

Ep #168 : Treating Your Parts Like People: A Simple Exercise to Access Clarity and Calm



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode #168. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine. And this podcast is your resource to rewire habits that take more than they give into deliberate ones centered in what matters most to you. Today we're talking about something deceptively simple and surprisingly powerful. What happens when you treat the different parts of your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, those inner voices, as if they were people? Let's dive in.

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. I never thought that I would say that I got up in the morning and did a few hours of skiing before popping inside to record a podcast, and being able to look outside and see that the weather is almost 75 degrees. There's bright blue skies, and to have that combination in such a short period of time was nothing I ever fathomed growing up.

For those of you who have listened for a while, you know I grew up a bunch of different places, but I spent the majority of my years in Tennessee, and basically in the Southeast. And I now live in Central Oregon. And Central Oregon is just radically different when it comes to the climate, the geography, all sorts of things. And we just happen to live in a place where it's really sunny. It's the sunny side of Oregon, and you drive maybe 20-30 minutes, and that's where the big ski mountain is. So you can go skiing and you can come down into town and do things that are, you know, not snow-based.

For the people who live here, that's just like, no big deal. But for me, it's still kind of dazzling. Like, gosh, I'm in shorts and a tank top, and I was just in snow gear a little bit ago. And I learned to ski as an adult. I did a little bit of skiing like in North Carolina. If you've ever skied in North Carolina, either

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you're really good or you know that the sheets of ice is maybe not the easiest to learn on.

So I didn't really learn much when I was younger, but I, you know, took lessons as an adult. And it has called on me to figure out how to be a beginner. And at the same time as there's that struggle of being a beginner at something, it was really fun.

So, whether this is your first episode with me or you have been here since the beginning, I am really glad you're here. And if as you listen, if this episode resonates and if you haven't yet left the podcast a review, just a phrase or a sentence, leaving it a rating as well, I would be so appreciative if you would take a few minutes to do that. I recognize it is a few minutes. It takes a second to scroll down, click the stars, write a couple things. Overall, it is, it's not just 30 seconds, but it really means a lot.

That word of mouth helps this podcast get into the ears of people who are really interested in learning these concepts. So your endorsement really means the world to me. So for those of you who are new, I'm really glad you're here. And my goal, when you listen to an episode, is for you to learn something that sheds light on why you think and feel and act as you do.

And also have something really tangible when it comes to a way of looking at things, or a practical tool that you can take and actually start applying in your everyday life immediately. Now, my view on habits is a bit different than what you might initially conceive of when you think of the word habits.

For me, habits are not just, you know, your morning routine or how you fidget with your hair when you're nervous. It's not just brushing your teeth every day. Habits actually encompass the repetitive, habituated patterns that you have in terms of your thoughts, your beliefs, the strategies you've used to cope, your emotional responses that happen faster than your thoughts, as well as your automated behaviors.

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And as difficult as it may seem to change your habits, they are much more malleable than we usually think. And habit change requires that we consider all of the components that go into creating a habit. So this expanded view of habits informs everything you'll hear on this podcast, and I think you're going to find it extremely effective.

One of my guiding principles is, does this work? Can you use it in everyday real life? Does it explain something in a way that makes really good sense? If so, in my book, it has value. And that's what I try to do here. So let's dive into the meat of this episode.

What happens when you treat the different parts of your mind, your thoughts, your beliefs, your feelings, your impulses, the inner voices you hear? What happens when you treat those like you would treat a person? Now, if this makes you furrow your brow and go, oh, wait a second, what podcast episode did I land on today? Just bear with me for a second.

If you've ever said something like, "Oh, a part of me just wants to cancel everything, even though I know a part of me really should go." Or, "I know I need to go to the gym, but a part of me just wants to lay on the couch and watch Netflix." No offense to Netflix. You already have a sense of what I mean when I say the word parts.

Our psyche, our mind, the way we interact with the world, is nicely understood as a multiplicity of many, many parts. And this is a paradigm that is posited by Internal Family Systems, a model in psychotherapy. Now, what if instead of pushing all of our parts away, or trying to reason with them or battling with them?

What if you paused and related to these different parts that you might notice, like you would with a group of people in a room with you? Now, the reason I ask this question is because oftentimes we will feel like the caricature of the angel and the devil. One part of us says, go do this. The other part of us says, "But no, you really want to go do this!"

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And we can have this push-pull tug-of-war where we feel conflicted. Or we have a part saying something, and we don't like that. And so we judge that part of ourselves, and inside, we just feel like there's so many different things. It's hard to find clarity, hard to find calm, hard to have perspective, hard to know what to do from a place of clear confidence. From a place that is really in line with what you value most and what matters in your life.

So what I want to offer to you is, think about what might shift. If, when you noticed conflicting thoughts, conflicting emotions, conflicting parts, as I'm going to call them. What would shift if instead of trying to fix them or create some reconciliation that required certain parts to be quiet? What if instead of judging these parts of yourself, you got really curious?

So today I want to teach you a really simple pen-on-paper tool, or typing if you like, that you can use any time that will help you tap into some clarity, help you feel less overwhelmed, and help you reconnect with your wisest self. But first, let me talk about why this approach matters.

If you think about the human mind, we have so many thoughts per day. If you've never stopped and noticed your thoughts, noticed the words that go through your head? Take a little bit of time and just, you can press pause on the podcast, and just notice, what are you telling yourself?

What words do you notice when you allow them to be present? For some of you, you'll notice it's completely quiet. For others, you will be quiet and you will notice your mind is busy, busy, busy, busy, busy. Lots of thoughts, lots of conversations, almost like going into a cocktail party and hearing so many different things.

Or you might have one news ticker that just cycles and cycles and cycles on repeat. Sort of like a thought swirl. Now, Internal Family Systems will conceptualize all of our thoughts coming from almost like little people inside of us. Or if it suits you to think of, this is just one aspect of my personality, or this is, this is one personality that has these thoughts. Or just even think

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about the thoughts that come, you can almost put them in buckets where there's themes.

When we can think of our thoughts, instead of just being a bunch of chaotic phrases and words just rattling around as a sort of a byproduct of complex things going on between our synapses. And we can think about them as originating from people. Just that change in concept can sometimes slow us down and make us go, "Hmm. If what I'm noticing, if what I'm telling myself, if what I'm thinking, if this were something somebody was speaking to me, like a person I was having coffee with, how might I relate to these differently than when it just seems like it's a bunch of stuff going on that doesn't really make any sense and it feels like it's just word soup?"

The same idea can be applied to our emotions, as well as to our behaviors. But what do we do most of the time? When we treat our thoughts and our feelings and our behaviors like nuisances or annoying background noise or problems to solve or things to judge? It's really easy to find ourselves stuck. What the heck do I do?

I don't know what to do with all these thoughts. I don't know what the heck to do with an emotion that I don't like. I don't know about you, but it's so easy to judge things like procrastination, or resist anxiety, push it away and try not to feel it. Or push something like resent away, because resent, ugh, who wants to feel that? Let me just ignore it and say, you know what? It's actually fine. We're okay.

When we do that chronically, we usually end up more confused, completely depleted, and often times very frustrated. Especially when it comes to trying to change our habits. But a really incredible thing happens internally when you can step back and treat your own thoughts and your own emotions like people, and listen to what they're saying. And this is what happens. You often times get access to calm. You get access to a really clear part of you that doesn't feel overwhelmed, doesn't feel so reactive and is not judging.

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And this wise, steady version of you, it's always there. The analogy that works really well for me is, your wisest, most authentic, clear self, the version of you that's just really grounded, knows what's up. Knows how to draw a line and say, "Nope, I'm not going there." That's inappropriate. And, "Oh my gosh, this matters most!"

That you? It's like the sun. And a lot of these other things that are the overwhelming thoughts and the big emotions that feel like we need to fix, those are like clouds. And that inner wisdom is hard to access when there's a bunch of clouds. But it's always there.

This is just like when you're in a really loud party and it's really hard to hear somebody next to you. They're standing right there. They're there. It's not like they're not there, but it's hard to hear them. And this is what can happen in our own system.

When we have a bunch of thoughts and feelings and behaviors that we don't like and we're judging them and pushing them away, it can feel just like a loud room inside your own system. When we slow down and actually step back a little bit so we can witness and notice our thoughts like we would notice a person. When we actually witness and notice our emotions, like we would tend to somebody who's having a big emotion.

When we do this, we actually quiet the room, we quiet our own system. And we can get access to a totally different way of relating to ourselves. So, let me give you a really practical way to do this, especially if you're not accustomed to unblending or stepping back from thoughts and emotions.

So this exercise is intended to be done on paper or on a screen where you can actually get what's in your mind and in your system out so that it is on a sheet of paper or on a screen outside of you, so you can have a little bit of space from it. Now, this exercise is something I really enjoy doing. I really enjoy having my clients do it. And it's an exercise that was taught to me by somebody who said it was taught to them by their mentor.

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And I believe when you trace it back, I recall Ashley Booth being connected to it. And I don't know if she's the originator or if there's somebody else where this came from. But I will just at least reference Ashley Booth as somebody who passed down this really beautiful idea that I think may have some connections to art therapy.

So you get a blank sheet of paper and something to write with, or a screen on which you can draw with an Apple pencil or something. This exercise can take you five minutes, or it can take longer if you'd like. What you do is the first thing is, if you are somebody who likes organization and you like squares, you can take your sheet of paper and you can fold it in half. So if it's landscape, you can fold it in half the 11.5 inch way.

And then you can fold it in half again so you, if when you unfold it, you've got 4 lines. And then you can fold it in half the opposite direction, up and down, so that you now have made 4 creases, but you now have 8 boxes. Or you can just draw 8 boxes. Or you can just use the whole page without any boxes if that feels too boxy for you.

So, in one of your boxes, if you choose to do that, you write down something that is present for you right now. So if you like the language of parts, who's here? What part is showing up for me right now? Or you can just notice what voices, what sentiments, what feelings are present.

It could be a critical voice, a worried thought, a rebellious urge to, "Who cares? I said I'd go to the gym, but I don't want to go." It could be some mental exhaustion. Anything that's taking up some space, just name it as best you can. And this could look like, there's a part of me that's dreading work. Or there's a voice that's saying I'm behind. Or there's the part that's so frustrated that they said that to me. Or, ah, the one who just wants to quit it all is here. This part hates everything. This part hates going to work.

You just write that down. And if you want to draw what it looks like, what it feels like, a little stick figure, if you want to do an emoji, if you want to do

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whatever, whatever occurs to you that can represent that part, whether it's words. Or you can even ask, how might I represent you on the page?

And just wait like you're waiting for somebody else to say something in a conversation, and see what comes to you. And it might come in an image, it might come in a color, it might come in words, or it might just be quiet, and that's fine too.

So once you're done with that, then step two is to ask, who else is here? What else is here? And in another square or another section, you write down that next part. And it could be a part that's mad at the first part, a part that hates doing exercises like this. A perfectionist voice, a planner, a people pleaser. Whatever shows up, don't overthink it, just write it down.

And then you repeat. And you keep writing one part at a time, one square at a time. And you keep just putting them in there. And you might look at the parts and go, gosh, a part of me hates all these parts. Or, a part of me thinks that part is right, and that other part is dumb. Okay. You write that down. And as you do this, at one of the steps when you keep asking, who's here? What's here? And at some point, you're going to go, I don't think there, there is a part here. I feel like it's just me. It's just I'm here.

That's when you've gotten to the conclusion where you're like, oh, the only one left is me. And this is the point in the exercise when all of your parts who've wanted to say something have spoken. What remains is you. The you that is able to observe without being caught up in one thought or one emotion.

And some people describe this as clarity and spaciousness. There's a calm or a gentle groundedness. And once you get to this point, you can simply stop. And that's it. You can revisit this page tomorrow. Or, this optional step is, you can go back and look at your list.

And you can ask yourself, how do I feel toward part one? How do I feel towards the second part? How do I feel towards all the parts? And if you

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notice that your answer is something in the realm of curious or compassionate or understanding, amazing.

That's a place from which you can start to connect with whatever that part is, like you would with a person. Because imagine going to coffee with somebody and you are curious and you're warm and you're open. That has the potential to be a really good conversation.

Now, imagine you go out and have coffee with somebody, and you're just irritated. You don't want to be there. You don't like this person. It's probably going to be something, you might be able to fake having a good time, but it's not genuinely going to be a good connection.

So you want to imagine when you're connecting with these parts, can you get to a place of openness and curiosity with each of these parts so that you could start interacting with them like a person? Now, if you're listening to this and thinking, wooh, this sounds like Dissociative Identity Disorder or multiple personalities, or, wow, you mean I'm supposed to talk to the little people in my head?

I understand some of this can sound like it's just a bit far out. But I encourage you to just experiment, just with an open mind, just see what happens. When you see what's on the page and you get curious and maybe even just ask a question, like, I wonder how come that part of me feels that way?

And then listen. Sometimes when you can treat parts of your own psyche like you would treat a person, you will notice an ease and a sense of almost inner harmony that makes it that tug of war that I mentioned earlier, makes that just dissipate in a way that feels really empowering.

So, that concludes the on-paper part of the exercise and why it's powerful. Now, some of you will write all these things down and then you'll say, well, I want to know more. And you can actually start building little profiles for

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each part, little baseball cards, but a part. You're like, ah, I want to get to know this part.

So I wonder what's this part like? If I had to write down what this part's beliefs are, what are they? Where did it get them? How long has it been here? You can do all the details if you'd like. And that is fun because you are doing a little bit of an interview, like a documentary filmmaker might do, or a journalist where you're really getting to know a part that you've externalized. And you're getting to know it at a different level than is possible when you're fighting with or just dismissing or trying to push away a bunch of chaos in your mind.

So, to recap how to do this exercise, you get a sheet of paper. And if you want to divide it into 8 squares or more or less, you can. And then you ask, who's here? What's here?

And in each square, you write down what's present for you. And you keep going until you get to the place where you don't really notice any other parts. There's just no other parts there. It's just you. And once you've done that, then you can look back at the list and go, how do I feel towards these parts now?

And then you can work on getting to know some of them like you would a person. So, why on earth does an exercise like this that might sound a little bit strange, and why does treating internal parts of your psyche like people, why does it work?

Well, the tool itself with writing things down helps you externalize what's swirling around in your psyche. It helps you get some space, separate from some of the noise so that you can have perspective. So that you can more clearly differentiate different aspects, different veins of thinking.

And when you can do this, it's almost like if you have a jar filled with water and filled with dirt and rocks and glitter and you shake it all up and it's just a swirl and you can't really see well. Versus when you let it settle, you can

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see clear, you can see glitter, you can see rocks is very, very differentiated. When you do this type of exercise, that's what you get inside.

And when you do it more than once, it builds familiarity with your inner landscape, with your own mind, with your own parts. And here's the brilliant part. With practice, when you do this type of exercise on paper, it will help you understand why you do what you do, what's going on inside you when you're interacting with other people, so that instead of feeling like you're just reactionary, you can be intentionally responsive. So when we treat parts of us like people, we are less likely to be hijacked by one strong voice or emotion. We actually create space for compassion, space for perspective.

And it helps us tap into calm, creativity, and your wise core of who you always are when you're not swirling it around in a bunch of clouds, otherwise known as a bunch of thoughts and emotions and parts. So, the next time you notice that you are feeling really overwhelmed, really conflicted, just not really sure what you think or why or what to do next. Get a sheet of paper and take it one thing at a time, one part at a time.

Write it down, ask who else is here, keep going until there's nothing left or there's less left than there was when you started. And then check to see if you can tap into some curiosity and open-heartedness and meet these parts of yourself like you would meet a good friend.

Now, everybody's experience of externalizing what's inside and creating a relationship with what is normally just jumbled thoughts, things that we don't think of as entities to relate to, is different for everybody. For some people, this is extremely intuitive. They sit down and they go, "Oh, wow, I can actually have a conversation with my inner critic. So interesting. I just didn't realize that my inner critic thought this way."

And for others of us, it can be very counterintuitive. It takes a bit. It takes a bit of practice. It takes a bit of almost a leap of faith to go, "Okay, I'm willing

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to try this thing that, gosh, nobody taught me this, feels a little strange, but maybe it'll work." And if you're in the latter camp, you are in good company. I can very much relate to that.

But the cool thing about this is, when you relate to yourself in a way that brings some compassion, brings curiosity, and brings an interest towards your own psyche, there's something really interesting that happens. And you will notice this interesting thing based on how you feel.

And what you're looking for is, do you feel a little bit less chaotic? Do you feel a little bit calmer? Do you have a little bit more clarity? You maybe feel curious? Do you feel open? Maybe open-hearted instead of all up in your head?

And these felt experiences, they are very, very obvious. You don't have to really go looking for them. When they happen, you just go, oh, wow, I really do... I just, I feel like I've got better perspective. I don't feel so tense or wound up or reactionary or like I'm being batted around like a pinball.

And I don't want you to take my word for it. The only way that this is going to be meaningful is if you try it and you experience it for yourself. So, thank you so much for listening. I can't wait to hear what it is like for you to try this exercise. And I will see you next week.

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.

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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 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 sign up page with all the details will come out

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closer to enrollment for the next round, but go to <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.