

Ep #109: How to Make Being a Beginner Easier



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Ep #109: How to Make Being a Beginner Easier

Welcome to Episode 109. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you understand the root causes of why you think, feel and act like you do, so that you can live your life on purpose instead of on autopilot.

Today's episode revolves around the idea of being a beginner. Being a beginner is sometimes easy, and sometimes not so easy. Today, I'm going to discuss why it's not so easy, a brilliant idea from Brené Brown for what to do about these not so easy times, and how her technique relates to Internal Family Systems. 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.

Hi, everybody. Sometimes I wish these podcasts were live so I could say, "Hi, how are you?" Which is what I do when I get on the phone with somebody I love so much and I want to know how they're doing. So because I can't say "Hi, how are you?" and actually get your response back, I'm just going to settle for imagining what you're up to as you're listening.

If you're new to the podcast, welcome to the podcast. I hope that this is making your commute to work, your walk around the block, your exercise, or just your downtime, that much more pleasant. My goal is to remind you that you're not alone. What you're experiencing is very common, even if you feel like you're alone. And let you know that your habits are so much more malleable than you realize, even the ones that are deeply entrenched.

So, this episode revolves around the idea of being a beginner and how it's so commonly difficult. Now, over the last few years, I've actually been doing a lot of things that I'm really new at. Now, it's not atypical for me to do things I'm new at, I mean medical school, residency, learning to be a

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surgeon, learning how to deal with medical emergencies, that was a lot of being a beginner for many, many years.

Sometimes being new at things is kind of exciting. Like, one of my kiddos is learning electric guitar. And just so that I could make sure that he understood what he was doing, I kind of fell into learning a few things on the guitar.

Like, “Seven Nation Army” by The White Stripes, and part of the theme to that old private-eye TV series from the late 50s called *Peter Gunn*. I don't know if... I would break into song here, but it wouldn't make any sense. I'm definitely new at guitar. It's not something I thrive in, but being new there didn't feel bad.

But what has been really clear to me recently is that oftentimes being new at something is not so fun. It's like the opposite of fun. It is awkward. It is difficult. Things seem like they shouldn't be so hard. It's really, really easy to conclude that things will not ever get better. And if you're me, to conclude that ‘I'm never going to figure it out.’

Even though this doesn't really make logical sense, when you think about it rationally, it's sometimes easy to conclude that the difficulty of when you're doing something new is an indication of your capacity and your capability. It's a very fixed mindset.

Now, given my personal tendency to dismiss challenges, like I talked about in a recent episode, sometimes I've not actually even acknowledged the difficulty that I've experienced being new at things. But the truth is this, new things are hard.

And since becoming a coach, and a business owner, and an entrepreneur, I'm quite often new at things, and quite often not loving the experience. So, I have lots and lots and lots and lots of opportunities to notice what my default experience is when I am new at something.

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For me, one of the most reassuring things ever, is that sense of common humanity, especially that sense of commonality that comes from finding out that people you admire also grapple with the same angst that you have.

And this is one really big reason that I love group coaching. People will share things that you've been through and then you feel less alone. Or people will put to words something that you didn't know how to describe, and instantly you feel like they have seen you and they have named an experience that you thought you were alone in having.

This reassurance, and this common humanity feeling, is exactly what I felt when I heard Brené Brown share that she doesn't love being new at things. Today's episode topic is inspired by a piece Brené Brown did. Now, if you haven't heard this particular podcast episode she did, this episode with me is a bit of a spoiler.

So, if you want to stop, and go back and listen to her original version first, it's the inaugural episode of her podcast, titled *Unlocking Us*. It's only on Spotify, but it's the March 2020 episode called "Brené on FFTs." We've got it linked in the show notes, if you want to just listen to this and go back to listen to hers.

Before I go on, I'm going to give you a moment to press pause, if you do want to hear her first before I spoil it a little bit, and then once you've listened to her, come on back. That should be long enough for those people who wanted to go.

So, the premise for Brené Brown's episode is that she doesn't love being new at things. And she talks about a strategy related to FFTs, which I'll explain what they are in just a minute. Today, what I want to do is I want to dig deeper into the strategy that she shares. I want to relate her wisdom to some of the ideas in coaching and to the framework of Internal Family Systems.

Here it is, the 30-version of her 38-minute podcast, "New is hard, and we don't like discomfort." To paraphrase Brene being new at something is hard

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because it involves vulnerability. She describes vulnerability as the combination of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. And shares that being new and doing something for the first time is the epitome of vulnerability.

So now, FFT. What is FFT? This is your moment to turn the volume down; make sure there aren't any smaller people around you that you don't want to hear any sort of explicit words. Because FFT means "Fucking First Time." Fucking First Time sums up the awkward, complicated, clunky feeling of being out of control, and having uncertainty and angst that comes with being a beginner.

Her advice for how to navigate an FFT... or if you have children and you want to call it what she suggests a TFT, for "Terrible First Time"... is this. First of all, just name it, name your FFT, and then do three things. One, we can normalize it, "Oh, this is exactly how 'new' is supposed to feel. This is uncomfortable because being brave is uncomfortable."

Two, we can put it in perspective. "This feeling is not permanent, and it doesn't mean I suck at everything. It means I'm in the middle of an FFT around this one thing."

Three, I can reality check my expectations. "This is going to suck for a while. I'm not going to crush this right away."

Now, this strategy of an FFT, and the three things to do about it, this alone can be a game changer. So, if you want to just soak that in for a second, or rewind about a minute and relisten to it, go for it. What I want to do today, is take her wisdom as a jumping off point and discuss why being new may feel hard, and why the strategy she articulates for an FFT works so, so well.

So, let's start with this. First off, I would be remiss if I didn't address this one elephant in the room. Just because doing new things that we don't already know how to do is commonly experienced as feeling off-kilter and awkward

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and out of control, doesn't mean that being new at something is intrinsically and universally hard.

It's hard to be new at something because of the automatic thoughts, beliefs, and feelings that bubble up to the surface. It's hard because of whatever different parts of our psyche are activated in the context of being new at something.

Being new, it's neutral; learning, messing up, not knowing the best steps, getting back up again. All neutral, until we have a thought about it. Until we interpret it, or until we make those experiences mean something about us. Which explains why doing things that are new to you are not always excruciatingly hard.

I'm new at playing guitar. But when I started trying to pick out the theme to *Peter Gunn*, I didn't have the same angst and anxiety and catastrophizing that comes up when I'm trying something new in my business. Think about times for you, when you have been new at something and it has felt really painful.

And then, think about times where you have been new at something and it's just been fine, like a non-issue, no big deal. The reason why there's a difference between those things is new things aren't always FFTs. And the reason for that is, we create FFTs by the way we think about them, and by what parts of us show up in those contexts.

So, this is a segue into explaining why the FFT strategy that Brene Brown mentions, of naming, normalizing, getting perspective, and reality checking expectations is so helpful. And this is where we get to use both cognitive psychology concepts, and Internal Family System, or IFS, ideas.

To recap, being new at something is neutral, then we have some thoughts about it. Thoughts, while doing something that at, shape our experience while we're in it. Thoughts after the fact, cement that narrative we have about being new at things.

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If our thoughts are, “I’m never going to get this. There must be something wrong with me that is so hard. I should know how to do this. It’s not that hard, right?” With those thoughts you’re going to feel out of control, stressed, defeated, overwhelmed, discouraged, inadequate, anxious, and so on.

Now, what usually happens is this: after time, after practice, after repetition, and after learning, our thoughts shift to something like, “You know, I can handle this. Even the unpredictable things, they’re kind of familiar. I basically know what I’m doing.” And underneath those thoughts might be some kinder beliefs like, I trust myself to figure things out.

When we’re in that space, we can look back and say, “Ah, time and practice and repetition, and all the things I learned, that’s what helped me feel confident and capable.” But here’s the thing, the real thing that makes us feel confident and makes us feel capable, is not the passage of time, or the repetition, or even the learning.

It’s what we are more easily able to believe about ourselves in the context of having more familiarity, more reps, and more time doing things that make us feel better. It’s the presence of some beliefs, and the absence of other beliefs, that drives confidence.

In IFS, we talk about our psyche and our mind as a multiplicity of parts. There are parts that feel anxious. There are parts that feel worried. There are parts that get angry. So, when it comes to doing something that we’re new at, in language, there are parts of us that feel anxious.

Parts that feel worried about not figuring something out. Parts that think they’re not good if they can’t get things right the first time. Parts that experience unfamiliarity as unsettling. And parts that become really vigilant and controlling with all the details, so that they can prevent feeling unsettled.

When all of these parts are present and really dominant, it’s like a lens through which we see the world. And a main concept in IFS is that when a

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part is present and really blended with us, we see the world through that part's eyes.

So, when we have an FFT, each of us has our own unique but pretty common crowd of parts that show up. There's the part that says, "I should know what I'm doing. There is something wrong with me that I don't."

There's a part that catastrophizes about the future. "It's never, ever going to work out. I'm never going to get there. When this doesn't work out everybody is going to laugh. I'm going to be rejected, and I'm never going to be able to leave the house again."

There's a part that compares to others, and unfavorably so. "So-and-so seems like she has it all together. What's my problem?" And there's a part that swoops in and tries to control all the things; prevent problems, research, crowdsource, hold tightly to figuring things out ASAP.

Now, let's compare these parts to what is present when proficiency is there and familiarity is gained. Well, after time, when the FFT doesn't feel so much like an FFT, the parts I just mentioned are quieter. Or they are temporarily on summer break until the next "fucking first time."

What's more present is what IFS calls "Self, with a capital S." Self is shorthand for several qualities. I'm going to list them all here, so that you can notice the ones that you experience when you're no longer new at doing something. Now. There's an easy way to remember them. There are, conveniently, 8 that start with C, so eight C's. And 5 that start with a P, five P's. And then there's some bonus ones.

"Self with a capital S" is not a part, and is present when any of these qualities I list off are present: Curiosity, compassion, clarity, confidence, calm, connection, courage, creativity. Now for the P's: Playfulness, presence, persistence, patience, perspective. And I'm going to add in deep gratitude, love, and acceptance.

So, let's use this concept of "parts and Self" to dig into exactly why the Brené Brown FFT strategy is so effective. When you name, normalize, get

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perspective, and reality check your expectations, it is so effective because it helps us pause. It helps us unblend, or separate from, the storm of parts that have taken over our psyche.

And it helps us access “Self with a capital S.” Because when you can separate from the parts of you that are struggling in an FFT, you make space for the qualities of “Self with a capital S” to spontaneously emerge. Just like how the sun can be seen when the clouds shift away.

Or how you can hear that one person in a meeting that has a great idea but is really soft spoken and has been talked over and interrupted or “mansplained.” As soon as everybody gets quiet, you can actually hear what they have to say.

So, let's take each FFT strategy one at a time and discuss how “Self with a capital S” is more present. First of all, naming the FFT. When you name it, you give yourself the chance to stop and recognize your surroundings. Naming helps you identify your context, and locate yourself in it, like you might locate a tiny speck of yourself on a GPS map.

When you name the situation you're in. It opens the door to a bit of calm and a bit of clarity. “Oh, this is where I am. This is what's going on. I'm in an FFT, that's why I feel like this.”

Then to normalize it, to normalize being new at something, is to access self-compassion and go, “Of course, I'm feeling discouraged. Of course, I'm feeling confused. Of course, I'm feeling overwhelmed. I'm in the middle of an FFT. The truth is, I'm not supposed to know what I'm doing. Even though a part of me thinks I should.”

When you normalize what you're feeling, you're also normalizing the parts of you that showed up, that were creating those feelings.

Now, on to getting perspective. Perspective is straight out of IFS, because it's a quality of Self. So, what is perspective? In one way, perspective is the way you look at things, your vantage point. The way you think. The way you understand or consider something.

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In another way, if something is *in perspective* it means that you can see that thing as a part of a whole. And when you have perspective, you're said to be able to consider something in a wise, reasonable, and holistic way. So, when you stop and deliberately give yourself a chance to get perspective, this is "Self with a capital S" in action. It's invoked on purpose, and brings clarity and understanding.

And when you have perspective, it's easier to access calm. It's easier to feel self-compassion. It's easier to be patient, and it's even easier to be playful. Like, "Okay, okay, I'm doing this new thing and I think the world's going to end. But it's just because I've got these blinders on I think I should be an expert immediately. Okay. Alright. I don't think that's how it works for anyone."

Now, lastly, reality checking the expectations. This calls on us to remind ourselves of what is true. Sounds like, "Since I'm new at this, I should frankly expect that it's going to take 10 times longer than it's going to take me in the future. I can also, perhaps adjust my standards that I'm holding myself to today, in a way that doesn't leave me feeling like I'm floundering all the time."

When you reality check expectations, you're being objective and this breeds more clarity, more calm, more confidence. So, the brilliance of the FFT strategy from Brené Brown... name it, normalize it, get perspective, and reality check your expectations... in my opinion, lies in the way that it helps you separate from parts that have all sorts of self-limiting beliefs, and all sorts of difficult emotions that they carry, so that you can tap into the wisdom of those qualities of "Self with a capital S."

So, I have two closing questions for you: Where in your life do you need a strategy to access qualities of "Self with a capital S"? Do you need it with a Fucking First time Experience? Is your need for a strategy when you're facing decluttering your house? Is it before you jump into a job search?

When you're going to be spending a long time with relatives that you feel tension with? Before making a big decision? Before setting a boundary?

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Before quitting something important? Where do you need a strategy to separate from the parts that are very present, and tap into those qualities of Self?

And the second question I have for you is: What kind of strategy can you create for yourself, that will permit you to access the Self qualities when you are struggling? Now, I vote that you just keep it easy. You can totally borrow Brené Brown's FFT strategy of name it, normalize it, get perspective, and reality check your expectations. But there are infinite strategies that you can use to access these qualities of Self.

In a future episode, I think I'm going to dive into what some of these might look like. But for now, you get to use your brilliant brain and find what's going to work for you. Now remember, the qualities of Self are as follows: The eight C's, the five P's, and some extras.

Curiosity, compassion, clarity, confidence, calm, connection, courage, creativity, playfulness, presence, persistence, patience, perspective. And then I like to add in acceptance, gratitude, and love. What kind of strategy can you create to help you tap into these?

That's all for this episode. I will see you next week.

Well, I hope you found that super valuable, and I just want to add a couple more things.

The Habits on Purpose for Physicians small group coaching program is currently enrolling, there are a few more days when you can enroll. We start on March 8th.

If you're a woman physician, who's interested in being more intentional in your life and more intentional with your habits, this is for you. 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.

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That's exactly what you can work on in the next round of the small group coaching program I call HOPP. The next round runs from March to September of 2024. 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/Habits On Purpose](https://HabitsOnPurpose.com/HabitsOnPurpose). Enrollment is open for just a few more days, as we're getting started Friday, March 8th. 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.