

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

[Habits On Purpose](#) with Kristi Angevine

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

Welcome to Episode #58: Ten obstacles to starting and maintaining habit change. What gets in your way? And most importantly, what can you do about it when you are working on starting and maintaining sustainable change? Keep listening to find out.

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. So, I want to start off and tell you something that is on my mind right now, that is making me smile so much. My six-year-old, who recently did a little cameo on the podcast when I talked about lessons from the kindergarten room, he lost one of his front teeth, and his whole look is totally different.

He has a sweet little smile, and when he smiles now, there's this beautiful hole, and he just looks like a different person. Every time I see him, I can't help but smile. It is just the sweetest thing. So, if you have had kids, and you remember back on what they look like when they lose their teeth, it's just so heartwarming. So, that's on my mind because he just lost it the other day.

The other thing I want to share with you is, my son was on the podcast and shared, as a reminder, some of the key guiding principles he has in his kindergarten room. He sat down at my mic, he spoke them, and got to hear himself on the podcast. It was so cute, because he kept saying that he was famous because he was on the podcast.

My daughter heard his excitement about being on the podcast, she's 10, almost 11, and she instantly was like, "I want to be on the podcast." That was also very heartwarming to me because I have been wanting to bring her on to the podcast, as a way to sort of give you a little view into some of our dynamic.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

And also, just let her participate in doing something that she knows is so meaningful to me. She knows how much it means to me to be a coach, and to be able to help people in a way that just lights me up. And so, to let her participate in that world, I just can't wait to do it. I haven't figured out what she's going to do. But at some point in time, you'll hear my daughter come on the podcast, as well.

I'm super happy to be here today, and to cover the 10, or actually it might be 11, common stumbling blocks or obstacles that get in the way of starting or maintaining a habit change. I created this list from what I see my clients get really blocked by, and no surprise, it also came from my personal experience.

Most, if not all, coaches create a program, create an approach for their clients, that they themselves needed at one point in time. And that applies to me, as well. Everything here is something that I've personally experienced and navigated.

The stumbling blocks that I go over, that get in the way of starting and keeping going on, they are oh so common and I know you're going to be able to relate to many of them. The great news is they are also manageable, and the solutions are really straightforward and doable.

So, before I dive in, I do have one more fun thing to share that's going to interest those of you who are intrigued by Internal Family Systems. Last week, I decided that I'm going to offer something totally new and really different for me. I'm going to offer one-off Internal Family Systems informed coaching sessions.

This means 50 minutes of doing IFS informed coaching sessions to deep dive into any issue, any dilemma, any decision, any habit that you want to explore more and understand better. I've never offered anything like this before, but as I've grown and expanded my knowledge base, I've discovered how essential it is to use my intuition and to use my body for hints when it comes to running my business and the ways that I will help serve my clients.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

One way that using my intuition looks, is acting on ideas that feel like a “hell yes,” in every molecule and feel super fun, even when they're really different from my usual. Now, my usual is private coaching that is roughly weekly to bi-weekly meetings for four to six months in duration.

I do it this way because I think there's a huge benefit to the rapport, the continuity, and the time and space to really explore things, try things, mess things up, find roadblocks, and then come back to coaching and address all the things that the client has discovered.

The duration lets my clients and I go really deep so they can heal and make legitimate changes. I've found Internal Family Systems to be so profoundly useful for coaching. Many people are interested in it but actually don't know much about it yet. So, it occurred to me to offer these individual sessions as a way for people to get a little taste test of an IFS informed approach.

So, if you're listening to this and you think, “Oh my gosh, yes. That is me. I want to dip my toe in. I want to learn some more, but I'm not really fully into doing four to six months in duration,” then you're going to want to go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/IFS, and sign up for a session.

If you're on the other side of things and you're thinking, “What the hell is IFS?” Go check out Episode 49. Or, check out the book titled *No Bad Parts* by the IFS founder, Dick Schwartz. This paradigm, for how the mind works, is truly a game changer.

And now, I want to segue into today's topic, which is obstacles to starting and maintaining change. One of the things that's so useful about Internal Family Systems is it has an uncanny way of helping identify what's in the way of making changes.

It not only helps you identify obstacles, but it helps understand how your unique challenges to change make sense. This level of understanding precedes all long-lasting change.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

So, with that said, I'm super excited to give you an overview of the most common stumbling blocks to starting to change a habit and to maintaining a change that you want. Hearing this is going to help you identify which of these you can relate to, and will help you on your journey to make real life lasting habit changes.

I'm going to do this Letterman style with a Top 10 List. But there's not really a hierarchy, in terms of the least common to most common, or least problematic to most problematic. Just listen and see what you can relate to, and maybe what your unique obstacles might be.

As you listen, I want to invite you to consider that each obstacle comes from a part of you. Each obstacle is an adaptive, resourceful approach that either worked really well in the past, or even if it didn't work really well, it has at its core a positive intention. After I cover the list, I'll cover a concrete approach that helps with these stumbling blocks.

So, here you have it; the 10 obstacles, stumbling blocks, challenges to starting to make a change or maintain a habit change.

Number 10: Fantastical, unrealistic plans that you never start, or that you start but then you stop, like a yo-yo diet. This is one of the most common tendencies and it comes from a drive for perfection and from all-or-none thinking. The perfect plan carries a sparkly allure and can almost intoxicate us with how gorgeous it is. But usually, it's highly unrealistic. It's too much, too fast, all at once. It may be beautiful, but rigid and unforgiving. And it can be so grandiose that it's unsustainable.

Number 9: Procrastination. No list about stumbling blocks for starting and maintaining would be complete without procrastination. So, procrastination is so easy, especially if your plan is really grand. "I'll just start later. Tomorrow will work out better, anyways. When you think, "I'll start later," and you think that every morning, you will never start.

Number 8: Confusion. Confusion is created by thinking thoughts like, "I don't know where to start. I don't know what I need to do." Confusion can

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

seem really, really, really, real. It can seem like it's a fact to say, "I don't know where to start." The problem is that confusion begets inaction. In this way, confusion is safe, even if it's uncomfortable. Because you don't have to risk screwing up if you don't start.

Number 7: Number 7 is so related to number 8, but it's a unique stumbling block. And that is, not having enough knowledge. It sounds like, "Once I know more, then I'll be prepared to start and then I'll start well. So, I should research more because I need to know all the steps before I can start. I can't start unless I knew all the things, and I know what it's going to look like, what it's going to feel like, and what to expect."

Number 6: Having a distaste for starting small. You know this feeling, right? You don't like to do the minimum baseline. It seems lame. It's not going to be meaningful, anyways. Small is silly. It's kind of wimpy. You think that meaningful change has to be sweeping, grand, exciting. And you might think, "I actually should be able to do more. I mean, who has to start small?" Then, you don't start small, or you don't start at all.

Number 5: In the aftermath of things not going perfectly according to plan, you're very critical of yourself, and you feel like a failure or really disappointed. Because you tell yourself, "See? I knew I'd screw up. That was just a complete failure. You could have done better. You should have done better. You're never going to be enough."

When you listen to that particular radio station in your mind, you feel super discouraged, and you see the world through the 'I suck' lens. You don't keep going, or you might not even get started because you know what will happen if you have a misstep.

Number 4: Slow and steady progress is being made, but you are completely blind to it. Your negativity bias blinders literally block you from seeing clear wins and, for sure, block you from seeing any infinitesimally small progress. So, you're dismissive and you minimize progress. You can listen to Episode 57, to hear more details about how this habit shows up.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

So, you only see obstacles and the problems, and thus you feel overwhelmed and discouraged and defeated, and you quit taking action.

Number 3: Getting impatient. You think progress should be faster. You want results quicker than you have them. You expect change to be easier and it should be smoother. And when it's not, you think something's gone wrong. Or, you get bored and restless. Because what you're doing isn't sexy or exciting as it was in week one, and so, you don't keep going.

Number 2: You rely on willpower, so starting seems super heavy. If you start, it actually saps a ton of energy to keep going on because you're using willpower; white-knuckling your entire way through. You're suppressing emotions and eventually, you run out of steam. This happens when you don't yet know how to process emotions. And willpower, which may have been super effective in some areas of your life in the past, seems like the only option.

Number 1: An unwillingness to feel what you feel, and meet yourself where you're at. As you do the work to create change, you will feel certain emotions that may be uncomfortable. And if you don't know how to process those emotions, if you don't know how to meet yourself where they are, you will start associating starting and maintaining with difficulty because you have negative emotions, and who wants that? So, you don't start, and you don't continue. Now, side note, if you listen to Episodes 6 and 7, they will give you some really good information about how to actually feel what you're feeling.

There is a bonus. I did have the idea that I would give you 10, and then, one more comes to my mind, so I will give you the bonus one. One of the bonus reasons why you won't start or you won't maintain, is that your reason, 'why' you want that habit change in the first place, is just really lukewarm.

It may have lit you up on day one or week one or month one or when you're talking to your friend. But when things get hard or when you anticipate that

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

it's going to be difficult, your compelling reason 'why' is no longer a steady pick-me-up.

So, all the obstacles to starting or maintaining some sort of habit change are some version of all-or-none, perfectionistic grandiose thought patterns, and/or a lack of experience or knowledge about how to allow feelings without trying to fix them or resist them.

What do you do, to navigate or avoid these common pitfalls? I'm going to segment this into what you can do, specifically related to starting. What you can do related to maintaining. And then, what applies to both.

Let's talk about starting. You actually start by starting. That means you need to start before you know everything. Start before you're ready. Start just to get moving. Because, remember, you're going to learn as you go. But you can't anticipate what you need to learn until you get going.

The next piece is, don't fall prey to self-induced confusion. Remember, confusion is an emotion; it's an emotional state. And as such, it's shaped or created by the ways that we think. When you think the thought, "I don't know. I'm not sure," these thoughts become your reality.

Check this out; when I think, "I don't know what to do. I don't know how to figure this out. I feel perplexed," I spend time wondering what to do. I think of other people who do know, and I compare myself unfavorably to them. I focus on the fact that I'm not them. I think of all that's in the way of clarity. I research, I google, I ask friends, I crowdsource.

I very much outsource my own wisdom. I take no action. I ask unproductive questions like, "How come everybody else seems to have it figured out? And ultimately, if you had to sum up the moral of the story when I do all this stuff, I block myself from knowing what to do and figuring things out.

So instead, deliberately choose clarity as an emotional state, and choose it on purpose. How do you do this? You choose the mental radio station that creates clarity for you. All you need is a modicum of clarity. An itty-bitty, tiny bit of clarity to inch you away from confusion.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

It sounds like this, “I bet I can figure this out. It's possible that I might be able to figure this out.” To steal from Marie Forleo, “Everything is figureoutable.” I'm figuring this out, no matter what.

Then, from those thoughts, you invoke a sense of focus, and your behavior will change. Likely, you'll ask productive questions like, “What are a few things I can do right now to get some useful information?” You'll make decisions and act on them. You'll stop wondering, stop researching, stop the analysis paralysis, stop the comparison to other people you know, and stop outsourcing knowledge.

You'll create a reality where you indeed do figure things out. So, instead of, “I don't know how to do this,” say, “I don't know how to do this, yet. And, I'm going to figure it out.” As my friend Ali Novitsky says, “Yet & and are both power words.”

Then you start by committing to taking one step. That means you just commit to taking the next best step and taking it now. So, those are some tips for starting.

Let's talk about tips for maintaining. To maintain habit change, you need to anticipate your unique obstacles and create plans for them. If it's emotions that overtake you, you need to find a self-regulation technique, a grounding practice. A way to complete the stress cycle, as the Nagoski sisters say in their book *Burnout*.

If it's a harsh self-critic on the back end of a perfectionistic plan that's not being followed 100%? Get coaching on the role your critic is trying to play. Reflect on, how can you not get in your own way, by being a jerk to yourself when things don't go perfectly?

The next tip is, regularly evaluate yourself. This means look back at the week and go; what went well? What didn't go so well? And, what am I going to do differently? This type of evaluation, I'm drawing from all the mentors of mine who have taught me how to evaluate things, and you can use it on your own habit change.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

The next thing for maintenance is celebrate progress like it's part of your job description. This is especially important if your first reaction, when I said celebrate progress, was to roll your eyes, I see you. Celebrating incremental progress, and really highlighting, savoring, and basking in wins is essential to maintaining change.

The next thing is, prioritize realistic changes. I'm talking about our changes that are 1% and 5%, instead of 100% different or 10 times different, from where you are today. Remember 1% changes every week accumulate. But when you yo-yo between going 100 mph over the top and doing nothing, it doesn't do anything but leave you exhausted. Commit to incremental, daily, and weekly changes.

I recently heard Corinne Crabtree, in an email, say, "How can I do just a little bit better today compared to yesterday?" I like to ask, "How can I do 1% more, a 1% change, this week?"

And then the last thing is, revisit your 'why.' What works one day may fall flat the next, so on a weekly basis, check in. Does your 'why' compel you to do what you need to do? Does it light you up? Or, does it need to be bolstered?

Now, let's talk about the overlap; the things that you can do to help you start and to help you maintain. For both of these, honing self-compassion and curiosity is essential. These are skills to practice, and using them is so high-yield.

What might it sound like to use self-compassion and curiosity? It might sound like this: Telling yourself, "You know what? Starting has not been easy for me in the past. So, it makes sense that this is unfamiliar. I wonder what it would be like to release perfectionism just a little bit, and celebrate a small win? Celebrate some progress today?" Honing self-compassion and curiosity will never lead you astray.

A concrete way to start and maintain any habit change starts with making a list of actions that you need to take. Then, you make a list of the feelings or

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

emotions that will drive you to take these desired actions. And then, you work backwards, to figure out what would you need to think to invoke these emotions. And then, you have your plan.

You find ways to practice these intentional thoughts that will create these intentional feelings, that will drive these intentional actions. And practicing these things literally is the simplest thing ever. It can be a thought written down on a sticky note, a reminder in your phone, a thought turned into an acronym as a password. You can enlist your kids to help you. You can enlist “Hey, Google,” or Alexa or Siri to help you remember these intentional thoughts.

And, you read or recall your new thoughts like they are lines in a play. It is truly just practice to install a new thought, to drive a new emotion, to drive desired actions, and create the result that you want.

Now, on the other hand, if, when you are starting or attempting to maintain a new habit, there are emotions that completely flood you... If you have a very intense stress response that you notice goes on, you need to get grounded and self-regulate. And don't even bother trying to find new thoughts and doing what I just told you to do, until you have created calm in your body, and you have soothed your central nervous system.

You do this by finding center in any sort of grounding or self-regulation exercise. You can even do it with deliberately distracting yourself. So, please, please, please keep in mind, if one of your challenges for starting or maintaining habit involves really intense emotions, you have to find a way to let that emotion pass. Find a way to find center or self-regulate, otherwise it just won't be that effective.

And then, once you do all this, as you're going through your process of starting or maintaining, when you notice challenges arise, when you notice one of those 10 or 11 obstacles, take note of them. Don't try to push them away or use willpower to overcome them.

Ep #58: 10 Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining Habit Change

Just notice them, get curious about them, and investigate them like you're a detective or a researcher trying to solve a riddle. Approach these challenges with that researcher's mind; tons of curiosity about, why these particular challenges come up? What these challenges create for you when they are completely driving your experience? And then, you get to get really creative about how you're going to choose to address them.

So, with all that said, now you know the top 10, or I should say 11, most common stumbling blocks for starting or maintaining change. And, some very practical tips for what you can do to avoid these obstacles altogether. Or, manage and address them when you notice them happening. Try all of these things out. See what you can tweak based on your unique obstacles.

And just keep in mind, application of the steps is exactly how you are going to create a life where you are in the driver's seat, no matter what life brings. If you need some help, come to the *Habits On Purpose* Facebook group, sign up for the *Habits On Purpose* newsletter.

On the HabitsOnPurpose.com website, you can sign up and get the email list. And if you have questions, you can always just press "reply." I read every email that comes through, and I will send you a reply.

Or, even better, sign up for one of the Internal Family Systems informed coaching sessions. You can do this by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/IFS.

Have a great rest of your week. I will catch 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 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.