

Ep #110: Amplify Your Strengths Instead of Improving Your Weaknesses



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 110. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you deeply understand the root causes of why you think, feel and do what you do, so you can live your life more on purpose instead of on autopilot.

Today's episode is about doing what comes easy to you, and limiting how much you work on improving your weaknesses. You heard that right. What if your habit was to do more of what you're good at, and to not spend so much time and effort on overcoming what you're not so good at? 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, everyone. I just finished up something really fun. I just finished up the 10-Day Habit Reset. This is something new for me. And essentially, it was 10 days of sharing fundamental habit change ideas through emails, as well as through texts. And the texts were really amazing, because they came with prompts and reminders for little concrete things that the people who received the text could do throughout their day.

It was really fun, and I got a lot of positive feedback for it. So, if you didn't do it this time, or if you're eager to do it again, I'm going to be running the 10-Day Habit Reset again, likely in the next few months. So, just keep your ear to the ground for that.

If you're not on the email list, you can go to HabitsOnPurpose.com. Sign up there, you'll hear about all these things as they come out. The next little update I want to give you before I dive in, is that I'm really delighted to have just gotten started with the next round of my small group coaching program.

This program is called Habits on Purpose for Physicians, and this particular group is just a great group of women physicians. As of the airing of this

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episode, we've just gotten started with our first official call. So, if you're in that group, I'm so glad you're there.

That said, we have a few spots left. So, if what you hear on the podcast resonates with you... If you find yourself struggling to apply the things that you intellectually know would make your life better... If you have habits like people pleasing, second guessing...

If you find boundaries to be difficult... If you feel really reactive or have lots of all-or-none thinking... If your norm is to have a lot of overwhelm and guilt in your day, or you live in a place of constantly overthinking and overdoing more than you would like to, feel free to reach out.

You can learn more about the program when you go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/HOPP, or you can just email me. My email is Hello@habitsonpurpose.com. Just shoot me an email and say, "Hey, I'd like to hear more about Habits on Purpose for Physicians," and we can go back and forth and talk about if it would be a good fit for you.

Or if you prefer texts like I do, my business texting line is +1-541-293-6213. You can text that number anytime, ask me any questions, share anything that you'd like to share, and I will get back to you. I do get back to people within business hours, on Pacific time, during the week. So, make sure you put your phone on 'Do Not Disturb' accordingly so no notifications come in at uncivilized hours for you.

But if you'd like to text asking questions about Habits on Purpose for Physicians or questions about the 10-Day Habit Reset, you can text me at plus +1-541-293-6213 anytime.

Now, I've been reflecting a little bit on my old life and my current life. My old life was more location based. And when I left for travel, it was mostly for vacation and for pleasure. In my new life, travel is a part of my work. And when I leave town, it's not just for vacation and pleasure, but it's for vacation, pleasure, and work.

I just got back from a conference that was put on by Bonnie Koo. I interviewed Bonnie here on the podcast back in Episode 81. And she

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interviewed me on her podcast called *Wealthy Mom MD* in Episode 172. We'll link both of those in the show notes.

But the conference that Bonnie put on was really great. It was a great location. There were interesting speakers. They were talking about money and talking about the mindset around money. And I got to meet some really fun new people. And if you're listening, hello, I'm so happy that we met.

And perhaps most importantly for me, when I traveled to this conference, I had the chance to catch up with some friends that I don't see enough of. Two of these friends are Devin Gimbel of the *Point Me To First Class* podcast, and Ali Novitsky of The FIT Collective. These two women, they're not just friends, but they're people I learned so much from.

The other person I was delighted to see, I got to meet somebody that I've known for years and I got to meet her in real life for the first time. This is the amazing Maggie Reyes. She's a marriage and relationship coach extraordinaire, host of her own podcast, *The Marriage Life Coach Podcast*, and she was a speaker at the conference.

Being able to spend some time with the three of them, it is very clear that these women know their strengths. They know what they're good at, and they're crystal clear on what they love to do.

Take Devon for example, she was a dermatopathologist turned life coach, who then took a whole new career path to be a business owner for a business that revolves around her passion for using credit card points to open doors to international travel.

Maggie, she used to work in hospitality, and she's now a relationship expert who speaks at national events about communication and about optimizing relationships.

Ali, she's a neonatologist turned obesity medicine physician, who used to geek out over all things nutrition, and I believe as a kid used to make exercise videos. And her business is now focused entirely on empowering people with fitness, nutrition, and mindset work.

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No doubt all three of these women could have done great things in their original fields, in their original jobs. But in my view, they have a much more meaningful impact and they have so much more fun doing what they do now. Because they found what they enjoy, they found what comes easily to them, and they turn that into their vocation.

Which gets me to the topic of today's episode, doing more of what comes easy and less of what's hard. So, if you listen to no more in the podcast and take nothing else home, the main message is this: What comes easy for you? Figure that out and go do more of it. What do you love? Do more of that. What don't you love? What do you dread? What do you have to drag yourself out of bed to do and slog through? What is the bane of your existence? Find ways to do less of this or none of this.

Now, conventional advice says identify your weaknesses and work on improving them. Get better at the areas where you have the most room to grow. If it's hard, that's okay, just keep working at it. Improving your weaknesses is how you're going to be the most effective and most impactful in the world.

Well, what if this is all backwards? What if life is more full, you're more effective and more impactful when you stop trying to get better at things that are difficult for you. And instead you put your energy into doing more of what you love and what comes naturally.

Now before I dig in, I want to name two objections that often come up when I talked about this idea of de-emphasizing weaknesses and stopping all this improvement on things that you're not good at.

People often say, "Now, aren't we supposed to always improve? Isn't it bad to just ignore what we're good at? Don't my weaknesses need to be solved? I mean, it's not good to have these problems, right?" Or they'll say, "Well, I hate going to work. I loathe EMR. I hate my inbox discharge summaries. I dread dealing with required education modules, that are just b.s., at work. I hate meetings."

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I don't like cleaning my house. I don't like ferrying my kids to other activities. I hate imaginative play. I do not like volunteering at school. Are you just saying I will stop doing all that? Should I just get myself fired or quit my job? It takes everything I've got to go exercise, to keep my house clean, am I just supposed to let all that go?"

Or conversely, they'll say, "So, it's easy to eat dessert and get drunk and skip work and be late to everything? Are you saying that you should just embrace this kind of delinquent, inner gluttonous sloth?" My friends, as you can imagine, that is not what this idea is about. Those things are a distortion of this idea.

Those things are taking a fundamental premise, taking it to an extreme, and then writing it off. And this phenomenon, in and of itself, of taking a fundamental premise, taking it to an extreme and then writing it off, is a habit that many of us have.

We'll hear an idea, quickly see the ways that it doesn't work, then apply it to an extreme situation, or over generalize it and see how there's a bunch of holes in it. And then, we conclude that it's hooey, before we actually sit with and consider how it might actually make good sense.

Now the second objection, when people hear this idea of amplifying strengths and putting less energy into improving weaknesses, is they'll say, "I am not good at anything that's special. I don't have anything that I like so much that I could just do that. What I'm good at I don't enjoy. And what I do enjoy, well, that's nothing I can just easily do more of. Nobody wants more of that." If you notice this, please just know this is a sign that you're simply warming to a new idea. I'll explain that as we go along.

Now, most of us have been indoctrinated to believe that working on things that we can improve is good. And in some ways, it is fine. If you struggle to leave the house on time and you want to improve that experience for yourself, you can make some modifications that maybe reduce what you need to do in the morning, or increase the time that you have to do them, and then you can have a much more peaceful experience of leaving the house on time.

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This is not the kind of improvement I'm talking about. If you find something to be a hassle, you want to learn how to make it easier for yourself, great. The habit and tendency I'm referring to, is the pattern of assessing where you struggle, and putting most all your energy into fixing that. Instead of putting your energy into maximizing what you already do well, and what you already love.

So, let's start here. Take a minute and just think, what things do you naturally gravitate toward? What subjects do you love? What activities do you enjoy? What do you love to do? What kinds of things come easy for you? What kinds of things do people say, "Wow, I wish I could do that, like you do." And you think, "This is nothing."

What do you wish you had more of in your every day? Do you love to study and learn and synthesize lots of information and ideas? Or do you like to organize and plan and get details tended to? Are you more of a learn from history type of person, or a dream big with visions of how things could be in the future type of person? Do you see obstacles with ease? Or do you see idealized outcomes with ease?

Do you love fashion and color theory? Or do you love travel in different cultures? Or do you love both? Is your idea of a great day sitting in a coffee shop or at a park or being at the library just reading and thinking and people watching? Or is your happy place talking, interacting, and connecting with lots of people? When you think of fun, do you think of networking events? Or do you think solitude with coffee?

Do you love fitness and nutrition, like my friend Ali? Do you love learning about psychology, sociology, and why people repetitively do the things they do, like me? Do you love the intricacies of interpersonal dynamics, like Maggie does? Or travel and creatively finding ways to do more of it without breaking the bank, like Devon? It doesn't matter what you find easy or what you love, it matters that you take time to identify it and that you recognize it.

Now, let's talk about why. Why identify, and then maximize what comes easy for you, and maximize what you love? Why does it matter? Well, when you focus all your energy on areas of weakness, you're going to spend a lot

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of time and energy to make marginal gains. Whereas, when you focus on your strengths and things that light you up, with significantly less effort you can get more done.

This is a main idea that underlies the Clifton Strengths Finder, or the Gallup Strength Assessment. Take what you already love and what you already do with ease, and titrate up on that, while letting go of the things that aren't so easy and that you don't love so much.

And when you do this, you will be happier, and you'll harness your precious time and your energy in a way that lines up with what you're good at. Which lets you be more you on a regular basis. And when you are more yourself, your whole self, when you bring the whole of you to your life, I believe you have the most personal satisfaction and joy and that you do the most good in the world.

But the tendency to focus on solving weaknesses is everywhere. And in my line of work, I see it happen in four main patterns and habits. Number one, the tendency to solve for weaknesses, as opposed to putting your energy into your strengths, looks like taking inventory of your life and only seeing the problems and the things that are not so great.

For example, a researcher bemoans how hard it is to write grants and stay on time with deadlines, and doesn't even notice her ease with connecting concepts in new ways. Or envisioning how a study would ask an interesting question. So, the majority of her efforts go into slogging through books on technical writing, attending grant writing conferences, listening to podcasts on how to manage your time better.

Or when posted the question, what are your goals? Out pours all the problems that one wants to solve. Not the list of things that are going well that they might want to do more of or amplify.

Number two, focusing on solving for weaknesses underlies the habit of second guessing. We'll think, "If it comes easy, it can't be right. Surely, I'm missing something. Maybe I'm clueless here. Maybe I should have done this other thing instead."

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Number three, focusing on weaknesses instead of strength comes out when you always picture the worst-case scenario and you don't give equal airtime to the best-case scenario.

And number four, it also shows up when you find yourself to be a perpetual self-improvement project. You'll say things like, "Well, once I figure out my procrastination and my fear of public speaking, then I'm going to start eating better. And the next thing that I want to work on is..."

So, here's my question for you. Where in your habits do you notice that you focus on improving your weaknesses instead of doing more of what are your natural strengths? Now, for some people even discussing doing what you love, discussing what's easy and in line with natural strengths, will bring up a lot of cynical self-talk.

Like, "Psht, anyone can do this. There's nothing special about X-Y-Z. I'm just doing what I do. What I love is just ordinary. It's run of the mill. There's nothing extraordinary that comes from this. No one cares. What I enjoy, it's not a strength worth mentioning. Frankly, it's silly." If this is you, this is simply your cue that you are actually onto something; you're onto something valuable.

As soon as you start dismissing something that you love or something that's easy as silly or mundane, that very thing is a strength. And I guarantee you, not everybody does it with as much ease as you.

What's entailed in focusing on strengths and focusing on what you love? To do it is not easy, because it means you're going against the grain of what we usually do. So, the first step is knowing what you love and knowing what your strengths are.

The way you can do this is you can do a values assessment. You can think about what you want more of. You can go back and listen to those questions I asked you at the very beginning. You can take the Clifton Strengths Finder. The key is, you need to know.

And once you do, then you need to infuse more of that into everything you do. When faced with choices, you check in: Will this bring more ease or

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more difficulty? When deciding on how to use your time, you get to be really clear on maximizing what you already do well, and minimizing or perhaps even eliminating what you don't.

If something is an energy drain and you notice it quickly, then you have to find a way to make it less draining; to delegate it, or to remove it completely. With everything you do, you ask: Is this in line with what I love and find easy, or not? When it comes to a decision: What would I love? What would be fun? If I knew somebody would pay me for this, what would feel really great to do?

Now, I'm going to close with an example to make this really clear. And this is an example of me. As many of you know, and it is probably clear from just how things are on the podcast, I love to learn. I can't help but see ideas that on the surface are unrelated, and then put them together in a way that is new.

I love to read. I love to write. I love to teach. I love to listen to people's stories. It is very easy for me to be empathetic. And I can usually see the best-case scenario and the ideal scenario much more quickly than I can see the pessimistic outcome. Which is fascinating, because I do have this amazing penchant for catastrophizing.

But despite this ability to catastrophize, my default is always to see the ideal as opposed to the less ideal. Now, I don't love data collection. I don't love statistics. I don't love working through complex chemical equations or complex long math. I don't find a state of flow in the microbiology lab or in the execution of administrative tasks. Strategic thinking and analysis of patterns is okay, but it's not my favorite.

I find more joy with ideas, and why we think and feel and act as we do, more than I do with manipulating concrete things. So, no surprise, my top Clifton Strengths are Learner, Empathy, Relator and Positivity. So, it makes sense that when I was a full-time physician, I spent a lot of my time teaching patients what I knew, making sure that they understood things thoroughly, making sure they felt seen and understood.

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That was wonderful, and it also got me way behind in my day because I would spend time doing those things. Now, also no surprise, I love planning. Because of how it blends positivity and learning. And when I do things that allow me to learn, to relate, and to see the positive, like teaching and coaching, it's really easy for me. It lights me up. It energizes me. I wake up in the morning wanting to go read, learn, study and write about anything related to psychology.

Versus if I needed to spend all day poring over data, or financial trends in marketing or networking with strangers, it would totally suck the life out of me. So, knowing this, when it comes time to do my taxes, and to do an analysis of my bookkeeping, I get help from people who love that type of work.

When it comes to taking care of the tech side of my business, I know the fundamentals and I outsource as much as I can. And in my life when I would do things that took an enormous amount of effort for me, like medical research projects, I would procrastinate. I would research really slowly. I would take forever to make decisions and actually complete tasks. Everything would take me forever.

In contrast to doing something I'm passionate about, like, say, talking about socialization aspects of perfectionism, and sharing that in a workshop or talk. It's so much easier, no comparison.

So, I want you to imagine that your day was filled with more of the things that you love, more of the things that you find easy, and less of the things that you don't. Imagine that you no longer spend as much time worrying about what you're not good at, and improving these things, and instead you put your efforts into doing more of what comes easily for you.

What would change? Really take a minute and sit with that. What about your life, as it is right now, would change? Would you make a career shift? Would you go for a goal that you've been postponing because it seems silly. How would your day to day be different?

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Now I want you to enjoy letting these ideas sink in, and see what comes up for you, and then I will talk to you next week.

If you love the podcast, could you do me a favor? I would love it if you would share this podcast with a friend. It would mean so much to me if you would take a couple of minutes, go to iTunes, and leave me a review. Sharing with a friend and leaving a review means more than you could possibly imagine, in terms of helping the podcast get into the ears of those who need it most.

Thank you and I'll talk to you next week.

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.