

Ep #187 : What to Do after You Don't Follow through on Your Plan



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If you've ever made a plan to do something, an intention to do something you want to do, like work out, eat differently, go to bed earlier, but then you just don't follow through, this episode is for you.

Today, I'm talking about what to do in the aftermath of not following through, what to do after you don't do what you say you want to do that doesn't involve self-blame, guilt, or shame.

Welcome to episode 187 of Habits on Purpose. I'm Kristi Angevine, physician, IFS practitioner, and podcast host, here to help you understand why you think, feel, and act as you do. So you can be more intentional with this gorgeous life of yours. Let's get started.

Hello, hello, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. If you are new here, thank you so much for joining. If you are a longtime listener, I'm so glad that you're back.

Sometimes, some of the things that are the most difficult for me and for my clients aren't the habits that we're doing that we want to stop doing. But they're the habits that we wish we had but we don't, the things that we want to do more of, but we're just not doing.

Now, if you've been listening for a while, you've heard me discuss the importance of identifying root causes and getting crystal clear on what's actually at the heart of any issue. When it comes to things that you want to do but you don't actually follow through on, this is yet another place where this concept is easy to forget. It's counterintuitive, and yet it's really important to keep in mind.

So, what are we talking about here? This could be going to bed earlier, getting up earlier. It could be working out. It could be calling a family member. It could be putting some FaceTime on your calendar to meet with somebody that lives across the country that you don't connect with in real life. It could be just putting things back after you take them out, slowing down, catching up on some things at work, cleaning up some clutter, that corner or the top of your dresser, or that guest bedroom that has the same

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growing catchall pile. You say you'll get to it. You mean to do it, but you don't.

And then afterwards, you feel like crap. You feel guilty. Maybe you feel embarrassed or discouraged, and the voice in your head says, "What is wrong with me?" So here's what most people do in that moment. They either double down with a new plan or they spiral into self-criticism.

But here's what actually works. What actually works is to pause and ask, "What is in the way? What's actually the obstacle for doing what I say I want to do?" So instead of assuming that you lack self-discipline or you don't have motivation or presuming that you're just not good with people or you are horrible at follow-through and terrible at time management, instead, get curious.

Get curious about the part of you that didn't want to follow through. Get curious about the part of you that struggled to follow through. Ask, "What's the unmet need here? What's the fear or concern? What's not being accounted for? What's the logistical barrier?"

When you ignore or overlook the real obstacle and try to sidestep it with a new strategy, it's like a tetherball. You can only go so far before that rope will yank you back. The obstacle will keep exerting its influence until you turn toward it. So here is the new approach. Treat your lack of action, any time you say you want to do something but you don't actually do it, treat that reluctance or resistance, or hesitation, the same way you would treat a person. Assume that it has a really good reason for being there. Assume that it makes sense in some way, and then go find out how. Go learn about it.

Remember, our brain stores patterns and blueprints for how to respond through our lived experience, not based on logic. So if there's a pattern that you can't seem to break, there's likely a very good reason for that pattern, which means there's likely a very good reason for your lack of action, any reluctance, any resistance, any lack of follow-through. And you'll only find it out if you slow down and get curious.

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So let's use an everyday example. I'm going to use the example of working out and exercising, but you can insert any example that would fit for you in your life. So, let's take working out. Say you want to start working out or get back to being more active, do things like you used to do, or start a new strength training program or sport. So you make a plan, maybe you even get started, but you don't ultimately follow through. Maybe a day or two or a week or a month goes by, and you're really not doing what you set out to do. And then you feel guilty. You said you would work out after work, and then you don't, and you feel bad.

And you go on to conclude that you just suck at staying motivated or that you really should find a better gym. Maybe you need an accountability buddy. Maybe you need new workout clothes. But none of these is likely the real issue. None of these is likely to address the real issue.

So what you can do instead is ask, "What's really making this so hard to follow through on? What's actually going on in me when I don't take the action that I said I would?"

So here are two possibilities for what this can look like. So scenario number one, let's say you tend to make really big, grand, and frankly, unrealistic exercise plans. Plans that are hard to implement. But when you make them, they seem amazing. "Oh my goodness, I'm going to go to my favorite yoga studio. I'm going to go to all of so-and-so's classes because I love how they do their classes. I'm going to get up before work, do one before work, I'll do one in the evening. And then I'm also going to go to my favorite mountain bike trails. I'm going to do that at least three or four times a week. And then I'm going to do some strength training. I'll do ten minutes in the morning. I'll do it every single day. It'll be no problem." And you come up with a lot of things that feel amazing when you think about them.

You imagine yourself doing it all, and you remember how fun it is. But while you're doing it, perhaps you're not thinking about the reality of other things that are taking up your time, and you're not thinking about the fact that you might not actually be able to get to that yoga class because that's the same

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time that you said you would do something else. But those things, in the moment of planning this amazing futuristic sort of fantasy of how you want things to be, those things are not on your radar.

So, when it comes time to stick to this grand plan, you can't, and you feel discouraged. And then, without realizing it, a part of you starts avoiding even starting to do the plan, just so that you can avoid feeling like a failure.

So in this case, it's not that you're being lazy. The part of you that doesn't start implementing the plan that you had isn't from laziness. This reluctance to exercise when you said you would is simply done with the hidden intention to shield you from feeling really discouraged.

So in this situation, the solution wouldn't be to find a better yoga studio, or to go to a class with a friend, or to buy new yoga pants, or to make another plan. The solution here would be to recognize that the plan you made was a little bit too grand for the reality of the season of life you're in and to make a more realistic plan, to celebrate some of your smaller wins, and to redefine what counts as success for you at this moment.

And this might mean that you do one yoga class every two weeks, that you start walking more at times that it happens to work out, that you build in strength training in pockets of time where you know you're not going to be derailed. And then, of course, underlying all of this, the solution is ultimately going to include learning why grandiose plans are something that you repetitively do.

Now, scenario number two. Let's say you want to exercise more often, and you come home after a long day where people have needed things from you constantly. And once you sit down, you feel like you're physically glued to your couch. The idea of moving that you swore you would do no matter what yesterday sounds horrible. Yesterday you was committed ten out of ten, but today movement feels like torture.

So you conclude, "I must be lazy, lazy to my core." But here's the truth, it's not that you're actually a slovenly human without any discipline. Really, in

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this case, it's simply decision fatigue. It's emotional exhaustion. It's overextending at your own expense throughout your entire day without any realistic plan for how to tend to that. Being glued to the couch is just a part of you that's perhaps craving solitude, craving respite, craving rest.

So, what's the real solution? Well, it's not pushing harder. It's not telling yourself you better go work out. Perhaps it's planning to rest on purpose, knowing these are how my days go. So what I'm going to do is instead of planning working out when I get home immediately, I'm going to come home, and I get thirty minutes to do absolutely nothing. Or I'm going to come home, and I'm going to work out when I said I would, but that evening, I'm going to have my partner do bedtime while I have some time away to do nothing with no expectations just for me. Maybe it's giving yourself guilt-free rest so that your body doesn't have to sneak it in when yesterday you scheduled your bike ride.

And then underneath all that, it's coming up with what is it about what you're doing during the day that makes making those decisions so difficult, makes it so easy to overextend at your own expense, creates conditions for emotional exhaustion.

So the key is this: whenever you're not doing something you say you would like to do, and it's a repetitive pattern, when you pause and investigate what's happening underneath your resistance, you get traction. Instead of bypassing the obstacle, you identify what's actually blocking you from executing and implementing.

And this could reveal something deep: a deep need, a fear, a concern, a previously unacknowledged challenge. It could also identify something as simple as just needing a more doable plan, bringing in something that's fun, or maybe addressing a logistical issue like moving your workout time to the morning, maybe away from things that could easily derail it, like other people needing something from you. But when you don't pause and investigate whatever is holding you back from doing what you say you want

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to do, it's very easy to make erroneous conclusions and come up with solutions that really aren't addressing the problem.

So when you struggle to do what you say you want to do, instead of judging yourself and then feeling guilty, when you look at what's in the way, you're acknowledging what's difficult, and you're addressing this difficulty as something that is valid. Your traction comes because you now stop relying on one-size-fits-all strategies.

And what happens with one-size-fits-all strategies? Well, if you take a cookie-cutter approach and you were to Google something like, "Why I can't keep up my exercise routine," you'll probably come up with some really good ideas that might just miss the root cause of your struggle. Ideas like set your gym clothes out so they're easier to put on in the morning. Join a gym with a friend. Make sure you have a playlist that you like all ready to go so that when it's time to go, you can play that music and overcome your resistance to exercise when the time comes. Now, none of those are bad ideas, but they might be sidestepping or overlooking the real issue.

And when you pause and investigate what's actually going on, you stop treating yourself like a problem to solve, but you start treating yourself as someone worth understanding. And targeting the real barriers, this helps you effectively move forward. You just waste less time, you waste less energy doing things that are not effective.

And in doing this, if we take the 10,000-foot view, what you're doing overall is you're supporting yourself and treating yourself like somebody who makes sense, even if it's not obvious sense on the surface, even if you're doing things that seem really unreasonable or oppose what you say that you actually value.

So, the next time you say, "I was going to do X, but I didn't," don't ask, "What's wrong with me? What is my problem?" Don't say, "I better fix this by Googling and coming up with a new strategy." Instead, ask yourself, "What is in the way? What part of me didn't want to do X? How come I didn't want that?" Because when you treat your resistance as a cue as

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opposed to a character flaw, you will unlock the real wisdom behind feeling stuck. And this is how change becomes not only possible but inevitable.

So to quickly recap, anytime you say you want to do something and you have trouble following through, ask yourself what's in the way. Treat your hesitation, your lack of follow-through, like you would treat a person who makes sense, a person who's there for a good reason. Treat it as a cue to investigate what's really going on behind the scenes. And remember, you are so much more resourceful than you realize, and this is how change becomes so much easier.

I'll talk to you next week, and until then, good luck trying out this new approach.

Do you like this way of approaching your patterns? Do you want to learn more? Want to better understand why you do what you do so you can show up more intentionally? If so, join the Habits on Purpose email list. Just go to habitsonpurpose.com and scroll down to find "Join the email list." And when you do, you'll get information into your inbox about workshops, what I'm up to, what I'm learning about, what I'm thinking about, where I'm speaking, where I'm teaching, and opportunities for us to connect.

For women physicians, you can check out Habits on Purpose for Physicians, a small group coaching program, and you can get more information at habitsonpurpose.com/Hopp. This program is where you can join a community of other women working on unlearning old habits and designing new ones.

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.