

Ep #57: The Habit of Dismissing Progress and Minimizing Achievements



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 57, The Habit of Dismissing Progress and Minimizing Achievements. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine. Today you're going to learn about the problem with chronically dismissing success. We'll talk about why you may do it, and what you can do instead. Let's dive in, shall we?

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, my lovely listeners. Welcome to the podcast. If you are new, this podcast is where you get to learn why you have the habits you have. This podcast is perfect for you if you want to change the habits that feel like they're on autopilot. If you're fascinated by how the human mind works, and by how habits can be learned and unlearned. It's for everyone here who wants to make the most of this one life we have by being intentional, one day at a time.

For those of you who are my longtime listeners, or those of you who have just heard or listened to the podcast recently who have taken time out of your busy lives to leave the podcast or review, I just want to say a huge thank you. I am so grateful. And soon, we're going to be announcing the Day Designer Planner giveaway recipient.

If you want to get in on this drawing, you still have a little bit more time to do so. The way you do that, is you go on to iTunes and you scroll down to the bottom of the episodes where it says "ratings and reviews" and you click "leave a review", and you leave a short review.

And then, you let me know that you left a review by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/review. You enter your information, with the title of your review so that I know that it was you, and we enter you into the drawing.

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So, today I'm talking about an oh so common phenomenon; downplaying success, downplaying progress, minimizing achievements, brushing aside what's going well, and dismissing wins as too insignificant to warrant acknowledgement.

You know, this habit, no? For me, this was an area of personal expertise for many, many, many years. And one that I see many of my clients reflexively do without even noticing.

So, this is how it sounds: "Congratulations on your publication! That must have taken so much work. I'm so impressed. Wow, you must seriously be so proud." And then the response is, "Yeah, there's so much work to be done, though. And it was so much harder than I expected. I really don't know how people do multiple articles per quarter; it just took me so much work."

A genuine acknowledgement of a legitimate accomplishment arrives at your doorstep, and you downplay, deflect, and minimize. Here's another example. You're at the gym doing a class and the woman next to you says, "You are so strong." And your response is, "Oh, no. It's just a family body type. I mean, I used to be strong. But gosh, I am just so out of shape now. This is such a struggle."

Or, someone says, "Nice work." And out loud, to them, you say, "Well, you know, it's not actually a big deal. In fact, it actually wasn't that good. You probably didn't see the part where I messed up X, Y, and Z. And did you see so-and-so, and what they did?"

And then inside, as soon as you hear that compliment you instantly compare yourself to how you used to be, how you think you should be, to other people doing the same thing. This habit of dismissing progress, downplaying success, can show up any time you take inventory of your life, and your list is imbalanced towards the negative. Despite the reality that you actually made progress.

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Downplaying progress shows up when you finish an onerous task and instead of mentally high-fiving yourself, your thought is, “Sheesh, that took so much longer than I expected. Other people don't struggle like I do. Gosh, frankly, how embarrassing that this lowly thing would qualify as a win for me.”

Minimizing can also show up as only being able to see what's missing. So, you meet a goal, but your first thought is there's always something lacking; it took too long, it wasn't as good as it should have been, there's so much more to do.

Instead of seeing how much you've grown, how much you've overcome the lessons you've learned, the grit, the persistence, the resourcefulness, you just see that is just not that great.

Or, one of my favorites, is you have a trusted friend come to you and say, “You have done so well! Look at how much you've grown.” And inside you think, “What are they talking about?” Instead of, “Look at how far I've come,” it's, “Look at how far I have yet to go.”

Now, as you're listening to this, do you perhaps cringe when I mentioned the idea of celebrating tiny wins? Do you bristle at the idea of basking in accomplishments for more than one hot minute? If the idea of celebrating wins feels ridiculously lame, you might have the habit of dismissing progress.

A subtle way that dismissing progress shows up, is feeling uncomfortable commenting on your strengths, and saying things like, “Oh, that was just a fluke.” Now, either you're listening to this nodding, going, “Yes, that is totally me.” Or, you don't relate and do not have this habit. But likely, someone you know does.

When you listen to this, even if it's not something you identify with, you can better understand the people in your lives, because you can start to identify this habit in them. And then, it can therefore inform your relationship and how you connect and respond to their habit.

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So now, why do we actually care? The habit of dismissing wins, downplaying success, minimizing progress, might seem totally innocuous, but it's actually quite problematic. And, that's because there's a cost. When we downplay what's working, we diminish and devalue the very thing we are working to achieve.

This keeps us ever-striving, but never satisfied. When we miniaturize and de-emphasize progress, we don't get to enjoy the fruits of our efforts. It's like it doesn't even exist. So, when this becomes a habit, we are chronically unaware of how well we are actually doing. We are essentially putting blinders on that block us from noticing what's actually going well. What we are actually making progress on, what we have made a success of, and what we have overcome.

Think about it, when we cannot see these things, it's so easy to feel discouraged, incapable, and less than. And life is filled with challenges, so if you want to surf the inevitably stormy waters of life, discouraged, incapable, and less than are not the emotions that make it easy to be persistent, to be crafty, to be resilient, to have grit, to be creative.

If there's not an upside to this downplaying habit, how come we downplay and dismiss, instead of acknowledge and savor? There are so many reasons, and most of them are very unique to each of us. But in general, there are some themes.

One reason for downplaying, is partly because of a cultural narrative that we've heard about the value of humility, and the risk of self-importance. You've heard all these things: Don't get too big for your britches. Don't toot your own horn. Don't count your eggs before they're hatched. We might worry that we are going to gloat, come across as arrogant, and then stop caring.

Or, in a similar vein, you might have this habit because you're uncomfortable with attention from others. You prefer laying low, and a compliment or a comment on an achievement is like a big, bright, undesired spotlight shining right on you.

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This habit might be familiar to you if you struggle with thoughts about being an imposter or a fraud. These thoughts about being an imposter or fraud can drive this habit because the imposter syndrome signature move is to have difficulty internalizing achievements. Another reason for this habit is a discomfort connected to owning success.

So, if you have this habit, consider what comes up for you if you imagine allowing yourself to notice progress. Do you detect an anxiety? Do you worry that perhaps it's silly or maybe a little delusional to acknowledge what's going well? Do you think if other people knew that you were celebrating progress that they would just scoff? Do you have a fear of future disappointment if your progress doesn't continue?

Perhaps you have this superstitious sense, that doesn't feel superstitious, that if you comment on what's going well, then things are going to come crashing down, fall apart, and you'll wish you hadn't. Maybe your reason for this habit is because you're simply unfamiliar with owning your strengths and acknowledging what's working.

So, another reason people might dismiss wins, comes from a habitual people pleasing habit; where there's a desire to shrink, or blend in around others, so that you don't make waves, don't rock the boat, and you ensure at all costs that other people are always totally comfortable.

Your habit to diminish your wins might come from the fact that it actually feels dangerous to feel positive and optimistic. Because optimism, in your system, is linked to a risk of being let down, being shot down, and this can be very unnerving.

For others, the habit of dismissing the positive may come from a worry that it will make you lazy. That it's risky to celebrate small things because if we're satisfied, God forbid, happy with a tiny win, we won't want to continue on to do more or to do bigger goals.

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We worry that we'll get complacent, will rest on our laurels, maybe we'll even become self-absorbed. And this can challenge the very core of an identity if we believe we should always be striving to be better.

But get this, what actually happens when you acknowledge and celebrate wins, progress, and strengths, is the opposite of this. When you acknowledge a win, you get pleasure from the progress. And then, you make things more fun for yourself. You enjoy the work towards the goal, you enjoy the wins, so you're more drawn to keep going for bigger and better things.

You feel encouraged instead of discouraged, and therefore you have more energy to be helpful to others; you don't become arrogant. And despite fears about tempting fate by voicing something that's going well, or articulating a strength, the world does not come crashing down once we do that. Even if in the future there is a change, there is a problem that you encounter, when you feel satisfied and proud it's so much easier to handle the things that come your way.

So overall, no matter the source of this tendency to downplay what's going well, it's not the only option. And it's not the most effective way to go towards goals and habit change. To challenge this habit, I'm going to give you some alternative approaches that I just want you to let marinate in your mind.

Instead of dismissing, minimizing, and downplaying, you can simply acknowledge what's going well. You can actively look for the positive. You can celebrate small things and big things. You can actually work towards basking and savoring in what's going well.

Now, what this can look like, is a practice of finding progress when you ordinarily would not see any. This requires deliberate effort. This can mean, simply mentally listing it to yourself and labeling it distinctly, as progress. Or, it can mean you write down a physical list.

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For some people, this can look like a gratitude practice for the achievements that you've done, even when you've had the most shitshow of a day. It might look like taking one minute to savor the feeling of deep satisfaction of checking something off your to-do list. It might be telling yourself, "Damn, I did it! Nice for work. Let's go do more."

It could be simply saying, "Thank you," and nothing else when you receive a compliment or external validation or acknowledgment from someone else. Instead of downplaying your strengths and diminishing what's going well, you can start owning positive things in a very matter of fact way to yourself.

This might sound like, "I'm a great listener. I love to learn. I'm empathetic. I'm detail oriented. I have grit, and I know how to show people I care. I'm emotionally intelligent. I know how to do hard things. I made a delicious meal. I learned so much and showed a ton of courage. I took on a hard conversation. You know, I didn't want to follow through, but I did."

So, I hope those examples help you brainstorm ways that you can start shifting out of the habit of downplaying achievements, dismissing wins, minimizing and diluting progress. And into a habit where you're acknowledging what's going well.

This week, my invitation to you is to notice where you dismiss, downplay, and deflect. Where you say it's no big deal. Where you poopoo your strengths. Where you ignore when you've made progress. Where maybe you focus on everything that's left to be done, instead of what you have done.

Now, I have a caveat to this. As you open up to the benefit of changing this habit, you might notice the following objection: You might worry that this is flirting with toxic positivity. That it is just a white-washing of what's really going on. It's a way to ignore problems and bypass reality, with a capital R.

This is a totally normal worry, but it's actually not a real risk. All you're doing when you stop downplaying progress is deliberately giving equal airtime to

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the other half of the story. So, my lovely listener, you are now totally game for acknowledging what's going well. You're up for cataloguing wins, for savoring the satisfaction of progress and success, no matter how big or how small. And you're going to want to dive in and try this out.

As you do, you might notice that either it's delightfully easy; you absolutely love this shift. Or, it's really, really not something you love. And if it's not, that's totally not a problem. It's simply a sign that there's more to understand about what is blocking you, and why it is not easy and fun. All it means is that there's something to explore about what's getting in the way of feeling ease, with acknowledging a job well done.

So, if that is you, for your deeper inquiry I have some prompts. And these are very similar to the ones that I give my clients, to explore when it comes to looking at how a habit developed and how it made sense. Here you go, questions to ask of this habit of yours:

Where did this discomfort with acknowledging the positive come from? What might be the benefit of not seeing progress? What might be the benefit of dismissing success? Another way to put this question is, what might I get to avoid by diluting my achievements? What's the risk when I open to seeing all the things that I'm doing well?

And a last prompt that can be really revealing is, growing up, did I see a caretaker, a mentor, a role model, perpetually deflect, self-efface, downplay their strengths, minimize what's actually working? Once you get the answers to this, you will have some great data that will really help you understand why shifting this habit might be challenging for you.

If you want to keep the learning going, there are two ways to do this. First of all, you can join the *Habits On Purpose* email list; there's a link in the show notes. Or, you can go to the HabitsOnPurpose.com website. And on the website, you'll see how to join.

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Or, number two, you can come join me in *Habits On Purpose* Facebook group. That's where we discuss topics from the podcast, and I answer any questions that come up.

Now, if you want to get even more traction on your unintentional habits, and you're listening to this in real time, when the episodes released in early March of 2023, I currently have spots open for private coaching. The way you can learn more is to go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/consult, and you can learn more and connect with me to discuss if my deep-dive, Internal Family Systems informed coaching is a beautiful match for you.

I will see you in the next episode. I will see you on Facebook, and I will see you in my emails. Take care. Talk to you soon.

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.