

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger



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With Your Host

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Do you try to fix or suppress your anger, and feel guilty if you can't? If you're someone who doesn't do anger, this episode is for you. In today's show, I share the cost of bottling up anger and three prompts to help you approach anger differently that will not only help you befriend this unpopular emotion, but feel confident and at ease with it instead of always trying to get rid of it.

Welcome to Habits on Purpose. I'm your host, Physician, Master Certified Life Coach and IFS Practitioner, Kristi Angevine. Let's get started.

Hello, hello everyone. Welcome to Episode #170. This episode is about the hidden cost of bottling up anger and what to do instead. So, when you get angry, what's it like for you? When was the last time that you got mad? Was it a particular situation? Was it with a person?

And when I'm talking about this, I'm not talking about the chronic irritation or outrage and disbelief that comes from an ongoing situation like global warming or a dysfunctional medical or work system, the socio political goings ons. What I'm talking about are discrete episodes of feeling mad.

Now, if you'd asked me about 10 years ago, what's it like when I get angry? I would say, I don't know. I don't really get mad. I would literally have no clue. Or I might be able to cite one or two really memorable times over the course of the last few years. But I would not be able to bring up something from the last day or week, or month. And this wasn't because I lived in some utopia and was contentedly smiling 24/7. It was frankly because I was unaware of the emotion. It was because I skirted away from confrontation and conflict, and because I was really skilled at masking and dismissing anger.

Now, if you've been with me for a while, you may remember in Episode #133, we explored why so many of us were taught to see anger as shameful, unprofessional, or even dangerous. Today, I want to pick back up on a different thread. What actually happens when we believe that narrative about anger and we keep it bottled up inside?

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

Many people, many high achieving women have been taught to dislike their anger, to shy away from it, conceal it, and even fear it. So they not only fear the idea of expressing it, but they might fear feeling it in the first place.

So let me ask you, on a scale of 1 to 10, with one being not at all and 10 being very much so, how comfortable are you with your anger? Compared to emotions like determination, calm, or happiness, how comfortable are you with the emotion of anger?

Just by being a woman in our society, you may have learned to rationalize or minimize anger. It's not a big deal. Repress and dismiss it. I should be over this. Redirect or sidestep it. You know, I'm just tired. Or internalize it. You know, it's probably my fault.

And here's what often happens when that anger doesn't go anywhere but inside. It turns into resentment. It leaks out as passive aggression or sarcasm. It gets rerouted into self judgment or perfectionism. It drains your energy and ultimately, it leads to emotional exhaustion. Because when your system has to work overtime to bury something alive, that takes a toll.

Anger doesn't just go away when you ignore it. It just goes underground where it festers or erupts later in ways that don't feel good to anyone. So if this is you, what can you do instead?

First of all, we have to acknowledge that the idea that anger is unprofessional and could get you fired if you express it, is not 100% unfounded. But when you approach anger differently, this fear of explosive expression, this fear of rage, goes away. So let's discuss a new approach to anger.

What if anger actually isn't bad or dangerous, but is simply an emotion that has a message? It's an emotion that signals a boundary has been crossed, a core value has been compromised, or that you have just witnessed an injustice to yourself or to others. What if learning how to feel and express

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

anger isn't a liability, but rather a life-changing skill that can reconnect you with yourself?

Connecting with anger doesn't mean blowing off steam or yelling or venting and then justifying it all. Connecting with anger is about rebuilding inner trust by honoring your real authentic emotions and not overriding them. So, what if anger isn't bad or dangerous at all? What if it's simply a natural experience in your body? It's hormones and neurological signals housing a message that's waiting for you to understand it. No different than any other feeling.

If anger is a cue that a boundary's been crossed, a core value is being compromised, or you are witnessing an injustice, there's actually a risk when you suppress it, right? So, consider your current relationship with anger. What would be different if you saw it as a signal?

So I want to offer you three prompts to help you relate to your anger differently. So the next time that you get irritated or frustrated or bothered or annoyed, which are all code words or shorthand for the emotion of anger or feeling mad, I want you to try these three things. So right now, you can actually bring to mind the last time you've been angry and think about what might have been different if you tried these three prompts.

So, prompt number one, notice where the feeling shows up in your body. What does it feel like? Physically, what sensations are present? Then, number two, ask yourself, what boundary or value or injustice might this emotion be pointing to? Number three, wonder, what am I afraid would happen if I really let myself feel this?

Now notice, when you do these steps, you're not trying to solve or justify or get rid of your anger. You're not expressing it outwardly to others. You're not yelling or kicking or throwing or having a tantrum. You're simply trying to understand it from the inside, and you're getting curious about any fears that you might have about fully allowing the emotion to be present internally.

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

These simple prompts will help you build trust with yourself and expand your emotional range, the capacity to feel the full spectrum of human emotions. Most of us, we weren't taught that all of our feelings matter. We were taught that some emotions are acceptable and some emotions are not acceptable. But there's a consequence to this idea of good and bad emotions.

When you minimize, dismiss, bypass, or internalize the emotions that are labeled as bad, you don't just lose access to those emotions, you start cutting yourself off from all of your feelings. And that can disconnect you from your instincts as well as intuition, and ultimately, can erode any semblance of self trust.

But when you practice getting more comfortable with anger, you do more than access the wisdom that anger holds. You grow your ability to be with all of your emotions. And in the process, you feel more like yourself.

Let me give you one example of what it might look like to connect with and then express anger differently. Let's say you have a colleague that repeatedly interrupts people during meetings. It derails the agenda, they don't listen, other people in the meeting have a hard time following, and it's hard to stay on track.

So option one is you bottle up your anger. You say nothing, you stew about it, and later on, you vent text to a friend, or you ultimately snap at somebody else later on. Until the next meeting, when the same thing happens again.

Now here's the alternative option two. This is where you try these three prompts. You're in the meeting, you recognize that you're irritated, AKA angry. And you check in on the bodily sensations. You notice there's a heat of the irritation and kind of a sharp, maybe fast feeling in your chest, in your arms, and there's an impulse to run and to yell. You take a breath, and you mentally note that the value being violated is a belief that everybody deserves to be heard. And the interrupting that you're witnessing, it really

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

feels like an injustice. It feels like there's an imbalance in whose voice is valued more.

Then you quickly check in on what you're afraid would happen if you just let yourself feel the feeling. And you realize that the feeling itself, that sharp, fast heat feeling, it's not actually that bad. And your concern is not necessarily feeling the feeling, but of being judged or rejected by the person who's interrupting and their friends, if you were to name what's going on externally.

So in your mind, you quickly remind yourself what matters most to you, and you tap into some courage. And then in the meeting, you say something like, "Hey, I want to make sure that everyone is heard. And when they're interrupted, it's hard for me to follow what they were originally saying. And then it's also hard for me to follow what you're saying. And when I'm interrupted, I can't finish my thought. Can we slow it down so all of us can share fully? And that way we'll each hear everyone and your thoughts too."

In this example, you're staying with your anger long enough to understand the core message. And then you're not yelling and you're not stuffing it down. You're simply advocating cleanly, clearly, really in a matter-of-fact tone without blame. And you're not attacking or scolding when you communicate it. You're simply sharing your value and offering a solution. And so no matter how the interruptor in the meeting responds, you aren't left with bottled-up anger.

And that's what doing this type of slowed down emotional processing work can look like. It's not glamorous, it's not flashy, but it's honest, it's simple, it's real, and it's powerful.

So, why does this even matter in the bigger picture? Could you not just keep bottling up your anger? I mean, you figured out how to do it this long and you can deal with your resent. So, like, who really cares? Well, here's the thing. When you don't know how to be with anger, you're more likely to overextend yourself to avoid conflict, dismiss your own needs to keep the

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

peace, and then feel chronically misunderstood, invisible, or emotionally depleted.

And then the people that you want to be closest with, they don't really get to connect with you, but they connect with the diplomatic, repressed, walking on eggshells version of you. And when you're chronically misunderstood and depleted, I don't know about you, but it's disempowering to say the least.

And these things apply to all the emotions we resist and judge and try to fix or try to numb. Which is why learning the skills of being with emotions like anger helps you learn how to be with all of your emotions. And it's such important work that it's built into all the things we do in Habits on Purpose small group coaching.

In HOPP small group coaching, we explore anger through the lens of Internal Family Systems. Not as a problem to fix, but as one of a myriad of emotional signals coming from a part of your system that's bringing information and, in some cases, bringing protection. In HOPP coaching, clients learn to recognize what anger is trying to communicate, and they learn to work with it without exploding or shutting it down. And they use it to inform their boundaries and be more clear on their values and their choices. Because when you learn how to be with anger, you gain access to more of yourself. And you get to feel confident to be with all of your emotions, which is one of the most liberating things that you could do.

And for any of you listening who have kids or you have students or you mentor people, when you can learn to be with anger and communicate it in a way that conveys a core value, you model integrity and honesty, and you give others around you an example of what's possible when they don't repress, but rather they express.

So let's recap. When anger goes unacknowledged, it doesn't disappear, it festers. Bottling it up leads to resentment, burnout, and disconnection. But when you learn to recognize anger for what it is, a messenger pointing to

Ep #170: 3 Steps to Transform Your Relationship with Anger

boundaries, values, or injustice, you stop fearing it, and you can start listening to it. The three prompts I shared help you build trust with yourself, expand your emotional capacity, and access more of your authentic self. Learning to relate to anger differently doesn't just help you feel better, it helps you live with more clarity, congruence, and connection.

So give these three steps a try, see how it changes your relationship with anger. Those three steps are: notice where the feeling shows up in your body, ask yourself what boundary, value, or injustice might this feeling be pointing to, and then wonder, what are you afraid would happen if you let yourself really feel this?

And then, if this type of work resonates, come explore more in the Habits on Purpose small group coaching. If you're listening to this in real time, the next round starts soon in June of 2025, and spots are limited. You can learn more at habitsonpurpose.com/hopp.

And if you want to get a jumpstart on understanding your anger better, join me in the Befriending Anger course. Details will come soon right to your inbox when you are on the Habits on Purpose email list, or you can go to habitsonpurpose.com/anger. Until next week, I'll talk to you soon.

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.