

Ep #180 : Why You Minimize Your Successes and How to Shift It



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Have you ever walked away from an experience, maybe a successful project, a meaningful conversation, or some milestone, and instead of letting yourself feel proud, you immediately started scanning for what you did wrong or what you should have done better? Or someone acknowledges a strength of yours, something that you do really well, something that maybe comes really naturally to you, and your first instinct is to downplay, deflect, or change the subject? If so, you're not alone.

Today, I want to revisit a fundamental idea I first explored over two years ago, back in episode 57: the habit of dismissing your progress and minimizing your success. But this time, I'm taking things a bit deeper, drawing on what I've learned since then, through my own lived experience, through evidence-based, researched-informed frameworks, including Internal Family Systems, embodiment, neuroscience, and nervous system regulation, that have all profoundly reshaped how I understand and work with this habit. Let's dive in.

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, everybody. Today, I am recording this in a little rental house in Chattanooga, Tennessee. I traveled here to meet up with some friends and some family, and let me just say it out loud, we tried our best when we moved to Oregon to entice all of our people to follow us to Oregon, but we were unsuccessful. So we make as many trips back east as we can.

And before I dive in, I want to give a little shout-out to Yellow Door Vacation Rentals. This company helped me with a place to stay when I was in a bit of a pinch. And that's a long story for another day, but they gave me a later checkout, and that allowed me to finish this podcast up before hitting the road. And there's something just so great about finding people and businesses that go out of their way to take great care of their customers. And I've just so appreciated that on this trip. So thank you, Yellow Door.

Now, for the topic of today, we're going to dive into why we minimize ourselves and how to relate to that habit or tendency differently. So first off,

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what do I mean by minimizing ourselves? What I mean is the act of discounting your own strengths, brushing off your own successes, and seeing them as either insignificant, unearned, or not worth noticing. It's the act of downplaying, deflecting, or outright ignoring your own strengths, successes, and progress, and treating them as if they don't really matter or aren't even worth acknowledging.

Now, if you're listening and you think that I've been eavesdropping on you, trust me, I simply understand this habit from the inside because it was one that ran so deep in me that I didn't even see it when it was pointed out to me repetitively.

Now, this particular episode was inspired by a moment I had a while ago in a training I was in, and it was a training I'd been looking forward to for ages, and one that I ultimately had just an incredible experience in.

Now, in this training, at first, I didn't even notice that I had the assumption that everyone around me was significantly more competent, more knowledgeable, and more qualified than I was. But over a pretty short period of time, I realized I actually felt really sturdy, really comfortable in the material, much more than I expected. And I felt remarkably more steady than many of the people around me, who at first I found very intimidating. What I thought was going to reveal all my inadequacies actually revealed how much I'd grown.

And yet, because of that awareness, and right on the heels of that awareness, I noticed a familiar reflex creeping in. A part of me still wanted to dismiss, minimize, and set aside the positive experience. And this showed up in me saying, "Well, this is just new material for some people. I've studied it longer, so of course I'm more comfortable with it. This is kind of like a high schooler going back to fourth-grade math. Kristi, you should kind of be able to hang. You should be more comfortable."

So this tendency to discount myself would not have been something that I appreciated as a tendency, as a habit, without the contrast of seeing myself alongside others in that moment. And I might not ever have fully

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appreciated how far I'd come or how automatic it was for me to downplay myself had I not had that increased awareness. Now, side note here, I can see other people do this, no problem. But noticing this tendency in myself, it's been so much trickier because the tendency is really stealthy.

So let me start by sharing how I thought about the phenomenon a couple of years ago. So, back in episode 57, when I first explored this habit of minimizing and dismissing, this is what I did. Back then, I described how this habit shows up as discounting progress, deflecting compliments, focusing on what's missing, and only seeing how far you have to go.

And the way I explained how it was problematic was that it keeps you stuck in self-doubt, and it disconnects you from your strengths. It hides your own progress from yourself, and that all feeds into feeling discouraged. I shared some of the reasons behind it, like the cultural messages around humility, discomfort with attention, imposter syndrome, and the fear of disappointment. And then I offered ways to shift it: noticing the habit, practicing acknowledging wins, deliberately savoring progress, and when somebody gives you a compliment, simply saying, "Thank you."

Now, all of that is still true and still really useful. And yet, what was missing was a deeper appreciation of how the habit of dismissing comes to be, and the purpose that it can serve, and the positive intention that's often overlooked inside of it.

So, what I've come to realize since then is that minimizing isn't just a bad mental habit to fix. When I first explored this habit, I approached it primarily through a cognitive behavioral lens, focusing on noticing and reframing thoughts, shifting language, and practicing new mental habits. I didn't yet see the connection between this habit and the nervous system or understand this habit as a protective strategy.

I spoke about acknowledging success and wins as a matter of correcting negativity bias and practicing accuracy and discipline without much awareness of how it actually feels in your body to let acknowledgement land, or how vulnerable or unsafe that experience might actually feel.

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What I've come to understand now is that this particular habit is a protective strategy. It's a strategy that developed from a part of you that's trying to keep you safe. And here's what I mean when I say that. Minimizing can protect you from feeling vulnerability, judgment, envy, or failure. It's something many of us learn very early, modeled by caregivers and reinforced by culture. It can feel safer to stay small than to risk being fully seen, safer to downplay strengths than to share openly and potentially be shot down, unwelcomed, or judged. And it shows up not just in thoughts, but it shows up in our body: shrinking, constricting, avoiding eye contact, nervous laughter.

On the surface, it might feel so much easier to stay in the cycle of minimizing than to feel more vulnerable emotions like rejection, loss, powerlessness, not belonging. But here's the thing. The reason this is hard is simply because we just weren't taught how to feel these vulnerable emotions in a way that doesn't feel destabilizing. We understandably see some emotions as way too much, way too risky, and something that is going to completely derail us.

We've absorbed the idea that if we allow ourselves to feel things like grief and hurt, we will just lose control and collapse. We won't be able to function. If we feel pride or confidence or capability, we're going to come across as arrogant. And all of that can seem so much worse than discounting and shrinking.

But here's the thing, all of that is a myth. It's actually a lie. The truth is, it's actually not easier to stay in a pattern of minimizing yourself. That cycle of dismissing and minimizing, it's a form of blocking and resisting growth, of getting in the way of who you're meant to be. It distances you from the very things that you find easy, from the skills that make you and make you stand out.

So, when you consider the tendency to minimize as a protective, adaptive strategy that made perfect sense in whatever context in which it developed, then you can start relating differently to yourself. And what does this open

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you up to? Well, this allows you to get curious about what that tendency might be protecting you from. So, what can you actually do when you notice yourself minimizing?

When you catch yourself, do this: Pause and ask yourself, "What is this part of me worried would happen if I fully owned my growth? What's the fear if I didn't downplay things right now?" Maybe just notice how it feels in your body when you let even a little acknowledgement in. Maybe practice letting recognition in without deflecting, without dismissing.

And the key here is this: You don't have to fix the tendency to minimize. You don't have to fix the minimizing part. So much is just get to know it and understand that tendency better. Essentially, befriend it.

So here are some reflection questions that you can carry with you and start using this week, start using right now. Number one, what part of you believes it's safer to downplay? Or, if you like a different phrase, how come it makes sense that you believe it's safer to downplay yourself? Number two, what are you afraid of if you let yourself see and acknowledge what you do well? And number three, how would it feel to let pride coexist with humility?

And here's what I hope you remember today. You may not realize how far you've come until you see yourself in contrast to where you started. But when you see that growth, when somebody points out your strengths and superpowers, it can feel very unfamiliar, maybe even uncomfortable, to refrain from dismissing them immediately. And that's okay. You don't have to banish the tendency or the part of you that minimizes. You don't have to insert a new thought over top of the self-deprecating ones.

Instead, I invite you to just notice the part of you that has this habit. And if it doesn't feel too clunky, you can even kind of give yourself a little internal wink and say, "Hey, I see you there. Thanks for being here, trying to keep me safe." And then just gently remind yourself, you can own your progress, own your strengths, without losing your humanity. And, in fact, I'll go so far

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as to say, you owe it to all of us to stop shrinking and downplaying your gifts. Thank you so much for listening, and I'll talk to you next week.

And if this topic resonates with you and you're ready to explore your habits at a deeper level and practice relating to yourself in a more compassionate way, I would love to invite you to join me in the next round of Habits on Purpose for Physicians small group coaching. Enrollment is open now, and we kick off with an orientation session the weekend of July 19th, 2025.

So you can learn more and sign up at habitsonpurpose.com/hopp. That's H O P P. And if you enjoy listening to the podcast, whether you are new or you've been here for a long time, if you haven't left a review for it or a rating, it would mean so much to me if you would. Or if you know somebody who would benefit from listening to these ideas, passing it along would be the best gift. Thank you for your time, and until next time, be kind to yourself.

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.