

Ep #56: The Hidden Habit of Busying



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Ep #56: The Hidden Habit of Busying

Hi there, this is your host, Kristi Angevine. Welcome to Episode #56. Today's topic is busying, and what we miss when we do it.

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, lovely listeners. I want to give a quick shout out to everyone who's taken time to leave the podcast a review. It might seem just like a tiny thing, but it's really big deal to me because you're taking time out of your day, you're writing a phrase or a couple sentences, and you're helping the podcast be more discoverable so that other people can get this information.

So, as a way to thank you, when you leave a review this month, if you're listening to this live in the month of February of 2023, you're going to get entered to win a Day Designer Planner. Which is this really lovely planner. It's very simple, streamlined, yet has all the things you'd want in a planner. And then, just go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/review.

The reason why I'm asking for reviews, is your reviews mean so much because they let somebody who's looking for a podcast to help them with habits or help them with mindset, click on a podcast and see that other real humans listen and see what they actually say. So, they can decide, is this something that I want to spend my precious time on?

I currently have the goal, as I'm celebrating the one-year mark for the podcast, to double the number of reviews. We're starting at 200, and my goal is to get to 400.

One of the most recent reviews that I spied on my feed comes from somebody named, it looks like, Ilove kt or I love KT. And this one says, "Medicine for my soul." And it's short and sweet. It says, "This podcast needs to be more discoverable! There is so much wisdom and kindness

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here, even her voice is soothing.” Thank you so much. That's so sweet of you to say.

“As a physician, woman, and as a mom... I feel seen and understood. One of favorite thing I've learned listening to this so far is the concept of the 'radio station playing in my head' referring to our inner critic and self-defeating thoughts, I love it! It has helped me separating myself from my thoughts and not letting them define me or taking control of all my actions, I'm still a work in progress.”

So, I love KT, thank you so much for taking time to this review. What you articulated is precisely one of my goals for the podcast. For you to listen to what you hear, to feel seen and understood, and then to learn something that's highly useful to your everyday lived experience.

I have one more comment before we dive into the topic today. And that is that right now, I currently have five individual coaching spots open on my schedule. If you want to learn how to apply everything that you hear on the podcast, and you want to deeply understand why you do what you do so that you can make lifelong changes, coaching with me will help you do just that.

When we work together, we meet via Zoom weekly for four months. And in between your calls, you have access to written coaching and support in Slack, which is an online way to connect. Which is like having a coach on speed dial for that in-between call support that you need. I mean, it's kind of like texting and venting to a friend. You know how that's so therapeutic in its own way?

But when you message a coach who will help you with perspective, as well as how exactly you can use whatever you're going through to better understand yourself, it's priceless. So, if you want to connect to see if we are a good match for your private coaching needs, we can do a consultation Zoom call.

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You just do this by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/consult and we'll hop on Zoom for about 30 minutes. My favorite thing to do is coach. And if you've been waiting for a spot to open up in my schedule, now is the time.

So, on to today's topic for the podcast, which is the habit of busying. Can I see a show of hands for all of the experts in busying? To be busy means to have a great deal of things to do. But there's a difference in having a full schedule and the habit of busying yourself, which is to purposely keep yourself occupied or engaged in activity.

Busying is a habit like all habits, in that it serves a purpose, but busying may also have an underbelly. Now, two weeks ago, in Episode 54, I talked about the power of meeting yourself where you are. And if you missed that episode, please go check it out. It's a really powerful one.

Part of meeting yourself where you are is being with whatever feeling, whatever emotion that is present for you. This means not resisting that emotion. This means not rushing to fix that emotion. And this also means slowing down and letting yourself literally feel whatever is present for you.

And this might mean being with parts of you that feel annoyed, disappointed, frustrated, sad. This might mean being with parts of you that feel restless or urgency, or even shame or insecurity or anger. This can sound really unappealing, right?

If no one's taught you the ways that you can feel your feelings and allow your feelings, which is, by the way, a learnable, life-changing skill. It's one that I teach my clients to do when we coach. If no one has taught you this skill, the idea of just being with your sense of frustration and anger is not going to be high on your list.

So, a super common response to uncomfortable, unwanted, unpleasant emotions is the habit of busying. Purposely occupying yourself or engaging yourself in activity, in response to an emotion you don't want to feel. Clients often come to me not noticing that they have this habit.

Today, we're going to flush it out so you can start noticing if you have it. We'll talk about the subtle and more obvious ways you might be busying

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yourself. We'll talk about why we do it, what it looks like. Then, talk about what you actually miss out on when you do it. And why it's useful to be with and feel your feelings instead of avoiding them by busying.

Busying as a habit can be stealthy. It's in the category of what I call "hidden habits". Hidden habits are the less obvious patterns that we have; the habituated patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that can go under the radar.

An overt habit might be staying up too late playing Candy Crush. A hidden habit might be the mean way you talk to yourself in the morning after staying up too late. Busying is one of these quieter habits that you might not notice.

So, let me give you some examples of ways that it could look. Feeling angry or discouraged or overwhelmed, and then you start stress cleaning your house. You know that kind of angry vacuuming or counter wiping where you're stomping and breathing hard and really focused.

Busying can be opening your emails repetitively because you feel restless. Busying could look like, all of the sudden, you find yourself the owner of a new pair of sandals, two more books, and you've signed up for a workshop. And moments before your shopping spree, you felt anxious because you're replaying an interaction at work.

Your busying might actually be very productive. Say your partner says something in a tone that you find super infuriating, and you go for a run and you listen to an audiobook or a podcast while your anger fades from fury, to irritation, to just be mildly annoyed.

Maybe the flavor that you busy yourself looks like repetitively getting up from the dinner table to tidy things up in the kitchen, or grab things for other people because you may feel a discomfort with just being still. Or, you might have some guilt from thinking that you should take care of everyone first and make sure no need is unmet before you enjoy your meal.

Or, how about this? You have 30 minutes of white space, and your plan was to do no work in that space. You were going to read this fiction novel,

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and you were going to take a little nap. But when the time comes, instead of that novel or the catnap you actually start a little laundry, review your schedule, answer a couple emails. And before you know it, you're back in the work again without having enjoyed any downtime.

You can even busy yourself with self-improvement activities. Say you feel sad, or you feel guilt or you feel out of control, and you throw yourself into reading about emotions or you throw yourself into doing some self-coaching.

A friend of mine, when she is procrastinating, she busies herself with doing other things on her to-do list. So, when she is busying away from an uncomfortable emotion, her drawers get organized, the house gets dusted, she shuffles piles of papers around from left to right.

How does busying, purposely occupying yourself in an activity in order to change how you're feeling, how does it show up for you? Now, quick note here. Busying is not the same as getting things done. Busying is a very special type of habituated activity where you, on purpose, engage yourself in some sort of behavior or activity that will occupy you, in order to avoid feeling and emotion.

In this way, busying is the equivalent of TV or scrolling or having some chips and beer in order to checkout or unwind. Now, it's not bad to have busying as a habit. But if you do have it, this is your chance to start noticing it and wondering why it might be a habit for you.

So, we busy ourselves in order to change how we feel or to avoid feeling how we feel. Busying is essentially an attempt to act our way out of a feeling. Why do we want to do this? It is natural to feel an uncomfortable, unpleasant emotion and want to alter it. Just like we reflexively move away from physical pain. You know, when we pull our hand away from a hot surface, or we step back from that falling knife from the cutting board when we're cutting vegetables.

Sometimes our emotions are a source of discomfort that we desire to get away from, that we desire to change. Busy essentially buys you time. It

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distracts and diverts your attention, so you get away from or move away from a feeling you don't love.

When we busy ourselves, we give ourselves the opportunity to think different thoughts and feel different feelings. When we busy ourselves, we change our physical circumstances, we move our bodies. And to use Internal Family Systems terms, we do this with the goal of getting space from the parts of us presented with emotions that other parts of us don't enjoy.

And often, busying works. The anxiety or restlessness or overwhelm or anger, it decreases, it retreats, it disappears, at least for the moment. So yes, your house might get cleaner. You may get some things off your to-do list. And it might just be how you roll, and you might like this form of productivity.

But let me assure you that there are other ways to be productive without busying and avoiding your emotions. And these other ways are actually more effective. So, this brings me to what do we miss out on when we have the habit of visiting? The analogy that I like is that our emotions are like visitors coming to us with important messages.

When we distract ourselves from these emotions, it's like telling a visitor, "No, thank you, go away." Where we cut ourselves off from the messages that those emotions are bringing to us. Another way to think about it is to think of busying is the equivalent of giving a tantruming toddler, a toy, or a lollipop.

When there's the delight of sugar or a new toy, that tantrum may fade and sort of fizzle out. But the source of the tantrum, whatever is going on for the toddler and the toddler themselves, it's still there, even if it's quiet. So, our emotions are kind of like the toddler. They can be loud, or they can be quiet. But until they're fully addressed, seen, heard, understood, they usually come back.

So, busying is a temporary way to stop feeling how we're feeling. But because we're avoiding it, eventually, it's going to resurface. So, the

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anxiety that you don't like to feel that propels you to race-walk and check your email compulsively and shuffle your papers, that anxiety itself may be a nuisance. And you might busy yourself and throw yourself into work, because you think the anxiety is an impediment to getting things done or to being present.

In a way, you're right. In this example, the anxiety presents for a reason. The anxiety is there because a part of you has thoughts that generate the emotion of anxiety. It's possible that anxiety is a cover emotion for another emotion, like disappointment, or sadness. And these other emotions might be the way that your intuition tells you something important.

For example, your disappointment, that's covered up by anxiety and then further covered by busying, might be your intuition telling you that you desperately want a change at work. But when you busy the anxiety away, you won't ever find the source of why you feel what you feel. So, when we scurry to get away from an emotion, we actually miss the opportunity to understand ourselves.

When it comes to our habits, in order to make a change that sticks, we first have to understand why we do what we do. Busying is a habit that puts on earmuffs and blinders and blocks us from that understanding. Here's another silly analogy.

I like to give you these analogies because everybody has a different way of understanding concepts. And if I just throw out a different number of analogies, one or two of them may stick. And so, when you're going through your day, later on this evening or tomorrow, you may have this image in your mind, as silly as it may be.

The silly analogy that pops in my mind right now, is imagine that you, as part of your day, need to walk from point A to point B. And as you're walking along, you start noticing that about halfway through, there's this really loud noise. There's an area that you walk through very loud. Maybe there's lots of strobe lights, things that just give you a headache and you don't like it.

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So, every time you walk through that area you've started automatically putting on sunglasses, a hat, and earplugs, and you hustle past that area. You get through, you take off your hat, your sunglasses, and you get the rest of the way to point B.

Now, no problem, right? You make it from point A to point B. But along the way, you never pause to wonder why is it loud there? Why is there something that causes a headache for me there? Why are all these crazy bright lights there?

You never pause to notice that your route happens to go right through, say a construction site or this really loud discotheque club. And every time you put on your earplugs and your sunglasses and your hat, you will not notice the source of the discomfort.

So, to relate this to busying, the loud noise, the bright lights, they're the emotion. The earplugs and the glasses, they're what you do when you busy yourselves. And you miss the chance to learn that the noise and the bright lights, they're coming from the construction site that's popped up on your route, or the dance club that now you walk through.

Sometimes emotions are telling us simple messages. And sometimes they're telling us something more complex. So, if you're frustrated and thin-skinned, that might just be the message that you need some rest. "I might feel overwhelmed, simply because I'm thinking I'm so behind."

And the simple message is, "Oh, I'm having some thoughts that make me feel so behind and overwhelmed. And I get to get curious about why I'm thinking that way. The emotion of tension might be there simply because I miss having more play."

Other times, there are deeper messages. Like, "I feel shame and like a fraud, because a part of me believes I'm not cut out for the job." When we busy ourselves, we cut ourselves off from exploring, in this example, why we might think that we're not cut out for the job. And we miss the opportunity to understand the part of us that carries an identity shaping belief like, "I have nothing to offer."

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So, if you constantly are busying yourself away from emotions, you will not be able to understand some of the limiting beliefs that are driving your repetitive habits. Understanding the messages that your emotions bring is the path to knowledge of yourself.

When you know yourself and know your patterns, then you can understand your habits. And when you understand them, then you can start changing them.

This week's episode is a little bit shorter on purpose. So that for five minutes after the podcast, you can notice if you feel the desire to busy yourself. Or, reflect on when you might use the activity of busying to distract yourself from certain emotions.

In a future episode, Busying Part 2, I will share what you can do instead of busying. But for now, your work is simply to be aware, and to notice when you do it. Notice the circumstances in which it comes up for you. And notice any trends for emotions that you busy yourself in response to. And then, my invitation is that you get curious why this might be the case for you.

So, I hope you find this to be very helpful, and that you do spend five minutes just reflecting. Thank you so much for listening. And thank you especially for leaving a review for the podcast. If you haven't yet, and you could do one today, not as a form of busying, but as a deliberate action that you want to take, it would mean so much to me.

And remember, once you do, let me know that you left a review by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/review. Just let me know, so that I can enter you into the drawing for the Day Designer Planner.

If you feel the nudge to get a personal coach and do some of the deeper work, I have five spots open for new clients. My coaching teaches you how to apply what you learn here, and combines deep dive and Internal Family Systems informed approaches to guide you to learn why you do what you do. So that you can tap into your own brilliant wisdom as you go for the goals that you want and shift into your ideal identity, and of course, create intentional habits for life.

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If you're interested, we can connect for a consult Zoom meeting at HabitsOnPurpose.com/consult It would be a joy to chat with you. See you next week. Have a good one.

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.