

Ep #169: How We Lose Ourselves- And the Unexpected Way Back



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Hello, hello, everyone. Welcome to Episode #169. Today is about how we lose ourselves and how we find our way back. How we get into a pattern of surviving and just working so hard to keep up, taking care of other people, focusing outside, but just along the way, neglecting to take care of ourselves. And how we can start changing this.

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.

Have you read Katherine May's book *Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times*? It is lovely to say the least, and I'm going to share bits and pieces of it here and there because the ideas she explores are so relevant to getting to know yourself, making changes to your patterns, and centering yourself around what matters most.

In the book, Katherine May says, quote, "Since childhood, we are taught to ignore sadness, to stuff it down into our satchels and pretend it isn't there. As adults, we often have to learn to hear the clarity of its call. That is wintering. It is the active acceptance of sadness. It is the practice of allowing ourselves to feel it as a need. It is the courage to stare down the worst parts of our experience and commit to healing them the best we can. Wintering is a moment of intuition. Our true needs felt keenly as a knife." End quote.

How often do we actively accept sadness? I know for me, so often, I sort of push that aside, box it up, look forward to try to be a little bit more efficient with my day instead of feeling what's actually present.

A favorite writer of mine is Maria Popova, who writes *The Marginalian*. And she refers to the quote, "soul-sculpting beneficence and cumulative effect of knowing how to skillfully winter and skillfully be sad." End quote. And

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when she's reviewing Katherine May's book *Wintering*, I'll just paraphrase what she says because it's so nice. She basically conveys that when we have a pattern of self-punishing ways of being sad, which are judging our sadness, dismissing it, feeling weak for having it, boxing it up, hoping it'll go away, we disconnect from the sadness and any other hard emotions. And what ends up happening is we also disconnect from ourselves. Not on purpose, but just as a byproduct of trying to get through, trying to survive.

So, if you can relate to pushing through, boxing up your emotions, not wanting to feel things that are hard, today's episode is for you. If you feel like somewhere along the way you got lost, lost in your work, in your to-do lists, in people pleasing, in constantly holding it all together for everyone else, lost in your overthinking, in soothing with Reels and food and perfectionism and guilt, or just trying to get through your day. If you've ever felt lost and had that quiet moment and thought, "Who am I?" This episode is for you.

I'm going to discuss what it might look like to lose yourself and how come it happens, and then how to reconnect.

So first, how do you know if you're a little disconnected or perhaps really lost? It can be hard because when we're on autopilot, we don't often notice feeling out of touch. We're only focused on getting through. In survival mode, we don't have the bandwidth to even check in, to cope with the realization that we aren't even sure who we are, where the time went, what our true north is anymore. And that's simply because when you're just trying to get through the day to do some mediocre adulting, get home in time for dinner, and maybe have a tiny bit of time to connect to the people you love most.

So here are some clues that you are a little disconnected or perhaps a lot disconnected. You don't know what you want or what you like. You feel numb or blank when you finally have downtime. When there's unscheduled time, there's no joy or ease, just emptiness or restless anxiety. You scroll,

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you snack, you start cleaning, not because you want to, but because you don't know what else to do. You say you're fine, but when you're honest, you feel like you are running on fumes.

You keep it totally together at work when you're around acquaintances and colleagues, but as soon as you are home, you're reactive, snippy, curt, sharp. Decisions are paralyzing. You constantly ask others what they think. And although you can sense that something is off, you can't quite put your finger on it. Maybe resentment, disconnect, some heaviness, but it's just hard to name. You might even feel guilty for just having needs.

And then, you might reflectively override your needs, ignore your exhaustion, skimp on sleep, skip meals, eat like crap, minimize how badly you feel, push through pain. And you know it's not sustainable, but slowing down also feels impossible. Rest feels indulgent, boundaries risky. You have no idea what lights you up anymore. You don't know what brings you joy. You don't know what makes you laugh, and you don't know what makes you feel like you.

So if you can relate, you're not alone. But get this, the reason that you might feel so alone is this type of thing falls into that category of things that people hide from the public view, and it's not brought up in small talk. I mean, how often do you order a coffee and the barista says, "How are you?" And you say, "You know, I am completely lost. I have no idea what lights me up anymore. You?"

Now, if you can relate to some or all of this, it is not a problem. It's actually quite normal to go through spells where you lose track of what matters, and then you make your way back. And despite what pop psychology and personal improvement dogma might suggest, life is not a linear moving from struggle to improvement to enlightenment. It's more like a tangle of cycles that spiral. We feel lost, we get back to ourselves. We wander off track, we come back home.

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So, why does disconnection from ourselves happen? Now, the details of disconnection are unique to everyone, but at the end of the day, it basically boils down to two main reasons. Number one, we disconnect and kind of get lost from ourselves because of adaptive coping mechanisms that work short-term, but they have an underbelly when they're used in the long term. Number two, we don't know how to apply what we cognitively know we need to do. Let me explain.

So first off, the way we lose ourselves often begins as a smart adaptation, a coping mechanism or strategy that's really effective and honestly, quite brilliant. But what works in one season of life is sometimes maladaptive later on. What works in the short term does not always work in the long term.

So let me give you a silly example. I was in high school and I was trying to get ready to be able to backpack on a trip that I was going to do in the summer with some friends. And I was a runner. I ran cross country, I ran track. I did some like endurance-type sports, but I didn't really backpack. So I thought it would be a good idea to make sure that my backpack was as heavy as possible so that when I went on my regular trip and it was lighter, I would, you know, be able to handle it.

So I overfilled my backpack. I didn't bring enough food, and needless to say, I was exhausted, and the hike was a lot longer than I expected. And after we did our hike and we were on our way back, I was absolutely exhausted. I was with a bunch of people who also were exhausted, and I wasn't quite sure I was going to actually make it back to the car. And thankfully, the teacher that went with us brought these tubes of frosting. Now, these were from, you know, tubes of frosting in the 90s. I don't know what type of chemicals were in them, but it was basically some combination of some sort of sugar and some sort of fat. And we were just squeezing them in our mouths, and it helped us all get back to the car.

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Now, in the short term, this was phenomenal. It gave me a pep to my step. It helped me have focus. I was able to keep moving my legs even though I thought I should be crawling down the trail with my backpack filled with like pots and pans. Short-term, great strategy, not a good lifelong, long-term plan, right?

So these short-term survival strategies don't work in the long run. When they overstay their welcome, the byproduct is disconnection from ourselves. I have lived this and I see this all the time in high achievers, especially in women physicians. This is what it looks like. You learn how to survive college, rigorous training, and then to succeed in a high-stakes system by putting your needs last. You hide your emotions to be professional, so you're not seen as quote, "that emotional woman" or somebody who can't cut it. You bury your intuition, you silence your impulses, you ignore your body, and oftentimes you might not speak up so that you can conform, you can belong. And you learn to always say yes, perfect your work, hide your struggles so you can avoid being reprimanded by your boss, your attending.

These worked. They were adaptive, but they are now what make you feel exhausted, resentful, and disconnected from the version of you that feels clear and grounded. When you undergo training that gives you the message that in order to be excellent at your job, to be a good person, that others come first, rest is a sign of weakness, your needs can only be tended to after your work is done, your value hinges on your productivity and what others think of you, of course disconnection and feeling lost is the result.

And it's almost like these adaptive strategies in their brilliance end up taking precious parts of you and wrap them up and set them in a safe place so they don't get hurt. Like you might do in a tornado where you hunker down somewhere where you will get the least potential damage. But if you were to stay in the basement or stay in that bathroom forever, you know where I'm going.

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Mid-Roll Message: Did you know most Habits on Purpose clients started out as podcast listeners just like you? If you're feeling stuck in repetitive patterns like overthinking, perfectionism, people pleasing, guilt, or overwhelm, you are not alone. In HOPP small group coaching, you learn things like self-criticism, empathy exhaustion, second-guessing, and feeling like an imposter are not personal failings. They're simply deeply ingrained habits that you can unlearn. And not by reading more or pushing harder or toxic positivity, but by understanding your unique root causes and gently, steadily changing your relationship with them.

In HOPP small group coaching over six months, we use evidence-based tools informed by Internal Family Systems to help you unravel what's been running the show behind the scenes. And then, you build something better. Lasting change isn't about willpower. It's about support, safety, and learning a new way forward that's practical and fits in with your real life. If you're not already on the Habits on Purpose for Physicians interest list, join it today at habitsonpurpose.com/interestlist.

You'll be the first to hear when early enrollment opens for the next round, which starts in June of 2025. And then, if you want to join me for a free workshop on how to change your inner critic using Internal Family Systems, join me on May 7th. Registration is at habitsonpurpose.com/innercritic or check the show notes for the link.

Now, the second reason that we stay disconnected or get lost is we might realize that we feel a little bit lost, but we have no idea what to actually do about it. And then we conclude that's just the way it is, that perhaps we are uniquely problematic and people like us just can't figure this out. We might intellectually know what to do, but we can't seem to do it. And this gap between knowing and doing keeps us stuck.

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So you know you want to slow down. You know you want to stop overextending. You know people pleasing is sucking the life out of you. You know that the smart thing to do is to say no. You know that perfectionism is slowly killing you. And you've read the books and listened to the podcast and you intellectually understand these patterns, but somehow in your ordinary everyday life, nothing changes. And this is because insight alone is not enough. But when we don't know that insight alone is not enough, we conclude that we just need to know more.

But here's the truth. You don't need more information. You simply need to know how to implement what you do know, which means you have to know what makes implementation difficult. What are the obstacles to applying what you know that you need when you feel off track and lost?

Now, for most of us, no one taught us this when we were young. So it makes a lot of sense that we don't know what to do.

But here's the good news. Application is not as hard as it might seem. You just have to know what's in the way and a few really practical tips and tools. So I want to take a moment and emphasize that realizing that you feel disconnected from yourself, it is not an acknowledgment of some deep, horrible problem. It's just like noticing that you took a few wrong turns and you're probably going to be late to your appointment, but all you have to do is retrace your steps, look back at the navigation again, and it's going to be okay.

And at the same time, as it's going to be okay, returning to yourself is an act of radical reclamation. It's an act of remembering who you are, who you've always been. And this is not something that's necessarily supported in our 24/7, hyperconnected digital world, because this process actually calls on us to slow down and turn in.

So I want you to just consider this. What if your struggle isn't a personal failing, but just a sign that you're overdue to come home to yourself? What

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if the disconnection that you feel isn't a flaw, but just a signal that it's time to pause? And what if the work of unlearning these previously adaptive strategies, of releasing the guilt, the doubt, the overthinking, what if it's not selfish, but the prerequisite for you to actually be able to contribute in the ways that you want?

So where do you start? First, just naming that you feel lost is like turning a light on in a dark room. You have awareness of what is present for you. And it is not a problem. It is simply data. Second, remind yourself that you make sense. The reason you feel lost makes sense. The fix won't be overnight or necessarily simple or easy, but you can do it.

Now, the third thing you do is every day or every other day this week, just take three to five minutes and do this one exercise. Get a photo of yourself, one that you love, or one of yourself as a small child. And I want you to take five or ten sticky notes or small sheets of paper and write on each one things that consume your energy and keep you from feeling like you. So you get your sheet of paper and you might write on there housework, charts, other people's expectations, tension and stress, overwhelm, my boss, the man, my to-do list, painful emotions. You might write on there grief or loneliness or not belonging.

Once you have written down things on these little sheets of paper that consume your energy and keep you away from feeling like yourself, I want you to take a look at your photo and invoke, invoke some love and some kindness. And then, once you feel that kind of warm sensation, I want you to take each sheet of paper and put them on top and cover your photo. And this could be, you stack all the papers on top of one another, or you just spread them out over the top of the photo. And once you do that, just take a minute to kind of soak up the metaphorical representation of all that stuff obscuring you.

Then, you take the papers or the sticky notes and you move them so that you can see a little bit of your photo, just a little bit, like a little triangle, a

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little glimpse. And you pause right here. Then, the next step is to move all your sheets of paper so you can see all of your photo, and you can also see all of the sheets of paper. Now, this stage represents you getting a little space from the things that obscure your access to the real you. So as you do this, you ask yourself, what is it like to see this in front of me? And after you spend a little bit of time there, you just wrap up by making a pile of the papers and taking your photo, and placing your photo on top of the pile.

And then you leave this here, and you come back and you do it again tomorrow or the next day by repeating the whole process from the beginning. You simply look at your picture, invoke some warmth and love, and then you place the papers on top of your photo, pause, move the papers away from your photo so you can see a glimpse of your picture, pause, and then move the papers away from your photo so you can see the papers with the words on them and your picture unobstructed, and just reflect.

Now, if you can relate to feeling lost and this kind of work of examining what's in the way of getting back to yourself is intriguing, that's what the Habits on Purpose for Physicians small group coaching is about. And I want to invite you to do two things today. First off, if you're interested in coaching, join the interest list. The next round starts in June, and early enrollment will open soon. When you're on the interest list, you'll be able to hear about the bonuses and the early enrollment offers. Just go to habitsonpurpose.com/interestlist, or you can see it in the show notes, or if you're already on the email list, you'll get a reminder in your inbox.

Next, there are three events next week. On May 6th, I'm teaching an Inner Child workshop. It is a practical, compassionate way to explore the roots of your habits and discover how they formed. And there are only a few spots left, and signups are capped at a very small number so we can do some of this deeper work in a way that feels safe.

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On May 7th, I'm hosting a free live workshop called Stop Beating Yourself Up: An Internal Family Systems Workshop for Women with Harsh Inner Critics.

And the third thing I'm going to do is right after the workshop, if you're interested in learning more about Habits on Purpose for Physicians small group coaching, we'll do a program overview and a Q&A to answer any questions you might have. So you can hear about all of these and get the information if you're on the email list, or you can simply go to the show notes.

Now, all of these resources and events are designed to give you tools that you can use and apply in your real life immediately. And they also will give you a feel for what coaching and Habits on Purpose is like.

So let's take a minute to recap. If you've been feeling like you are buried under years of coping strategies and you feel a little bit lost, you don't know who you are, and maybe intellectually you know what you should do, but you can't seem to actually do it. And if you are tired of surface level strategies like positive thinking and mindset hacks that you've tried and they work short-term, but they didn't actually stick, I want to invite you to remind yourself that you make sense, feeling lost also makes sense. And this week, try that photo exercise.

And remember, you are not alone. You are not broken. So come find your way back to yourself. And if you want some help, come to the Inner Child workshop, come to the workshop on stopping beating yourself up, and then come to the Q&A to learn about Habits on Purpose. Thanks for listening and I'll see 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.