

Ep #107: What's Missing in Your Life?



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 107. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you understand the root causes of what you think and feel and do what you do, so you can live your life on purpose instead of on autopilot and on default.

Today's episode is about the habit of not noticing what's missing, and how to be more aware of what's missing in your life. Let's get started.

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'm bringing this episode to you right around the time that I'm doing some traveling. When I leave town, my daughter often tells me how much she's going to miss me. She gets what she calls the "missing feeling," which I take to mean as a longing for something that's not available, and kind of an ache that comes with something being absent.

She misses seeing me, talking to me, hugs, good nights, and just general access to what I hope feels like a soft-landing spot and love and fun. As I'm preparing for travel, and noticing that she doesn't want me to leave and noticing that she's going to miss me, it got me thinking, it is abundantly clear to her what she's missing.

She doesn't have to wonder about what she's missing. She's not confused about what she's missing. And she's not unclear about why she has this longing feeling. She knows that she's going to miss me. She immediately notices when I'm not there. And this clarity about what is missing is very different when it comes to our habits.

It is super easy to notice that we miss a person, but it is not so easy to realize what we're missing when it comes to the insidious patterned way that we live every day, day in and day out. Take perfectionistic thinking and insecurity as an example. When I am perpetually tense, perfectionistic, hard on myself, and vigilant, scanning for possible rejection, I may not even

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see my own anxiety and rigidity. I don't realize how harsh I'm being. In short, I don't see the forest through the trees.

Likewise, I'm unaware of what's missing. When I am perpetually striving for perfection I don't notice that I fixate on the goal, and I miss out on enjoying the process. I don't notice that there's no savoring, but missing out on seeing things that are excellent, albeit imperfect. When I'm always critical of myself it's not obvious that I'm missing things like levity and humor and kindness and play.

When I'm always scanning for potential external criticism or rejection I can forget that I'm missing internal acceptance and self-love. When I'm catastrophizing, not that I catastrophize very much, but when I'm catastrophizing I don't realize that I'm missing seeing all the ways that things might turn out neutrally, or turn out okay or positively.

Now, a similar phenomenon of not noticing what's missing happens with numbing habits. When we outsource stress relief, and when we outsource relaxation, and when we outsource contentment to things like our phones, or a few glasses of wine, and pizza, we don't notice what's missing.

When my miniature computer that happens to have calling features, aka my phone, when my minicomputer helps me wind down my own ability to wind down without a screen atrophies. But this shrinking internal skill isn't detectable. I might not even notice what's missing in my day is some ease or joy or feeling of autonomy or feeling in charge of my time.

All I see is that I had a draining, stressful day that seemed to have no end. And when I come home, the only solution I know is to get some space from that day. What better way than some quick dopamine from some sugar or some alcohol or my screen?

When we have the habit of using external things to change how we feel internally, when we have the habit of numbing, we don't recognize what we're missing out on in terms of internally creating the relief that we'd like. And we don't recognize that there are all sorts of things missing in our day leading up to the time that we want to numb.

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Listen and tell me if you've ever had this experience. You're plodding along, doing the normal adulting routine, and then you have a conversation with a friend and something they say turns a light on for you. All of a sudden, you realize that something has been missing.

Something in your day to day that used to be important to you is actually absent. Or say somebody that you know dies, or gets a really tragic, unexpected diagnosis, or you get a diagnosis. All of a sudden you see mortality in a way that wipes the fog off your lenses, and you clearly see what's missing from your experience.

Can you relate to this? In these situations, we get some sort of wake-up call, or a new awareness that brings our attention to what's missing that we didn't realize was missing. But what if we could notice what was missing with the same clarity that we notice a person being gone, or the same immediacy that we notice our electricity being off, in our everyday life?

There are a few ways, I think, really help you do this? First, and most simply, is to just ask the question: What is missing here? What is missing in my day? What is missing in my life? What is absent that I wish were present?

Now, you might be someone who needs to give yourself explicit permission to acknowledge what's missing. If you tend to say things like, "I know this is a first world problem, but..." you tend to minimize or dismiss things that you desire. This is for you. What you do, is you imagine the proverbial Fairy Godmother or the Genie's lamp. You imagine that you could be granted all the things that you deeply want.

What's on your list? Write down everything, include material things, include things about your relationship, include how your days would feel, activities that you would do, things that you would know how to do. Write it all down.

Now, after you've written it all down, then what do you do? Let's take something that is a quintessential luxury item, say on your list you have a Maserati. The way to find what core desire is behind the desire for this

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fancy vehicular marvel is to figure out what you get to experience and feel when you have that Maserati.

Would it be a feeling of posh luxury? Would you feel totally settled and well taken care of? Would it be self-confidence? Would it be the rush that you get from learning how to drift your car around a track? Did you perhaps always dream of racing Formula One cars or doing the Baja 1000, but you abandoned that dream for a more “sensible” career, and you want to get back to the literal act of driving a fast car?

Now, the reason to list all these things isn't just that you go through an exercise of listing things that you would like to purchase if you were to hit the lottery. But it's to use the items that you write down as a way to work your way back and get really clear on what you really want more of in your life that is currently missing.

For the Maserati example. Maybe, indeed, it's literally wanting to race vehicles. Or maybe it's just fun and freedom that you associate with that vehicle that you really crave. So, permission to dream about what you want granted. Write all the things down.

When your core want or core desire isn't clear when you look at your list, take every item that you're not clear about and distill it to the essence of what makes it a value to you. Do you want to be in better shape, so that you can travel and hike some trail in Spain because you love to travel and you are missing a feeling of adventure?

Do you want a new job, because deep down you want to be able to own your own time and be more creative as you generate an income? Do you want a pilot's license because you want to learn how to fly, or because a feeling of freedom is missing?

Do you want a car or certain clothes because of the things themselves? Or because of what you think you're going to feel when you have them? Or because you associate them with joy and fun, and joy and fun is actually what's missing?

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What is it about living in that town you want to move to that's actually the desirable thing that's currently missing? Is it access to yummy food? Is it access to the ocean? Like-minded people?

Or what is it about getting a dog that really calls to you? Is it a sign that you're missing some companionship? Or that you want built in walks and silliness in your day-to-day life? Do you want to learn how to play guitar because your life is missing music in general, or because you're missing having a hobby?

So, try out this Fairy Godmother/Genie in a Bottle exercise to jumpstart your desires and your wants, and then distill them down to what's behind them. Then just check in. What of these things that I really want are present right now and what's missing?

Now, the third way that I like to use to get perspective about what's missing is to catalog all the things that seem really hard right now. All the things that seem to take extraordinary effort. Say it's keeping your office organized, or picking out clothes to wear, or writing the first draft, or staying on top of charts in labs, or making time for sex and romance, or exercise.

What is on your list right now that you never get to, or it takes you a lot of energy for? What are you currently doing that's really draining? Dump all that shit out on a list and reflect. What's actually missing? Why is this stuff hard? Is exercise hard because you're exhausted and spread too thinly? Or is it because the kinds of things you call exercise are no fun?

Is getting your kids to bed or out the door one tense nag vest because you're not giving yourself enough time? Or is it because you're trying to control minutiae? Or is it because you're always so burned out from work that everything rubs you the wrong way?

Are your discharge summaries the bane of your existence because more tedious busy work is the last thing you want to do after a day that's filled with busy work, and what's missing is a feeling of agency? Or is it because you're missing a system and a routine just to knock them out?

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Or do you hate discharge summaries because you second guess everything, and you're worried what other people are going to think about your discharge summaries and your clinical management, and what's actually missing is confidence?

So, catalog all the things that take you extraordinary effort and find out why it is so hard? What is missing in your life that makes these things so draining?

You can also combine all three of these techniques into a general checking in with how you're feeling during the day. Just set a reminder to go off, say three or four times a day, for a few days. When it goes off, just check in. How am I feeling? Is there anything missing? Is there anything I wish would change? What core desire or core value is this reminding me that might be missing?

I recently realized that reading books was missing in my life. I have all sorts of books, I buy all sorts of books, I check books from the library, and I return many of them unfinished. And on one hand, I really enjoy reading a few things at once. On the other hand, I realized that I was not actually spending much time reading.

What was I doing instead of reading? Well, in residency I was reading other things, trying to stay awake, trying to get sleep where I could and just trying to survive. When my kids were tiny, while I was feeding them and diapering them and working and sleeping, and again, just trying to survive.

But more recently, I noticed I was just busying. I would sit down to read, and then I would recall that there's laundry to fold, or there's papers to tidy, or there's emails to check, or there's something with my family that sounded kind of interesting that I should maybe go do instead of reading. My habit of always doing something that had a very concrete clear result had served me well.

But this habit really didn't make it easy to sit down and curl up with the book for more than 10 or 20 minutes. Because what type of concrete result was

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that getting me? But knowing what's missing has alerted me to wanting to address it.

Now, identifying what's missing in your life may seem daunting, like you're going to unearth all the things you want but can't have, or you can't fathom how to get these things. But please, don't use this exercise as a way to go into a deep hole of despair, or as a whip to judge yourself for the things that aren't currently present.

The reason to identify what's missing is to give you a perspective and clarity about whether you're doing what you want to be doing, in the way you want to be doing it. And if you're not, to jumpstart your brilliant brain to figure out what's in the way.

Once you're aware of what's missing, you can figure out what's the obstacle in front of you that prevents you from getting it. And you can figure out what you need to do to navigate the missing. So, if like me going out of town, it's a temporary thing. my daughter will mitigate stress with daily phone calls, or noticing her emotions and self-regulating, or journaling.

Or if it's a longer standing deficit, what can you do right now to address it and change it? This might call on you to make tiny tweaks or bigger changes. For my reading situation, I've had to make sure I've checked work messages and done my Duolingo before I go to bed, so that when I'm in bed getting ready I have undistracted time carved out to read. That's a tiny tweak.

An example of a bigger change, for noticing that my life is missing more outdoor exploration and more unstructured downtime, I've had to reflect on all the ways that I've been over scheduling and overextending and over signing up for activities, and how that has an impact.

That's required the harder work of saying no to some really cool things. Like, not signing up for a mindfulness-based stress reduction course, stopping one of our kiddos instrument lessons, saying no to certain work conferences and retreats and speaking opportunities. That's been a much bigger change.

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So what's possibly missing for you, my friend, that you might not even notice in the blur of just getting through your day to day? How can you find your way back to more of that without having to hit the lottery? Let me know what you're missing.

The way you can do that is get on my email list. Go to HabitsOnPurpose.com, you'll see "Join the Email List," and then any email you get just press "Reply."

Learning what's missing in other people's lives has helped me see my own life better. So, I can't wait to hear from you.

Now, if you're a woman physician and you're interested in understanding your habituated patterns better so that you can start being more purposeful and understand more of what's missing in your life, keep listening to hear the details about enrollment for the next cohort of Habits on Purpose for Physicians.

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 habits like perfectionism... a perpetual harsh inner critic... 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

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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.

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.