

Ep #159 : The Hidden Costs of Compartmentalizing Your Emotions



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode #159. I'm Kristi Angevine, and I'm here to help you understand why you think, feel, and act as you do, so you can put an end to the habits that take more than they give and redesign new intentional ones. Today, we're taking on the habit of compartmentalizing and ignoring that which is not welcome or comfortable. It's a bit of a complex kind of nuanced topic, but it's such an important one. 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. If you are listening live in real time, it is February of 2025. And gosh, it kind of goes without saying that at this particular time in history, there is so much going on just in terms of politics and policies here in the States in a nearly dizzying way.

And I'm also noticing that I'm personally in the thick of a lot of intense, busy, just very full things in my personal life. There's all just the school and social and activity-related things for a 12-year-old, an 8-year-old, and they're just enough to feel like a full time job.

And I've concurrently been doing a lot of my own deep internal work and one thing that I just want to put a big plug in that's been a lifeline for me is texting and voice memos. There is something so nourishing, so normalizing, so supportive about having a text or a voice memo exchange that leaves you, or at least me, leaves me feeling seen and heard and encouraged and is just filling up my cup in ways I can hardly even put to words.

So if you don't yet have a bestie or a girl gang or a tribe that really gets you that you voice memo or text with or Facebook messenger with or however you like to correspond in ways that are really easy in the middle of your

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highly full, complex, busy life, I cannot recommend adding this in. I just cannot recommend it enough.

Now another source of major nourishment for me are my clients, both my private clients and my group clients. I am perpetually impressed with all the things, their willingness to be vulnerable, the wisdom that they have, the work that they put in.

And as their coach, I don't think I realized in this profession that I would get as much, if not more out of the experience from witnessing and guiding my clients than anything I have to offer them. I'm dazzled and inspired and every other over-the-top hyperbolic word that sounds ridiculous when it comes to my relationship with my clients and what it's like to see them unpack subtle habits, overt habits, explore them, discover things they didn't realize were there. It's just phenomenal.

So to all the people that I coach, to my lifeline that is my texting and voice memos exchange, you know who you are. Thank you times a thousand million billion.

Now for today, this is all about a sneaky and easy-to-miss habit. These types of habits are my favorite ones to put words to so that we can actually start noticing them. And I'm sharing it so that you can start noticing if you do it and then start understanding it if you do.

And once you identify these sneaky habits and understand why they might be there, that's when you can have your jumping-off point to be really thoughtful about how you might want to shift things. So what is the sneaky habit? This is the habit of compartmentalizing, ignoring, and turning your back on certain emotions, desires, impulses, or experiences.

So if you want a primer on two related habits, check out Episode #57 and Episode #108. Episode #57 is about minimizing positive things in your life and Episode #108 is about minimizing or dismissing negative difficult things in your life. And in both #57 and #108, you'll learn why we do these things,

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the cost of doing these things, and then how to get started on changing them.

Today, we're taking things a little bit deeper. And the question at the core of this topic is this, what makes it hard to be with what is present? What parts of you aren't welcome and are habitually compartmentalized, ignored, or dismissed?

So to answer this, let's start here. Have you ever competed in a race or had a hard workout where you were determined to beat your time or beat some person or just finish and your legs are burning, your lungs are burning, and a part of you just really wants to quit, slow down, and you think, why the heck did I do this? And another part just doggedly wants to win or maybe you've got this competitive streak that comes out where you want to beat your neighbor or you want to beat your time from last week, and you have some internal motivation, maybe self-talk, where you kind of push aside the suckage and you keep going. Or maybe you remind yourself, I can do hard things, but you have such sheer determination that you are willing to push aside anything that's uncomfortable in order to meet that goal.

Or maybe you have a job that calls for you to be able to stay focused and awake with no lunch breaks, no pee breaks, and means you get home late and you've got piles of paperwork. And to get through it, you set aside the desire to eat or relax or sleep because it's really important to you to get this job done.

The same thing can happen with maybe a long drive. So if you've ever been on one of those long drives where you are determined to come hell or high water that you are going to arrive somewhere at a certain time, it doesn't matter how miserable you are, it doesn't matter how tired you are, it doesn't matter how bad you have to stop and go to the bathroom, you just ignore so that you can get where you want to go.

Or the last thing I can think of is, say you have to go from one person to another, like two different meetings, two different patient rooms, two

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different families, and with one person or family, you have fantastic news to deliver. Like they just found out they're pregnant and they're so excited. And in the next room, you have tragic news that you have to deliver and you don't have time to savor the good or cry about the hard. You need to be able to go and shift and pivot.

In all of these very different but related situations, it is useful to be able to compartmentalize. To compartmentalize, in the way I'm speaking about it, is to set aside certain emotions or thoughts and desires in order to keep going towards your primary goal. In these situations, the primary goals are very explicit. Finish the race, finish the workout, finish the project, see the next patient, get to where you are going.

And if you were to stop and think about it, you might be completely fine with temporarily compartmentalizing, dismissing, or ignoring anything that competes with your primary goal. So if I want to get out of clinic on time and I want to be able to give my full attention to every patient, I need to be able to compartmentalize my sadness and sympathy for one patient so that I can be excited and informative with the next patient and so that I can be able to just listen to the patient in the next room who's maybe anxious. And then I need to be able to keep all of that in nice tidy boxes so I can get my charts done. And I'm okay with that if my primary goal is to give full attention and get out of work on time.

But what I want you to think about for just a moment is where might you do the same type of compartmentalizing where you dismiss, ignore, or you push to the side in ways that are less explicit or in ways that might be kind of a chronic approach. So implicit dismissal as a long-term pattern can sneak up on you. Habitually ignoring, habitually turning your back on some things is a reflex that many of us don't even realize we're doing.

So I want to give you several examples of compartmentalizing or dismissing something that may be unwelcome or unsavory or inconvenient that is very different than just pushing past the need for a snack in order to

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pitch in for an emergency or very different than not going to the bathroom because you want to keep going and arrive at your destination in time.

Say you're having a really hard time in a relationship. Maybe it's an intimate partnership, or with a work colleague, or a sibling, or a parent, or one of your kids. Things are complicated. It is so messy and it's ongoing. And you in the complexity of this, you're often left feeling overwhelmed or guilty or confused or powerlessness. And maybe you're balancing competing desires. You're sad and you're mad. You're determined to figure your way out, but you also have no clue how. But in order to stay sane, to be able to get up and go to work and function, to be able to volunteer in the classroom at your kid's school, you take all the difficult feelings and you shrink them down to a manageable size and you slap on a smile, you put your head down and you kind of just suck it up.

Like, listen, you know, everybody goes through hard things. This is my hard thing and I'm just going to set it aside for now so that I can get up and keep going. And you move on and maybe you focus on the positive. And it works, sort of. And you can have conversations, do work as usual, you can interact with people, you can go to the operating room, you can get through your charts, you can do your conferences. And from the outside, like you look all right, but you feel a bit like you're going through the motions.

And when you have quiet moments driving with nobody in the car, but you, or when you're in the shower or right before sleep, huge tidal waves of all these previously shrunk down emotions come bursting out and you either have rage or fear or powerlessness or you cry and cry and cry while you're driving only to pull it together at the next red light. Or maybe you get snippy and you yell at people you love without much warning. Or if someone you trust even a little asks you with some genuine concern, "how are you doing?" You might just completely fall to pieces.

This is an example of what can happen if you reflexively push aside things that are too much, things that are unwelcome, and things that maybe you

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don't know what to do with. Now there are other ways this habit of compartmentalizing or pushing to the side things that are unwelcome can look.

So maybe you grew up and you learned that showing emotions is a sign of weakness. Like irrational emotional displays may have been quietly unwelcomed or very openly criticized for things like don't let them see your pain, there's no crying in baseball, feelings are for sissies, you know, whatever variant you heard. And in this type of situation, if you flash forward to the future, whenever you in 2025 have a big feeling show up, you might reflexively find it very unwelcome or unsafe and without even realizing it, you suppress it so deftly that you don't even notice it was there.

And then after decades of doing this, you might see a few clues that this is actually going on. Here are a few of those clues. You have discomfort with emotions like anger. And you might say things like, I don't really get mad, I'm just not an angry person. Or you have discomfort with emotions like disappointment or sadness.

And you might say things like, I'm just really positive, I roll with the punches, nothing really bothers me that much. I mean, why complain? Why point out the negatives when so many other people have it so much worse? Or when someone asks you, what are you feeling? You just don't know. It's like a blank black hole. Maybe you feel fine. Maybe you feel all right. Maybe you feel a little off. But you really don't know what you're feeling, even if you feel a bit not like you wish you felt.

And the reason for these things is that when emotions are not welcomed on a habitual basis, whenever they show up, which they will, because as humans, we have a full range of emotions that will show up in the full range of experiences we have in our life. And when they show up, they will show up with either a discomfort with certain types of feelings, or a sense of unfamiliarity and a lack of emotional vocabulary to name what is going on for you.

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Now I have a third way that this insidious habit of compartmentalizing things that are not welcome can show up, and this is when we have unacknowledged desires or impulses. Let me just give you an example. This is kind of a stereotype, but say you grew up with a family of engineers. Your mom's an engineer, your dad's an engineer, your sister's an engineer, everybody from the inception of your family tree, all engineers. And what's valued are things like science and math and all the things that go into an engineer's mindset.

What's not valued are things that are a little bit more frivolous, a little bit more amorphous. If it has anything to do with anthropology, literature, the arts, those things are just not emphasized. They might be explicitly sort of warned against, but if there's any desire in you for a non-math based subject or a non-engineering subject, it might be something that you just routinely set aside.

So say you wanted to be a choreographer or a surgeon or you wanted to dance or be a stand-up comedian or be a teacher. If this wasn't a welcomed thing in your family of origin, you might have systematically, subconsciously unwelcomed, or ignored or set aside any creative impulses to dance, any desires to go study medicine, anything that like even flirted with going to like a poetry jam.

And this would show up later in life as finding yourself in a degree or in a field or in a career that just feels hollow and not realizing why. So the reason we might not realize this insidious pattern is because it may have started out as something really strategic and advantageous and we repeated it so much and we just stopped noticing we're doing it. Other times we don't even realize where we're doing it but it worked and when things work well enough sometimes we just don't even notice the insidious underbelly.

Now let me give you another example so you really have a good sense of different ways that this can show up. Say you have a really great job that

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for the most part you love. You've wanted this job your whole life, you worked really hard to get it, and now you have it. And you've been there for a while. And yes, there are some soul-sucking parts. You are expected to stay late, expected to come in early. You are not paid for that. And when you first started the job, you were really eager to impress and you wanted to look like a team player. And honestly, it was kind of exciting. It was your first job.

But over time, this approach starts taking its toll. You have less time for sleep, for hobbies, and in order to cope, you just kind of suck it up perpetually. So even though there are a lot of things that you really don't like, things that you wish would change, you really just want to do your best and you don't want to be consumed with discontent and you don't want to not like this job that you want to like so much. So you just kind of dismiss or compartmentalize or put in boxes the things you don't like and the feelings you don't enjoy feeling around this job you want to love.

And then say a friend finds out that you go in early, you leave late, and you're not paid. And they say, "Gosh, how do you do that? Like why do you do that?" And you say, "Oh, you know what? It's not really that big of a deal. Like, I don't really mind. I mean, it's like that everywhere." But if you were honest, you wouldn't turn down more money if they offered it.

You wouldn't be bothered if they said, "Hey, listen, we have a new policy here, a new culture at this workplace. No coming in early, no leaving late, unless you're gonna get paid." And you wouldn't say no to more time or more sleep. And if you're honest, you are kind of burnt out. And maybe what you used to love, you just now sort of like.

But you don't really want to say that out loud because you've worked so long to get to this job and saying that like you don't just absolutely love it might not be something that people from the outside could understand. So you find yourself saying things like, "Well, you know, at least I've got a job

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and it's pretty good. There are worse things in life. I mean, at least I've got heat and water and my situation is not as bad as so-and-so."

And so if we were to bring in some old-school truth serum and ask you, "How do you like it? Has it lived up to all your expectations?" You might reveal there are some parts of it you really hate. You're so disappointed. You would not have chosen this had you known it was going to be like this, and now you just don't know what to do.

But because you're not openly acknowledging the hard parts, so the truth serum wears off, you don't even realize you've acknowledged those things, and you are not openly acknowledging what is difficult, you find yourself just left wondering, "Why do you feel so tired? Why are you more snippy? Why are you reactive? Why do you have numbing habits that don't really make any sense? Why is your fuse so short? Why don't you know yourself? Why don't you have the hobbies?"

And you might just wonder, "Well, maybe it's just that time of life. Maybe this is just a little bit of mild burnout. Maybe the spark is just gone and that's what everybody goes through." And this is what happens when you compartmentalize things that are unwelcome or difficult, simply because maybe you don't know how to deal with them, you're not able to deal with them, and you have a habit of setting aside, chronically dismissing things that are difficult. When we do this, it's like taking things that we don't like and putting them in jars and putting them in a back closet.

Over time, these things are either going to mold or ferment or just you're going to have a closet filled with so many jars and it's going to overflow. And more and more and more of the time, you're going to be carrying around the weight of all these untended-to feelings. Because just because you don't look at them or you minimize them doesn't mean that they're not there and taking their toll.

So this is kind of heavy and sounds like a downer, but what I want to do is I want to inspire you to start wondering about the things you might not

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realize that you are either ignoring, dismissing, or minimizing. To get curious about the kinds of things you might be turning your back on in your own experience in ways that have you basically chronically partitioning off parts of your experience in order to cope.

And again, I want to emphasize I am talking about a long-term pattern here. I'm not talking about the short-term idea of I'm gonna suck it up and finish this workout or I'm gonna really just push through all the pain and get the last, you know, half a mile of this race. That's advantageous. That has its time and place. There are probably more pros than cons unless you have some sort of injury.

But if you are doing this more subtle, regular pattern, it's a recipe for burnout, resent, exhaustion, and walking around feeling like a hollow shell of a human. So if you notice that you compartmentalize to get through the day, or if you feel burnt out, or you're not sure what you're feeling, or if you've had some really big stuff go on in your life that other people say to you, "Wow, that sounds really hard," but you've basically coped by shrinking it down instead of acknowledging how really difficult it is, you might have this habit.

So I want to give you some very open questions to ponder or to use as writing prompts so you can investigate what could be going on for you. So to help you notice what you might turn your back on, ignore, or tuck away without realizing it, I want you to consider these questions. What do you welcome and what don't you welcome in your day-to-day experience? What types of things were welcomed in your family of origin? What types of things weren't welcomed? For example, was playfulness welcomed? Were emotions welcomed?

Was it acceptable to relax or was that seen as lazy? Was relaxation seen as selfish and bad because there is a message that you always need to be productive or contributing or working as hard as possible because maybe you were told that you're going to need to work 10 times harder than

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somebody else in order to get ahead. So you better not relax and you better always be productive.

Was being frivolous welcomed or not? How about street smarts versus book smarts? Was it acceptable to talk about money? Was it acceptable to talk about intimacy? Bodily functions? Sex and sexuality? Relationships?

How about the arts versus the sciences? Which one was welcomed more in your house? How about traditional jobs like the main jobs, doctor, lawyer, teacher, or entrepreneurship and finding your own way. Was independence welcomed and nurtured? How about interdependence?

What about doing what your mothers and fathers have done for ages because it's the family tradition and the way we honor them and keep the tradition going is, 'we do this,' was that what was mostly welcomed? How about religion was religion welcomed or forced or neutral? How about unfamiliar things and unfamiliar people and places? Were those things welcomed or were those things considered taboo?

Let's talk more about money. Was spending money on things for pleasure welcomed? Or was saving money and always paying your bills without ever carrying a balance or a loan, more welcomed? And as you're thinking about what was welcomed and what was not, how have these things that were welcomed versus what was not shaped your view of the world and yourself today? How does it shape what you view as welcome in your own system?

Let's think about the idea of being a jack of all trades. Was that something welcomed or something to be hidden? Was it better to be seen as an expert and an authority in one particular area as opposed to a dabbler?

Did you receive different messages about what was welcome and okay from your nuclear family compared to your community at school or compared to other families? Or maybe you had relatives who were outside your nuclear family that they welcomed something totally different than you had at home.

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What ideas were welcomed? For example, was it really important in your family to be self-reliant and to be able to take care of yourself, rely on yourself, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps? And was it perhaps seen as shameful to ask for and receive help? Was it a weakness? Or, conversely, was interdependence welcomed? Were things like therapy and mentorship and coaching assumed to be good, positive, and welcome?

Think about your family sayings. Did your family say, "10 minutes early is on time, and on time is late"? Or did they say, you know, "Better late than never"? Did they say, "Better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all?" Or did you more get "Go big or go home"? "If you're going to do it, do it right." Did you get "you deserve it"? Or did you get, "You're gonna have to work 10 times harder than any other people to get the same thing"?

Now, a shortcut to thinking about what was welcomed and what you currently find welcome or unwelcome in your own system can be to answer these six questions:

1. When you think back to your formative years in your family, what occupations would have been acceptable and welcome to you and/or to your family, and why?
2. What behaviors were encouraged versus not, and why?
3. What emotions were welcome or were emotions welcome at all?
4. What qualities were welcome versus not? Assertiveness, individuality, hard work, interdependence, community, following traditions, forging your own path, curiosity, focus, or more generally, what was seen as better than other things?
5. Were certain things praised and other things punished or ignored?
6. And lastly, one of my favorite prompts is, what's hard for you to do, feel, or talk about?

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These things that are difficult for you to do, feel, or talk about may have been unwelcome, frowned upon in your formative years or during your schooling or training.

Now, as you reflect on all this, you may start to realize there are lots of things you never realized that you dismiss, that you bottle up or you simply find unwelcome. And this is totally normal, it's not a problem.

And remember, the question at the core of this topic is, what makes it hard for you to be with what is actually present? What parts aren't welcome and are habitually compartmentalized, ignored, and dismissed?

And once you start to notice what you are habitually setting aside, you can start to gradually acknowledge these things that you haven't. And it looks very simple. It looks like this.

Whoa, I am not 100%, but I think the case is, I'm not just a little irritated, I'm actually really livid, I'm so mad. Or I think what I've been going through is actually so much harder than I've realized or admitted. Or I've always wanted to do something creative, but I just never thought that was allowed. I never thought I had permission. Or I chronically push aside my discontent and slap on a smile and I make the best of things by basically pretending that I'm not miserable. And I kind of feel miserable right now.

When you start to welcome and acknowledge that which has not been welcomed or acknowledged, it is not the easiest. It can be a bit overwhelming and honestly, having support can really help. But it can also be profoundly liberating to stop shooing aside or ignoring what's actually real for you, be it big feelings, impulses, desires, etc.

Because here's the silver lining to all of this. Our emotions, they really do only last about a minute or two. It's when we start to try to push them aside, squash them down, bottle them up, get rid of them, fix them, rush ourselves through them. It's then that we feel so exhausted. It's the resisting and the judging and the fixing that makes it so much harder.

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So it's actually significantly harder to compartmentalize or shoe aside things that are not welcome than it is to just be with what's actually present, even if it's unfamiliar. So I do recognize as I'm going through this, that this may be a bit of a heavy episode or an episode that kind of makes you furrow your brow and I have to really kind of do some sifting and digging.

But I love that it gives a name to a phenomenon that's often really slippery, such that we don't know it's even there, and we might not be able to put our finger on why we feel so bad when this is actually a major contributor, this habit of compartmentalizing or having things that we don't welcome that we push aside.

Now, my last idea that I want to leave you with is this. If you find a bunch of things you just don't know what to do with as you ponder these questions, just get some help. Find a friend to support you. Find a therapist you trust. Connect with a coach that helps you feel seen and heard.

Connect with somebody who can guide you to understand what's going on and help you get through it in a way that has you feeling empowered. And by all means, if you have a girl gang, a tribe, a bestie, a boy gang, don't forget to text and voice memo them as often as possible. Until next week, I'll talk to you soon.

Are you a woman physician interested in being more intentional in your life, being more deliberate with your habits? Maybe you're feeling a bit frayed on the edges with all the pressures of work and life, and you may have a tendency to overthink, people please, second guess, or feel so much guilt when you do something for yourself.

Perhaps your charting takes forever, you bring work home, and you're just not as present as you would like to be. Maybe you scroll or shop or emotionally eat, or you use a drink to wind down more often than you'd like.

If you can relate to this and you just want to feel less reactionary and more in the driver's seat of your life, you need to understand the root causes of

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your habits. Habits like perfectionism, a harsh inner critic, people pleasing, numbing, ruminating, overcomplicating, procrastinating, and so on.

And that's exactly what you can work on in the next round of small group coaching called *Habits on Purpose for Physicians*. *Habits on Purpose for Physicians*, or *HOPP* for short, comes with CME and is a small group of women physicians who meet weekly for six months.

And in *HOPP*, you get practical, deep dive coaching and teaching from me. And I come at this from a perspective of cognitive, somatic, and Internal Family Systems informed approaches in a way that is not only accessible, but applicable to real life.

And you get a ready-made structure that you don't have to create on your own, and you get probably one of the best parts is a community where you can connect with other physicians doing the same work.

Enrollment information and the link to join the waitlist can be found at <https://habitsonpurpose.com/hopp>. And when you go there, get on the waitlist, because when you're on the waitlist, you'll get access to early enrollment and some bonuses only available to those who sign up early. And the reason why this is important is spots are limited. So signing up sooner as opposed to later is really smart so you can ensure that you get a spot before they're full.

Also, if you are interested and you want to join but you find the price is a barrier, there are scholarship options so don't hesitate to fill out the easy application for either a partial or a full scholarship that will ultimately be linked on the main sign-up page when we open up enrollment.

In the *Habits on Purpose for Physicians* group, you will unpack and unlearn old habits so that you can create new ones that are sustainable. So I hope you'll consider joining. The signup page with all the details will come out closer to enrollment for the next round, but go to

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<https://habitsonpurpose.com/hopp> to get on the waitlist. I can't wait to see you there.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit [HabitsOnPurpose.com](https://habitsonpurpose.com). Tune in next week for another episode.