

Ep #156: Tiny Experiments: The Antidote to Rigid Plans, Shoehorning and Multitasking



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to episode 156. I'm Kristi Angevine and I'm your host. This podcast is here to help you understand why you think and feel and act as you do so you can start to untangle habits that insidiously take more than they give. And then learn to rewire new ones that help you be more deliberate in your everyday life.

Multitasking, shoehorning, and an unyielding commitment to an original plan are three related habits that insidiously take more than they give. This episode is all about overcoming them with a small but powerful technique. 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, everybody. Welcome to the podcast, especially if you are new. I want to give you a very personal welcome and tell you just thank you for checking it out. My goal for you is to hear an interesting idea and learn practical ways to apply them so that you not only understand yourself a bit better, so that you have a way to implement that understanding with a tangible technique or tool that helps put you back in the driver's seat.

And all of this is quite self-sufficient because I really want to leave this place better than I found it. And with all the challenges and troubles we have in the world, I need all hands on deck. So I want you operating at your best so that you can pitch in, no pressure.

So if we've just recently met, maybe we met or we chatted at the Women's Professionals Wellness Conference in the Bahamas, you know who you are. I love knowing you're here and I hope this episode is really valuable for you.

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Now the other morning I was the first one up in my house as I usually am and I was gathering my things so I could get settled to sit down with my coffee, my computer, my books, etc. And all these items they were kind of in different spots because I had a lot of things in my backpack. I'd had an extra bag where I'd put a couple things that could carry some food, but then I ended up stuffing some other things in there I needed. And I was getting all this together so I could get myself to my favorite place to sit.

And I found myself tiptoeing around, keeping the lights down, because not only do I like it dark to ease into the day, but I have a part that thinks that when the lights are on in this house, that somehow that light will seep past the doors and wake my family. And not only was I tiptoeing around in an effort to be quiet for the humans, I was also trying to be quiet for the cats in my house, because as soon as they hear people are awake, they start meowing, and sometimes they will wake up our kind of easily startled canine, and then there will be noise that kind of interferes with my ability to have this cocoon of silence.

So all this is to say, I'm tiptoeing around in the dark, and I had a particular destination in mind and I grabbed my laptop, a planner, a sweater, this bag that had this additional miscellaneous stuff in it that I thought maybe I would need. And I had made this really awesome cup of hot, fresh coffee and I'd put it in this big thermal mug. You know, I had a lid and all the things.

And as I'm holding all this stuff, I realized that I forgot something, and I needed to backtrack to find whatever it was. I think it was like a charger or maybe some headphones. And I wasn't sure exactly where they were, so I ended up walking backwards to retrace my steps and find it.

So both my arms are full, the coffee is tucked between my laptop planner and my chest, there are things under both my arms, that bag is hanging on one of my arms, My phone is clutched in one hand and well, no surprise, I could not easily find whatever I was looking for.

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So it's dark. I'm trying to be quiet. I'm literally walking slowly and softly, not only to be quiet, but to balance my stuff. So I couldn't easily turn on a light switch, or if I could, I didn't. And it was kind of hard to see using the light of my phone because I was trying. And so like a stealth cat burglar, I kept at it and I found what I needed. And it didn't take that long. But I'm curious, have you ever done this, carry too much kind of silliness and then had it backfire?

Well, here's the thing, about halfway through doing this little, you know, cat burglar thing, I realized this would be 10 times easier if I just set everything down and turned on the lights or even if I just set most things down and I used my cell phone light. But even with that clear awareness in the moment of what would theoretically be easier, did I do that? Oh no, I did not.

And this is what I noticed. When I had that awareness, I didn't have this huge surge of emotion like, no, I'm determined to do this my way. But as I was precariously balancing all the stuff and awkwardly moving around, it was like a soft inertia, like a disinterest, like, oh, I don't think so. It's going to be fine. I've got this. It's just gonna be a minute or two more. You know, if I'm patient enough, I'm gonna find what I need. I think I even had the thought, something like I'm used to being uncomfortable. I'm really good at being patient. If I'm just patient a little bit longer, I'll find it.

And simultaneously, I've got another part of me that's kind of chuckling at myself because it was very comical. And anybody seeing me during the daylight hours would just say, why are you carrying 17 things and not just setting them down?

So I share this example because it's actually a beautiful illustration of a few sneaky habits all coming together at once that many of us do. And when they combine, they create less than ideal results that are bigger than just me taking an extra 60 seconds to find something.

So what are the habits that this example illustrates? Well, it illustrates holding too tightly to an original plan, shoehorning, and multitasking. Now,

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let me elaborate on each one. And I want you to think about do you do this and where do you do this?

So do you ever get your mind set on doing something a particular way and even when you realize that part way through there might be an easier way. It feels a bit like trying to turn a cruise ship in that it's easier to keep going than pivot. But in hindsight, you kind of see the rigidity, but in the moment, it generally feels kind of reasonable, even though you're going to slog ahead, it would be easier.

And even if it's the equivalent of taking the muddy, rocky, rutted out road instead of the paved road that's like 10 feet to your left, this is what it is when you hold too tightly to an original plan or a stubborn loyalty to the quote, "the way it was supposed to be." I have a particular penchant for this unyielding commitment to an outdated decision. And it is so obvious in hindsight, but it's really easy to miss the moment.

Or how about this? Instead of piling on too many physical things in your arms, like I was doing, do you perpetually pile on too many things in your schedule? So this looks like at first your list, it's doable. And maybe you've had a similar type of a list or similar type of day before, but as your day goes on, what was reasonable at 8am is no longer realistic. But instead of adjusting it, you double down and you rationalize squashing it all in. And this, my friend, this is shoehorning at its finest. And if you want to hear more about the habit of shoehorning and what to do specifically about it, in episode 112, which is called Frazzled and Stressed, How to Stop Shoehorning, I believe, this is all about the act of squeezing too many things into too little time.

Now, let's talk about the third habit here, multitasking. This can be either physically multitasking, like I was doing, or your multitasking might be trying to listen to a podcast while you eat your lunch and do some charts and answer some phone calls. Or it can be mental multitasking, which is the stealthiest of all because people can't see it externally. And this is where in

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your mind you've retained too many open loops, too many unanswered questions, and a list of unfinished tasks.

Mental multitasking is one of those things you'll know you're doing it when you look at your long to-do list and you only see that one thing can be checked off. And even though you set the list down and you walk away, that mental list of unfinished things haunts you and pesters you like a mosquito. Now it was both physical and mental multitasking. We actually can make progress. It's not like we don't get things done, but it's never quite as smooth or as easy as when we do monotasking, as when we don't have all of this stuff sort of weighing us down. So where in your life are you doing the equivalent of my precarious balancing act, tiptoeing in the dark, aware intellectually there's a better way, but not actually able or not actually choosing to change my course.

Do you have a stubborn loyalty to your original plan? Do you shoehorn? Do you multitask? Do you do all three? The combination of all three is really common. So here's what you need to know about these three related habits. Change does not happen with intellectual understanding alone. And change does not happen within the moment awareness that you are doing it.

So like many of our patterned ways of acting, there is a special kind of momentum that these types of habits have. And while an intellectual understanding is really important and awareness of your habit and awareness of what you're doing in the moment is really necessary. These are just parts of the puzzle for change. They're like having flour and sugar, but not butter and eggs. No cake ever comes from flour and sugar.

So what's missing? What is the butter and the eggs? Proper grammar, probably not. So the lived experience that the alternative works. That is the missing piece. You need to know that the alternative not only works, but it feels better and you need to experience that. The proof, the positive reinforcement that pivoting is safe, that monotasking is okay, that releasing that original plan, it's safe and it's better.

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Until you actually feel the positive emotions or the satisfaction that comes after doing something differently, you are going to keep shoehorning, keep multitasking, keep holding on to your original plan like it is a certificate for your worth and safety. But how do you take the first step towards this alternative of feeling? This is where a tiny experiment comes in.

So with all these habits, change is unfamiliar and therefore can seem risky. Anything that seems risky will feel unsafe and we will not want to do it. So if I change my original plan, it's risky because maybe I won't get done what matters. I'll see it as a failure and it's like breaking my word. If I stop shoehorning, when will these things get done? Danger, danger.

If I don't multitask, again, things won't get done. Or if I single task or I have white space, I'm gonna feel super restless, I won't be able to focus, it'll be too little. So where there's perceived risk, we will always try to avoid it, even if our experience is not so great, because unfamiliar risk is way worse than misery that feels familiar and safe.

So what exactly is a tiny experiment and how can you do it? A tiny experiment is a small palatable test in the direction of something you want to do instead of what you're currently doing. So the test should be a very clear action that's specific and measurable, but it's tiny in that it doesn't seem too risky. So it is a manageable step in the direction of something you want and it's something that you can do the next time you catch yourself starting one of these habits. Because ideally you devise this tiny experiment in advance.

So let's just talk about this with the specifics. Say you want to stop shoehorning and your goal is to stop underestimating how long things take and stop overestimating what you can actually accomplish in a day, in an hour, a week, or a month, whatever. Your tiny experiment needs to move you towards that end. If you want to be more fluid with your agenda for yourself, so that you can adjust on the fly, your tiny experiment should be something to move you away from your rigid clinging.

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The purpose of a tiny experiment is to be so small that it doesn't rattle your internal alarm bells and you actually go do it, and that it helps you see the alternative isn't so bad and perhaps is better, and it helps you feel that alternative that is safe. It helps you feel that things are better, not just intellectually know.

So how do you create a tiny experiment? Ideally, you start with curiosity, which is why it's really good to do this in advance when you can sit down, have some time, and really tap in on purpose to the feeling of being curious. And you ask, what's a little thing that's slightly different than what I usually do that could be reasonably and realistically done instead? What would make this feel really safe and easy? And what's the purpose of my tiny action? You ask yourself those three questions and you answer them. And then, once you've come up with your tiny experiment, the thing that you're going to do, you want to do a gut check and you want to verify that it seems reasonable. And you do this by either methodically asking these questions I'm going to teach you about, or you just check and feel in.

So the questions to ask are, does this experiment, does it feel grandiose or boring? Does it feel maybe too small to matter? If the answer is yes, great. Does it feel memorable and doable? You want it to be memorable and doable. And then you want to feel in, do you have any internal objections?

So let's take a specific example and go through all these. With shoehorning, what's a little thing that's slightly different that could be reasonably and realistically done instead? For me, I will pause for 60 seconds, and then I'm gonna take one thing off my to-do list. Just one thing.

So then I check, what would make this feel really safe and easy? Well, for me, what would feel really safe and easy is knowing that I can add it back. And then what's the purpose of this tiny action? Well, it's to see how it feels to do a little less and if that's smart or not.

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And when I look at those things, like taking 60 seconds, taking one thing off the list, knowing I can add it back, seeing that if it's smart or not and how it feels, that seems really reasonable to me. But then I move on to phase two to verify it's reasonable and see how it feels.

So is it grandiose or boring? Well for me, that's pretty boring. Does it feel too small to even matter? Yeah, my thought is how could this possibly work? It's probably not gonna work. So that's a green light. Does it feel memorable and doable? Yeah, sure.

Do I have any internal objections? Now this is the feel and exercise that may take a little bit longer. Do I feel any hesitance, any dislike of this idea? Anything that's like, I don't wanna do this. And it's no problem if I do. I just want to know if any part of me is not enthusiastically on board so I can just be aware of that. If I notice a bunch of resistance, a bunch of like internal objections, then I may want to adjust it until it feels a little bit more doable. But if you just notice a little bit of rumblings like some, you know, ordinary people in the back of the auditorium, totally fine.

Now, how about stubborn loyalty to the way it was supposed to go? This is one I do all the time, and I usually don't notice this until I'm deep in it. So my tiny thing would be, as soon as I notice, I will experiment for five minutes and I'll ask, what else could I do here that would be reasonable? And I give myself five minutes to just think on that.

What would make this feel really safe and easy? Well, maybe I will text a friend and ask their point of view. And when I go there, I think, oh, you know what? I would have to text them in advance and let them know I'm going to do this. That's too complicated. So instead of texting a friend who might be busy, I'm going to pull up my phone and I'm going to type on my list, I'm taking blah, blah, de, blah off the list. Ooh, maybe I'll take the thing I'm picking off the list, I'll put it on the list for tomorrow. So that would make it feel safer and easier.

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So then what would be the purpose of this tiny action? Well, it's to see if disaster strikes. That's my first answer, right? So phase two is where I verify if this tiny experiment seems reasonable by seeing how it feels. Does it feel grandiose or boring? Does it feel maybe too small to matter? Does it feel memorable and doable? And do I have any internal objections?

So let me just walk you through an example with multitasking. A tiny experiment with multitasking could be you pick a time where you usually multitask and you decide for 20 minutes you're just going to monotask. So instead of walking with a podcast, you're going to walk with a no podcast. Instead of coffee with an audible book while you empty the dishwasher, you just sit and have your coffee for five minutes. Place a do not disturb sign on your office door for 15 minutes or use noise canceling headphones for 15 minutes while you chart at the end of the day.

Now, you are gonna come up with ideas that are unique to you. Now, I said that it's ideal to devise this tiny experiment in advance so that you know what your plan is and it readily comes to your mind as soon as you notice you're doing the thing. But that said, if you do not devise one in advance, but you happen to notice you're in the middle of something, you can also feel free in that moment to go, huh, what's a tiny experiment I could do right now?

Now when you ask in the moment, it has its own brilliance because it does require you to pause and ask a question. And as you've heard me say often, pausing alone, all by itself is an effective way to interrupt your default autopilot ways.

So you're on the go, you recognize you're doing something, you go, ooh, what tiny experiment could I do? And you ask your question that might sound like, what the hell am I going to do now that's a tiny experiment? Just notice that would be a question from exasperation. And that question is probably not going to lead to a fruitful tiny experiment, but it could get you to notice, ooh, I'm asking, ooh, I feel exasperated. All right, how can I ask this with some genuine openness?

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Because genuine openness will sound like, is there anything small that I could do slightly differently right now that's not horrible, that would perhaps get me some different information. I wonder what that might be. And I recommend just giving yourself 30 or 60 seconds to see what answer comes because either you're gonna have an intellectual cognitive answer that pops up or you're gonna notice an instinct or a nudge from your intuition. And then either way, instead of systematically going through all those questions about is it okay, does it feel safe, how's it gonna work? You just feel in and then you go do your tiny experiment.

So for me, when I was carrying that armful of stuff tiptoeing around in the dark, what I didn't do, but I could have done was as soon as I observed that comical nature of what I was doing, I could have just stopped right where I was and asked that question, what's something a little bit different that I could experiment with right now.

And instantly I know exactly what I would have done because I had this inkling that was there, I just didn't give it any space to come out. I would have taken all my things right in that moment where I was and just set them down. And then I would have turned on my cell phone light and continued my search. It would have been so much faster, so much easier.

Now, when you do a tiny experiment, often this is what happens. You realize, huh, you know, that wasn't so bad. Disaster didn't strike. And you may actually be just as productive, feel less harried, and you might get a pleasant emotion. You might feel calm or settled or peaceful or satisfied or proud. And even if you don't feel this way in the moment, when you look back and you feel that sense of like, huh, that was actually okay. You open the door to feeling really satisfied that you made progress despite your reservations. And that feels really good. It's reassuring. It feels safe.

And this is a really critical part about doing a tiny experiment. You need to check in afterwards and see how you feel. Because remember, an intellectual understanding is not gonna penetrate deep enough to help you change. So you do your tiny experiment, it works out okay, but afterwards

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you don't take a minute to go, oh man, how did that feel that that worked out? Okay. It's going to be yet again, more information you gather, but you don't actually internalize.

So to help with change, you really need to anchor your intellectual understanding with a felt experience. So after your tiny experiment, you need to really take a moment and notice and savor how good it felt. Any positive emotions, any neutral state that's different from your normal overwhelmed or stressed out state, that's what you notice and savor. Emphasizing and appreciating this good feeling is how a tiny experiment paves the way to larger change.

Now, if you do your tiny experiment and it doesn't work out well, that's also fine because it was tiny. That just means it's back to the drawing board.

Now, tiny experiments really call on you to be creative and playful and they can actually be really fun. They can be a little bit silly. And when you think about tiny experiments from the perspective of internal family systems, when you set the intention to create one, you're opening the door to all those qualities of self-energy. Things like clarity, courage, patience, perspective, and then the fun of creativity and playfulness. And in a way, doing this can really connect you to the present moment and to yourself.

So as a teaser for future episodes and maybe some workshops that I might do, I want you to just think about how tiny experiments, they can be used beyond shoehorning, multitasking and that stubborn loyalty to the original plan. They can be used to challenge an old belief. They can be used to test out an assumption. They can challenge a rule that you have for yourself. They can help you experiment with a better way of doing things while you loosen up your perfectionism. They can move you toward a more sustainable way of eating or moving or sleeping. Tiny experiments are helpful in a myriad of areas, so stay tuned.

Now, I want you to go give this a try and let me know how it goes. So how can you let me know? Well, if you're one of my clients, if you're in my

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group, you know exactly how to get ahold of me. But if we're not already in touch, we can stay in touch, and many of my listeners correspond with me this way, by email when you join the email list.

So if you haven't already, go join the email list because it's where you're going to hear things that I don't share on the podcast, things like in-person events that I'm going to be either attending or speaking at, workshops I'm offering, more about my coaching, more about my own life and my journey.

And if you are more of a, let's leave a comment on this podcast type of a person, I'm all ears for that. I love reading your comments. And when you leave a rating and a review of the podcast, not only is it a great way for me to see what landed with you, it actually helps other people find this content.

So if you found it valuable, putting a review or a comment, even a sentence with a rating of the podcast, I would be so, so grateful. You're actually doing an act of public service and you're helping the things that you found valuable get into the ears of more people, which again, I told you my mission is to leave this place better than I found it, helps me help more people so that they can pitch in and we have all hands on deck.

Have a beautiful week, I'll talk to you soon.

Are you on the *Habits on Purpose* email list yet? I send community emails with practical information, habit change tips, and announcements about workshops, lectures, and in-person events that I'm going to be attending. I share things that I don't share here on the podcast, and I let you in on what I'm studying, what I'm learning, and what I'm going through in my life.

When you're on the list, you can always press "Reply" and ask me a question. And you'll hear back from me; not from my team, not from AI. You'll hear back from me.

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So to connect in your inbox. Go to [HabitsOnPurpose.com](https://habitsonpurpose.com) and join the email list. You can also find me on Instagram and Facebook. And get ready for it, eventually ... gasp ... you will find me on TikTok once I actually open an account.

Take care, and I look forward to connecting.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit www.habitsonpurpose.com. Tune in next week for another episode.