off the trail go to an easier surface. And I, as you can predict, instantly declined.

I was flooded with stress. I was flooded with distress. And I couldn't absorb his well-intended tips or his nice suggestion. In my frustration, I couldn't soak up any reassurance or encouragement. But at the time, turning back seemed worse than pushing on. So, I kept falling; I would fall, I would cry, and he would gently ask, "How about we turn off here?" And I repetitively said, "No."

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I stubbornly pushed ahead, even though I was growing less and less able to roll with the punches, and falling more and more because I was getting so wound up. In hindsight, this is what I can see. The whole time, I was telling myself something like, "This should be easy. There's something wrong with me that it's not. I suck. Quitting is not an option." Talk about a mental vice grip.

In hindsight, I can see that not only was I learning a new skill, but I was trying to do it on a trail that was much more technical than I was ready to ride. What would have been easier would have been just to start on an easier trail or to recognize this trail is just not appropriate for the skill I'm trying to learn. Turning back after the first two or three or four falls would have been such a gift.

If I had known that my inner critic radio station was not the only available station to listen to, I could have thought, "Wow, this is really hard. How cool that I'm trying something new and that my partner in crime is happy to make it as easy as possible to learn. You know, I guess today is just not the day for this trail."

So, when have you done something similar? When have you made something unnecessarily harder on yourself? Maybe it's as straightforward as underestimating how much time you need to arrive somewhere. Maybe it's over-scheduling your day and then beating yourself up for running late or not completing tasks that simply needed more time.

Or, perhaps perfectionism is your flavor of making things harder. Say you have an hour, and you want to clear out your inbox and address or reply to the 30 messages that are there. But then you spend 30 minutes wordsmithing a reply to make sure it's just right. And at the end of your hour, you're nowhere near complete, and then you're upset with yourself.

Or maybe, your version of adding insult to injury is having a difficult challenge at work and then telling yourself it's all because you aren't cut out for the job or there's something wrong with you. Some of the surgeons that I coach, who grapple with feeling like imposters, they will do this when they have a difficult case. Where, say, the anatomy is challenging, or there are

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adhesions that make it more difficult. Or the O.R. staff or unexpected emergencies arise and bring challenges.

And instead of acknowledging that they're simply having a difficult case, a difficult set of circumstances, they personalize every challenge. They make it mean there's something wrong with them as a surgeon or as a human. And in addition to the challenge inherent in the case, they carry this added weight, and this added burden of cruel self-talk, shame, anxiety, and insecurity.

Or if you're a parent, if you've got kids. Perhaps you have this Sunday planned, but it turns out that your kids are really tired and thin-skinned, and cranky. So, you end up getting snippy with your kids. You yell at your partner, and you think to yourself, "What is my problem? I can't even enjoy my weekend."

You make the baseline challenge of activities with tired kids even harder by telling yourself you're a bad parent, a bad spouse. And then not adjusting your plan to accommodate the stress of everybody involved and pushing on to make sure that you do what you intended to do in the beginning.

I paint these pictures so that you can know how to detect and identify when you might be making things hard on yourself. Because knowing when you're doing this is part of the process of changing it.

Here are a couple more examples. If you have the habit of time traveling to the future of a worst-case scenario, beating yourself up, overcomplicating something that, in hindsight, you realize could have been simpler, and doing more with less would totally suffice. Taking on more things you know you have time for.

Mentally beating yourself up for difficulties. Cataloging reasons that you're not good at your job instead of things that you could learn from a challenge. One of my clients puts it this way. She says, "There's the bad surgeon list vs. the things I learned from that hard case list."

If you have the habit of opting to do things on your to-do list when what you really need is rest. Or volunteering to do something that leaves you

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personally in a lurch with time or energy. That means that you have the habit of making things harder on yourself than they need to be.

So, if this sounds familiar, if this is your habit, you are doing the equivalent of piling heavy rocks into a backpack and walking through sand on your way to the top of the mountain when the backpack isn't necessary, and there's an alternative route that is much smoother.

And if you're like most of us who've had this habit, you may not even realize that you're making things harder on yourself. Or, if you do realize it, like I did with my bike situation, you realize it in hindsight.

But the beauty of this is once you know that you do this, and once you know the specifics of what it might look like for you when you're making things harder than they need to be, then you open the door to being able to do something differently going forward. And this is possible because now you can anticipate your usual pattern and you can opt for a different way.

Before we talk about what it looks like to make things easier, let's talk about why it's important not to add additional suffering. I want to be really real here; life has the potential to be hard. Try as we might, we cannot control everything. Challenges happen. Uncertainty is an inevitability.

From war to food shortages, political unrest, abuse, and trauma, to more ordinary everyday challenges like loved ones with depression or addiction. Diagnoses that we didn't expect or want. Having ailments without diagnoses.

Because we're human, as a part of our full human experience, we are bound to experience these challenges. We are bound to experience pain, sorrow, remorse, grief, disappointment, shame, and fear. You may go for big goals and fail publicly. You might work your butt off and feel regularly unseen, unheard, and unappreciated by colleagues, by the institution that you work for.

You may have friends die before you had a chance to say that one thing you wanted to tell them. There can be discord with a spouse. Watching a friend or child navigate something really tricky and difficult that you can't

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help them with. You might get unexpectedly fired. Have a launch for your business flop. Apply for your dream job and be told no.

So, given all of this, why make things harder? Life presents challenges, and we can't control everything we encounter. But here's the thing, there is something that we do have control over. We are in charge of how we think. And because of this, we have the capacity to make things harder and the capacity to make things easier when we meet these inevitable storms of life.

You may have heard that pithy but powerful saying, "Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional." Its origins aren't clear to me, but I find it really powerful because it reminds us that despite the inherent challenges of being alive, we can add suffering to these challenges. And we can make things harder on ourselves than they need to be.

If we can do that, we can also do the opposite. So, if life is guaranteed to bring challenges, and we have a choice when it comes to how we think about these challenges, that means we have the power to make things easier.

Making things easier may sound really simple, but when it's not your default, it might not actually be easy to implement. I'm gonna give you some examples of what it might really look like to make things easier, not as a prescription, but to inspire you to come up with your own ideas.

I like to think about this in two categories. Making things easier comes down to either how you're thinking about things, or sometimes it's an action that you take or stop taking. In terms of thinking, making things easier could simply be acknowledging things are hard right now instead of thinking I have no choice. Making things easier might look like reminding yourself, "I have more choice than I realize."

Shifting from black and white, either/or thinking to finding a middle ground is one way to make things easier. So, instead of thinking, "I have to get this done this way. Otherwise, it doesn't count, won't work, and everything will

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go to shit,” you can remind yourself, “There could be a middle ground. There could be a different way. Let's find it.”

Or, say you're craving external validation or acknowledgment that's not yet available from the people you'd like it from. Making things easier might look like internally validating something by saying to yourself, “This is hard. This takes guts. This calls on courage.” Or, normalizing your experience to yourself by saying something like, “Other people in the same situation, they too would find this hard.”

You can make things easier on yourself when you stop telling yourself that you're wrong for how you feel and instead, you meet yourself where you are with compassion. This sounds like, “This is how things are right now, and that's okay. I'm going to figure this out; I always do. I can do hard things.”

Now, let's talk about some of the actions that you can take that can make things easier on yourself. It could be as simple as adding in your favorite music while you do something that you find to be a chore; your taxes or your discharge summaries, or going over lab values.

It might be asking for help from a friend with picking up your kids so that you can finish that errand. It might mean getting really clear with B- work for your to-do list. And if you're not familiar with B- work, check out Episode 47. And especially, go check it out if when I say B- you cringe because you think, “Ugh, that sounds like substandard and mediocre work.”

Making it easy might mean you cancel something to give yourself the time you need to finish a nagging task. Making things easy might come in the form of saying no, or changing your mind from something that you initially said yes to, that initially felt good but no longer does.

It might mean pivoting from your original plan to plan B. Making things easier might mean you stop and pause, and you change your complicated approach to something that is streamlined and simple.

Making it easier might mean stopping taking on things that are not yours and stopping trying to control things you can't control. No longer playing

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mediator between your two friends who are arguing. No longer carrying the mental load of trying to fix other people's feelings.

Bringing in ease could also look like delegating; paying for help, and hiring a babysitter so you can have a date night or just some time to yourself. Or, as one of my friends told me, maybe it's having your kids put themselves to bed once a week so you and your partner can have time to yourself to watch a TV show every Wednesday.

Creating ease for yourself could also be counterintuitive. It might mean taking on that hard conversation that you've been putting off, that's really weighing on your mind. It might mean you quit a position or quit a job or turn down a project that you don't totally love so that you can put all your energy into something that you really do love and make that thing a reality.

Ease could come in the form of setting a difficult boundary. It might sound like telling the truth that you've been avoiding telling for fear of how it will be received. And these things might be hard in the short term, but they always bring ease in the long term.

So, if you hear these things and you're thinking, "Huh, that's me. But how do I actually implement and operationalize making things easier in my real life?" Well, I've got you. The first step is awareness. It's awareness of how you are currently making things harder on yourself.

The second step is acknowledging there's another option.

And the third step is answering a productive question so that you can shift your mindset to something that will bring you ease.

I have some questions for you. Think about these questions, and if you need to, rewind this and listen to them again. You can even write down your favorite ones. Or, you can go to the show notes, where they'll all be listed there. These are questions that at any time during your day, if you catch yourself making things more difficult than they need to be, if you feel that familiar feeling of discouragement or self-judgment and you want to pivot, you can ask yourself these questions.

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How could this be easy? How can I make this easy? What can I do to make this 10% easier? What are one to two things that I can do right now, today, to make this a little bit easier on myself? If I could simplify, to the most essential things, what would change? What can I remove from my list? What truly can wait until later? What do I most need to hear right now? And how can I tell that to myself? How can I seek that out from someone else?

What can I change about how I'm thinking that would bring more ease? This is one of my favorites. What's the next best step? Sometimes having something super concrete is really helpful. What's most important for the long game and will bring ease in the here and now? And the last one is, will this matter on my deathbed? And if not, what do I want to do instead? And that's it.

So, try answering these questions above this week. And if you find them valuable, let me know by going to iTunes and leaving the podcast a review. This is a huge favor to help me get more reviews and celebrate the podcast turning one. When you leave your review, you can go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/review, and you can enter the drawing for the Day Designer planners.

Thank you so much for listening. Thank you so much for leaving a review, and I will see you next week.

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, you'll find it right there.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit HabitsOnPurpose.com Tune in next week for another episode.