

Ep #106 : Persistence & Perseverance without the Burnout



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 106. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you understand why you do what you do, so you can live your life on purpose instead of on autopilot.

Today's episode is about persistence, the things that support it and the things that block it. I'm going to discuss a take on persistence that's a little bit different than what we conventionally think about. So, if you want more sustainable persistence in your everyday life, keep listening.

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. For those of you who listen every week, I am so glad we have a standing date together. If you're new here, pull up the spot and get comfortable. A great place to start is Episodes 1 - 10.

And then, some of the most listened-to episodes when I went back and looked are, Episodes 41 titled "Your Hidden Habits," Episode 46 "How Intentional Habits Transform Your Life," and Episode 100 "Reconnect to What Matters Most." So, a huge welcome. And a huge thank you to you for not just listening, but for taking some time out for yourself when sometimes it's so much easier not to.

Now, another thing that it is so easy not to do, and I know this personally, is taking time to write a podcast review and then taking time to share this podcast with your friends. If you listen to this podcast and it speaks to you, or you learn something from it, or you're a regular Wednesday listener, or Thursday listener, it would mean so much to me if you would take a minute, scroll down, and leave the podcast a review.

Word-of-mouth sharing and real, authentic reviews helps the podcast get into the ears of people who would benefit from this kind of approach to habit. So, please, thank you, and all the rest.

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Now, on that note, I recently looked at the download stats for the podcast and I was pleasantly surprised to see that the podcast had crossed the 100,000 downloads mark. I saw that there are also some new reviews that I hadn't looked at in a while. So, here are some of the reviews from the last couple of months.

I would give a shout out to the people who wrote them, but some of them are those little usernames that are hard to pronounce. So, if these are you and I don't say your name, that's why.

Here's one. "This is my never miss podcast. The episodes are often very applicable to my daily life. They are perfectly sized bites to fit into my crazy daily life as a full-time physician, managing partner, wife and mom." Thank you so much for that, that's sweet.

This one, from Bridget G., says, "I absolutely love Kristi's podcasts. She's able to motivate and spark change while being gentle and nurturing." Thank you so much. "And she's a clear teacher who's able to put so many things I've always felt into words, making them so much less overwhelming. I'm so grateful for this podcast and all I've learned from it!"

KMRDOC says, "I love these podcasts and Kristi Angevine! Coaching with love and compassion- like listening or talking with your best friend. Real, honest and helpful. Real, honest and helpful! Listen and absorb her real life lessons- consider her group or personal coaching. You can't go wrong with any of them."

Reading these, I read them and think, "Damn, this is exactly what I was hoping for, this type of influence and impact and experience for my listeners, when I started the podcast that, frankly, I didn't think was possible in the beginning. And so, it's just really cool to see that things have reached and exceeded the vision that I originally had. So, thank you, all of you. Even if I didn't read your review, I read every single one of them and they do mean so much to me.

Now, onto today's topic, persistence, perseverance. What comes to mind when you hear those words? Maybe you think of inspirational people;

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Harriet Tubman, Virginia Apgar. Maybe you envision athletes or Nobel Prize winners or authors. Because we all have different ideas and connotations, we have to start by defining what this episode is actually about.

Persistence, as described by Peterson and Seligman, is defined as “a voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement.” I quite like that definition. Perseverance, when you look at Merriam Webster, is the continuum effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, discouragement, or opposition. And it's also steadfastness.

Both of these definitions, for persistence and perseverance, imply keeping at something even when it's hard, or even when it takes a long time, or even when there's opposition. And I think we could spend all day splitting hairs about the semantics and subtle differences between persistence and perseverance, but for now, for the purpose of this teaching, I'm going to use them interchangeably.

So, what I just shared the general meanings of the words. But today, I'm talking about something that has a special departure from these general meanings. Today, I'm talking about kind, open-hearted persistence. With that said, let me now clarify what I'm not referring to, what I don't mean.

I don't mean perseverance as tolerating the intolerable under the label of being “resilient.” I don't mean persistence associated with always being productive, always being busy, and conquering your to-do list efficiently.

When I say perseverance, I'm not referring to the kind of pushing through physical discomfort that we tap into to keep going on a marathon, or at the sprint at the end of a 10k. And I also don't mean that macho or robotic ‘show-up-and-do no matter what’ flavor.

The persistence that I want to talk about is the quieter, more sustainable kind. It's the kind of showing up with an openness to learning and a compassion towards the challenges that you go through. It is slower rather than fast. It's strategic without frenetic hustle.

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And instead of denial of the difficulties, open-hearted persistence has you purposely learning from what's difficult. It's keeping at something that's hard, while simultaneously acknowledging the hard, making space for the difficulties, and tending to all the internal challenges that surface.

The reason this distinction is so important is many high achievers equate perseverance with dogged determination, where you push through no matter what. Even at your own expense, as you stuff down your feelings and compartmentalize painful experiences.

This kind of perseverance is not without short-term benefits. It can get you through. It can get you through physical challenges, sleep deprivation, exhaustion when you've had a baby, long work hours, difficult classes, clinical rotations, etc.

And, by all means, if you are literally in a life-threatening situation, or you're doing some physical endurance event, and the only thing available to you at the time is kind of 'suck it up, buttercup, let's go soldier,' knock yourself out. That is perfect.

This short-term kind of harsh approach might be exactly what you need, if you're trying to survive the night in some cold conditions and falling asleep might mean death. Or you really want to get through that last mile at a certain pace.

But the same approach applied in life threatening or horrible situations, does not necessarily extend to ordinary, everyday life without some consequences. And the underbelly of this kind of persistence comes when we never slow down and revisit what was stuffed down and compartmentalized.

Most of the time, let's be real, that's what we do. We suppress, we forget, we push through, we squash down, and we keep on going. And later on, do we ever have time to revisit? Do we stop and look back? Stop and process? No. So, it's no wonder this can eventually lead us to burnout and to not knowing who we are, or what our purpose is, and having lots of unprocessed stress.

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I'm here to sell you on another way to think about persistence and perseverance in your life, and this is kind, open-hearted perseverance. This is counterintuitive, yet it is a much more sustainable approach. So, what is open-hearted perseverance?

This kind of perseverance is approaching and responding to challenges while simultaneously being honest about how you feel, being honest about what's difficult. It's deliberately acknowledging challenges and meeting yourself with kindness. And it calls on us to use failures and mistakes and struggles as moments of learning that are quite precious. And this type of persistence requires compassionate validation, along with keeping at it.

To discuss how to shift from the more conventional head down, ignore the pain, kind of perseverance to kind, open-hearted perseverance, we need to clear something up. Persistence and perseverance, they're not just a set of actions. They're also a mindset that drives a set of actions. Perseverance is as much about your thinking as it is about what you do.

And if you want to be more persistent, but you're not aware of this relationship, you're going to run the risk of focusing all your energy on what you think you should consistently do, and on all the doing. This can leave you vacillating between speculating on the best things to do and then a bunch of frenetic hustle.

As an expert at swinging between hustling and researching the best things to do, I know this pattern so well. I want you to think about thoughts as a fuel for your actions, kind of like gas is the fuel for a vehicle. If you put kerosene or water or some other non-gasoline fluid in a gasoline engine it is not going to get you anywhere, and it is going to mess up that engine.

So, if you want to be persistent, but you're thinking thoughts that are the equivalent of water in a gasoline engine, it won't get you anywhere good. Your thinking can drive hustle and compartmentalizing, or your thinking can drive kind, open-hearted persistence.

And you're going to know the difference between thoughts that serve you and the ones that don't based on two things. Number one, how you feel

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when you think the thoughts. And number two, what results happen downstream. So, let me give you an example to make this more concrete.

When I think the thought, “I am doing this, no matter what. Come hell or high water, I must do this,” and I feel laser focus and kind of a fierceness, I'm likely to get to work to dismiss minor nuisances, to focus on my mission, and I'm also potentially likely to dismiss stress, box up any anguish, squash down any anxiety, discouragement, negative emotions, so I can get back to that sort of ‘eye of the tiger,’ encouraged, determined focus.

This is going to lead me to do my work no matter what, and it also is really likely to leave untended stress living in the backroom of my psyche. Versus when I think, “I wonder what I'll learn as I go all in to do this, no matter what?” Where I think the thought, “This matters too much to steamroll over obstacles and challenges.”

These thoughts are likely to give me some determination, but determination that's tempered a bit, with maybe a side of curiosity, a side of care. I can feel focused, but also with clarity and openness. And this is a bit more nuanced.

This combination is going to lead me to focus on my mission, get to work, but probably won't lead me to compartmentalize or squash down hard emotions. Which, ultimately, is still going to have me persevering but I'm going to be doing it in an open hearted and kind way.

It's much less sexy than ‘let's fucking go’ or ‘bring it’ or ‘I'm doing this no matter what.’ But it avoids the pitfall, and decreases the chances of burnout and exhaustion. See the difference? All of this is based on the way I choose to think about my approach to something. Your thinking is the fuel for sustainable kind, open-hearted persistence, or the fuel for burnout.

Now, how do you cultivate kind, open-hearted perseverance? First off, you need to check in to see: Is the type of persistence and perseverance that you're tapping into to get through the hard things in your life right now, is it one that is leading you to perpetually compartmentalize and squashed down things or judge yourself for the difficulties?

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If it is, welcome to “The Club.” That is not a problem. But now you have an alternative. Now you know another way. So, here's some concrete things that you can do if you want to cultivate this different type of persistence.

First of all, expect that sometimes you're not going to want to follow through on something that you really want to do. Anticipate that obstacles will come up. And then, make realistic plans for what you're going to do when these inevitable obstacles come up. Planning in advance takes the pressure off of you to come up with some impromptu solution in the heat of the moment.

Then, monitor yourself for making the challenges mean something negative about your worth. Monitor yourself for thinking things like, “This is hard because I'm a bad person.” Notice if you make challenges mean something about your capacity, and say things like, “This means I'm a failure and I'm never going to be able to do it.”

These types of thoughts feel terrible. And when we feel terrible, and we recognize that our negative emotion is getting in the way of persisting in the face of something difficult, it is very easy to push those negative emotions aside, put them in a box, tape them up, put them in the back closet, and then keep pushing through.

Instead of doing this, kind, open-hearted perseverance requires you to be curious and compassionate while you continue to take action towards your goal. So, let's talk about a real example. Say you want to finish an article or a blog post or some sort of project.

Garden-variety perseverance might drive you to work on it every day with this white knuckled discipline, push down your doubts and tell yourself that you can sleep when you're dead and true dedication means you're going to suck it up and soldier on.

Kind, open-hearted perseverance means working on the project, maybe consistently, maybe not, and being strategic and fluid instead of rigid. Taking real breaks, acknowledging doubts when they surface, and then investigating them.

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What are these difficulties and doubts about? What are they signaling? Instead of pushing through fatigue by just sucking it up, you, eyes wide open, address the fatigue. Why is it there? What do you need? What will best support you as you do what you want to do? What's the equivalent, mentally and emotionally, of water and sunlight for a plant?

Kind, open-hearted perseverance doesn't have an underbelly. And despite what your ambitious, perfectionistic side might be saying to you right now, it doesn't lead to complacency or to being soft or to mediocrity. It's actually a much harder path to take because, frankly, it's unfamiliar. And because it requires such a counterintuitive approach.

Putting your head down and pushing through no matter what has a simplicity to it that can be attractive, but it eliminates making space for the difficulties and challenges and looking internally and understanding what's going on for you.

So, open-hearted, kind persistence, it sounds soft, but it's not. It calls on you to be strategic, to anticipate challenges, and to plan for them. And it's fueled by a mindset that drives feelings like committed, settled, steady, calm, focused, methodical. Rather than just pure excitement or gritty determination. Garden-variety perseverance has the potential negative consequence of suppressing and ignoring stressors. Whereas open-hearted persistence does not have a downside.

This week, how can you start cultivating an open-hearted persistence? Could it be that you acknowledge the challenges you've been dismissing? Could it be that you refrain from telling yourself that you should be able to handle things better, and instead, you take a pause and really sit with what's hard and tend to what you truly need, like you might do for a friend?

Let me know, I would love to hear how you do this. The way that we can connect is just go to HabitsOnPurpose.com. You'll see a little button that says "Join the Email List." When you join, you'll get emails from me so just press "reply" to any email. I can't wait to connect and to hear how you're cultivating open-hearted persistence.

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Have a beautiful week everyone, and I'll see you next week.

Are you a woman physician interested in being more intentional in life, more deliberate with your habits? Maybe you're feeling a bit frayed with all the pressures of work and life, and you've got the tendency to overthink, people please, second guess, and maybe you feel guilt whenever you do something for yourself? Perhaps charting takes forever, you bring work home, and you're never as present as you'd like? Maybe you scroll or shop or emotionally eat or use a drink to wind down more often than you want to?

If you want to feel less reactionary and more in the driver's seat of your life, you need to understand the root causes of the habits like perfectionism, people pleasing, numbing, ruminating, overcomplicating, and procrastinating. That's exactly what you can work on in the next round of the small group coaching program I call HOPP, Habits on Purpose for Physicians.

HOPP comes with 48 hours of CME, is a small group where there's a max of 30 physicians, and we meet weekly for six months. In Habits on Purpose, you get practical, deep dive coaching and teaching from me. I blend cognitive, somatic, and IFS approaches in a way that's accessible and applicable to your real life. You get a ready-made structure that you don't have to create on your own, and a community where you can connect with other physicians who are doing the same work.

Enrollment information can be found at HabitsOnPurpose.com/HOPP, and enrollment opens soon. Because spots are limited, signing up sooner as opposed to later is really smart, so that you can ensure you get a spot before they're all full. Also, if you want to join and the price is a barrier, do not hesitate to fill out the easy application to see if you can get a partial or full scholarship, this is linked on the main signup page.

In Habits on Purpose for Physicians, you'll unpack and unlearn old habits so you can create new ones in a sustainable way. You'll learn a skill set that you can use for life. So, I hope you'll join me. The signup page, with all the details, the dates, etc. is at HabitsOnPurpose.com/HOPP.

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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.