

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

[Habits On Purpose](#) with Kristi Angevine

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

Are you a natural-born problem solver? A fixer? If so, have you ever caught yourself thinking, "I just need to fix this," or muttering, "I see the problem. I know what I'm doing, but how do I fix it?" Whether it's procrastination, overwhelm, being reactive, or having an urge to go scroll on your phone at night when you said you'd go to bed.

What if I told you that the real problem isn't the habits that you want to change, but the idea that you need fixing in the first place? So if you are a natural-born fixer, keep listening. This episode is for you.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, I'm your host, Physician, Master Certified Life Coach, and IFS Practitioner, Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello everybody. Let me first say, my voice is all messed up. I've just gotten over a viral illness that feels like the plague, otherwise known as the flu, in May, and it's taken its toll. So, please forgive me if I sound a little bit scratchy or if my words sound a little bit funky, and hopefully, this will be tolerable for you to listen to.

But this is episode 174, and I want to start this episode off by pulling back the curtain a little bit. Over the last few weeks, things have just been a whirlwind in my life. This perfect storm of travel and unexpected personal stressors, and then getting knocked flat by the flu. And it's been one of those stretches of time where everything feels like it's happening all at once, and honestly, my nervous system has barely gotten a chance to catch up.

And all I've really wanted to do is just fix the problem. I want to fix every wrinkle, every challenge, every obstacle. I just want to press a button and have them all be fixed. I want to fix my fatigue. I want to fix feeling behind. I want to fix all the things. And that just hasn't been possible. And it's why you may have noticed that I did a replay episode last week. There's been so much going on and no real clear fix, but just adjustments to be made.

So, in the adjustment stage of figuring out what to do with all these challenges that have kind of cropped up, I decided to reschedule and shift

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

some really big things in my life and in my business. I've hit pause on some things. For example, the start date for the anger course and for the next round of small group coaching, as well as the preview week. All these are postponed to make space and time for rest, for getting truly better from flu and not just maybe 50% better before I just jump back in, which is my usual.

And I share this because my normal is not to make time, make space, delay things, postpone things. That is not my comfort zone. And my habit for a long time has been to stick to a plan, not change it except for tiny things, and always to push through instead of rest. So I'm sharing this with you because this is me living what I teach, choosing flexibility over rigidity, honoring my own limits, and modeling self-compassion in real time, even when it means that people might be disappointed. And even if it means that important things have to happen at different times than I expected.

And it feels both amazing and very uncomfortable, which is what I find is often the case when we're making really important changes and when we're growing. So I share this with you so that you can see that I'm growing right along with you. I am dealing with all sorts of challenges of implementing the things I teach. And in my current, sort of busy season, I have had this very strong desire to fix all the things, and that's not necessarily possible.

So, today, I want to share a short but powerful reminder about the difference between fixing and understanding, and why, when it comes to moving the needle on changing your habits, a paradigm of understanding and a paradigm of presence trumps one of fixing.

So what comes up for you when I say, "You have permission to stop trying to fix everything. You have permission to stop trying to fix yourself"? If you are like most of us, you might say, "Yeah, okay, but there's so much that needs fixing. There's so much I need to improve. So many bad habits, so many bad feelings, so much I wish I could do better. There's just so much

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

to fix." Stopping fixing yourself might sound like giving up, and maybe it might sound like taking the easy way out. I get it.

But what if you didn't have to fix anything about yourself, and you could still make the changes you want to make? Now, you might not believe me, but the truth is you can actually stop all fixing efforts. And in fact, when you stop trying so hard to fix things, you will actually fast-track the changes that you actually desire and make it easier to get to your goals.

So, what if you stop trying to fix and started trying to understand? In this episode, I'm going to contrast fixing and understanding. I'm going to explain how this ties to Internal Family Systems as a life practice, and how shifting what might seem like semantics is actually at the core of effective habit change. So let's dive in.

When you have something you want to change about yourself, often the solution entails fixing what's not working. And if you've been learning about Internal Family Systems and considering all the different parts of yourself, you might find yourself thinking things like, "Okay. So, how do I fix this part of me that people-pleases? How do I fix the part of me that's procrastinating and that catastrophizes? And how do I fix the overeating and the snapping at my kids and the numbing out on Instagram? How do I fix being reactive and being harsh?"

The truth is, changing something is not actually about fixing. As a verb, "to fix" means many things, and we could geek out about that for way too long. But the definition I'm using today is the one for "fix," that means to mend, to repair, or do the work needed to improve something so that you make wrong things right. The implication being that there's something problematic, something suboptimal, or something wrong with whatever we are endeavoring to fix.

Now, let me just name the elephant in the room. This may actually sound like semantics to you. Come on, does it really matter if we say we want to fix something or if we say we want to address something? I hear you. But in actuality, the wording here matters more than you may realize. Our words

Ep #174 : Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

matter. Words describing how we approach ourselves matter because they reveal what we think about what we are doing and why we are doing what we are doing.

So, when you approach a flat tire with fix-it energy, that's perfect. This is a discrete problem with a straightforward solution. But that same energy directed towards yourself can be counterproductive. And as we go along, I'll show you how this is the case. Next, when it comes to habit change, personal change, what's the actual difference between fixing yourself and understanding yourself?

Well, to fix yourself is to get rid of a problem, to stop a problematic behavior or a pattern, or to do something new that is better. To fix your overeating by getting rid of your urges, fix your procrastination by getting rid of your overwhelm. To fix is to identify a core issue and make the wrong thing right.

And that might not sound that bad to you, but stick with me. To understand yourself is nearly the opposite. Instead of getting rid of a problem, it entails learning what makes the problem make sense. Instead of stopping a behavior, understanding how that behavior helps and why it developed as a go-to response in the first place. To understand isn't ever to eradicate something, but to discover the mysteries about something that explain it. Instead of getting rid of urges, understanding why they are present. Instead of eradicating overwhelm, understanding why it's there.

I don't know if any of you grew up hearing this sort of dark story. It's like a riddle meets a joke, meets a cautionary tale. And it's a story of a person, they're driving their car down this dark, lonesome highway, and over and over again, this trucker keeps turning on the brights, and it's wiggling the person out. They're getting really scared. And so they get to a rest stop, and they pull over, about to call the cops to tell them that this person keeps flashing their lights at them. And lo and behold, it turns out there's a murderer with a knife skulking in the backseat of the person who's with the car, and the trucker could see the person. And every time they could see the person get up in the backseat to cause harm, they would shine their

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

bright lights on them so that maybe the person would be seen, something like that. I remember it was almost told as a little bit of a ghost story.

The reason I tell you this, and the way it relates is, a fixing paradigm when it comes to deep personal work and habit change would be to get away from the trucker and their high beams. But to understand would be to figure out, how come these high beams make sense? What's going on here?

The problem with a fixing mindset when it comes to change is, fixing is a bit impatient, it's hasty, and it's seeking a solution before the root cause of the issue is actually brought to light. And this leads to superficial, short-lived changes that we have to continually address. And as an empiricist, if fixing as a habit change approach worked, I would be all for it. But the problem is it doesn't, and it backfires, and it wastes precious time and precious energy.

So, understanding, in contrast, takes a different path towards change, one that is slower and not so intuitive, but it is so much more effective. So, ponder for a moment, what would be different for you right now if you stop trying to fix things, stop trying to fix yourself, and started only trying to understand yourself? What if you stopped trying to fix your desire to eat the whole box of cookies or drink the whole bottle of wine and started trying to understand why the desire for that was there in the first place? What if you stopped trying to fix your second-guessing and started trying to understand it?

This understanding, as opposed to fixing approach, connects to my favorite model of the human mind and the human experience: Internal Family Systems. Now, if that phrase is new to you, feel free to go back and listen to some of the foundational episodes. We'll have those linked in the show notes for you. But the footnote version is that Internal Family Systems, it's a model in psychotherapy. It was articulated and created by Dr. Richard Schwartz, and it offers us a multiplicity model for understanding why we think, feel, and act as we do.

It basically explains that despite the spooky connotations surrounding multiple personality disorder, aka dissociative identity disorder, that the

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

actual natural state of our mind is to have multiple parts or multiple personalities, like the proverbial angel and devil that you have on your shoulder.

So we all have different parts. Right now, you might have a part that loves learning and losing yourself inside podcasts, and you might also have a part of you that watches the clock and cares about not being late. Our inner parts, they're actually like people on a team, and they all have important roles that they play. For example, your inner rebel might make sure that you don't passively conform, and your inner anger ensures that you react when you see injustice.

IFS as a therapeutic modality has at its core the idea that none of our parts need fixing, but they all simply need understanding, even the parts of us that we might not like.

So, if you have a part of you that likes to scroll, scroll, scroll and stay up late instead of stick to the plan, even that late-night scrolling part of you doesn't need to be fixed, it needs to be understood.

So let me pause this broadcast and ask, are you a natural-born fixer? Do you like to problem solve and brainstorm? Do you see a problem and reflexively pitch in to help? You may have a professional job title as a fixer. You operate to remove things. You fix clinical problems. You might even do your best to fix other people's problems or fix other people.

So if you are a fixer, understanding in lieu of fixing may seem awful. But as a fellow fixer, I assure you that understanding is much more effective in the long term than actually going about fixing.

So, back to Internal Family Systems. So often when people encounter Internal Family Systems, they get super excited. They feel very seen and validated. "Finally, my inner contradictions are explained." And then people start noticing all sorts of different parts. "Oh, there's my anti-social part. That's my rule-following part. Oh, that part of me really likes to people-please, and it's really big right now."

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

And as people do this, they might note that the parts of them that drive behaviors they don't like stand out as problems, and the inner monologue starts to sound like this: "Okay, so what part is this? Ooh. How do I get this part to go away? How do I make it stop? How do I fix the angry part of me, the part that likes to avoid? How do I fix my perfectionistic part? How do I fix it?" And this makes sense, right? If a part of you is causing you suffering, of course, you want relief, and of course, you want it gone. But there's a different way.

When we exchange fixing for understanding, change is easier because we learn to treat our inner parts like we would treat people. And what happens when you try to fix people? Get rid of people, silence people, sort of strong-arm, persuade people. Nothing good, right? When you intentionally approach any internal conundrum, any pattern, the way you would approach a person that you want to get to know, you will actually access depth that's available only when you're in understanding mode.

Now, a lot of this can sound really abstract and overly theoretical, so let's make this really concrete. Take scrolling on your phone or watching TV, or maybe even reading books late at night past your ideal bedtime. Say you want to reduce this pattern, or at least feel like you can change it when you want to. This is what a fix-it approach looks like: "Scrolling late at night is so bad. So I'm going to set some screen limits, and I'm going to turn on downtime on my device. I'm going to put my phone in a lockbox in the kitchen. I'm going to get an old-school alarm clock. I am leaving my books in the living room, and for every day that I go to bed when I say I go to bed, I get a checkbox. And when I do it for a week straight, I'm going to go get a massage because I am a person who does what she says, and I am ending this today."

None of this is bad. Rock on with your bad self, right? But many times this type of bravado ends up not being a solution that works for the long haul, and you do it for a week or a month, and either abruptly or insidiously, you find yourself back in the thick of scrolling or reading, and you're like, "WTF, how did I get back here?"

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

So this is what an understanding approach looks like: "You know what? A part of me loves to read and scroll late into the night. And another part of me wants to feel refreshed after sufficient sleep in the morning. And when I stay up late and I get less sleep, a part of me gets super frustrated with myself for yet again staying up late."

"So I wonder, how come staying up late is so appealing? And then, before bedtime, what would it be like if I stopped scrolling in 10 minutes? Oh, interesting. As soon as I do that, a part of me finds that so depressing. I have not had any me-time all day long. This is my one chance to decompress and do something fun. I would feel robbed. I never get enough time for me. Huh. Well, that makes a ton of sense. I value my me-time. I need my me-time. And I wonder if there's a way to do this differently where I can get my me-time, but not exchange it for exhaustion. So maybe I pick a day every week where I delegate kiddo bedtimes, or I just retire to my room earlier, and I get that extra me-time. Or, maybe I figure out how I can feel less depleted through the day so I don't feel so desperate for this me-time. Huh."

See how understanding sounds so different from fixing? If we can understand why we're doing something, we can actually understand a better solution than just going in with fix-it energy. Understanding is a letting go of the idea that you are a problem to be fixed, and instead, approaching yourself like someone you're interested in getting to know, or if you're a traveler, approaching yourself like you would approach a town or a trail that you've never been to that you want to learn about.

So let's recap here. Trying to fix yourself often means trying to get rid of something: a feeling, a behavior, a part of you that seems inconvenient or problematic, getting rid of things that seem like they are so hard. And baked into this desire to fix is the notion that there's something intrinsically bad, broken, or wrong. Versus understanding yourself, that's different. To understand calls on getting curious, being compassionate. And it's not about erasing parts of you, but it's about getting to know the how, the why, the details of how something makes sense.

Ep #174: Stop Fixing and Start Understanding Your Habits

Fixing hides haste behind a promise for a speedy solution, but in actuality, it slows down any change, which is part of why it often backfires and only leads to short-term and superficial change. In contrast, understanding is slow and has the premise baked into it that there's a good reason for this habit. There's a good reason why this part of me is here. So let's learn about it. I wonder what the full story is. So, I want you to try this: no more fixing, unless you're fixing a leaky faucet or flat tire. Pick anything you want to change and put your precious, aka finite, time and energy into understanding it.

And here are the two questions I love: How come this is what's going on right now? And what's really going on here? Ask those two questions to anything that you would rather fix and get rid of, and change, and see what happens for you. That is all for now. Enjoy, and I will talk to you next week.

If you're a woman physician and you want to go deeper with this kind of work and create changes in your everyday life, come join us in the next round of Habits on Purpose for Physicians small group coaching.

Enrollment is open now and spots are limited. Learn more at habitsonpurpose.com/hopp. And if you're listening to this in live time and you want to start this kind of work even sooner than our program starts, there are two options.

The Befriending Anger course starts soon, and you can still join us. It's a two-week course designed to help you understand this complex and very often misunderstood emotion. And the Habits on Purpose for Physicians preview week is a free week that gives you a sense of what being in HOPP small group coaching is like. Check them both out in the show notes, or you can go to habitsonpurpose.com/anger for the anger course or /preview for the preview. I hope you have a really good week, and I'm so grateful you tuned in.

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.

[Habits On Purpose](https://habitsonpurpose.com) with Kristi Angevine