

Ep #188 : Overcome Analysis Paralysis by Accessing Your Inner Mediator



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With Your Host

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Ever feel conflicted about what to choose, what direction to go, or what to do? Ever feel torn or unsure? And maybe for the life of you, you cannot decide what to do. Today's episode is all about finding clarity in these types of times. 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. So, if you have ever had analysis paralysis or felt like you were clueless what to choose, maybe you felt a little bit crazy because you could see so many different facets of the situation that you weren't sure where to go, this episode is for you.

I feel like this type of topic is so timely right as those of you who are parents have kids entering school and all sorts of new activities and kid drop-offs and sports pick-ups and all sorts of things that might be ramping up if you're in an academic setting yourself at your own job. And sometimes in these really busy seasons, it is just ripe for all sorts of decisions that need to be made and ripe for the habit of overthinking. Overthinking can be torture, leaving you to be conflicted about what to do and take less action than you'd like to, or perhaps you take haphazard or last-minute action when you would rather be more deliberate.

But when you feel conflicted about something, it makes a lot of sense to overthink things if that is your go-to for how you find a sense of internal safety and agency. Overthinking can actually feel necessary and inevitable. So, if you're in a really busy season of your life with all sorts of things going on because of just busyness externally, talking about how to make decisions more quickly, with more ease and more clarity, learning how to get unstuck from all the overthinking and be able to make decisions with ease is going to be a huge source of relief.

So, let's think about what happens when we feel torn about something. Oftentimes, we get stuck in these internal mental pros and cons lists. We

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list off all the good things, all the bad things, and we try to sort of balance the equation out to help push us for one side or the other.

Or you might do some crowd-sourcing. Or you might just decide, let's just ignore the issue. We'll kick that can down the road, deal with it later. Then, you might end up having a last-minute decision. You get squished into making a decision at the last moment, and then you're left wondering afterwards, was that the right decision?

So, the question that we're tackling today is, when a part of you feels one way and another part of you feels another way, how can you get clarity? Clarity without side-stepping, suppressing, or denying how you actually feel, so that you can move forward.

So, to tackle this question, let's start with what's actually going on when you feel conflicted or torn about a topic. When you are torn, this simply means that you have the presence of different thoughts and opinions and different feelings about the topic at hand. If you are torn about what to do, a part of you wants to do something, another part of you wants to do something else. Maybe a part of you wants to make a decision quickly, and a part of you wants to gather more information. If you're torn about how to spend your time, maybe a part thinks there's a perfect answer, a part wants to do nothing, and another part of you has a big goal and wants to work toward it immediately.

If you're unsure about how to approach something, perhaps a part knows exactly what you want to accomplish and exactly how it should look. But another part of you is primed and ready with all the dangers of that approach. If we say that, so-and-so will think this. If we respond like that, we're going to be shunned. It will feel awkward. This will be the consequence of that. We'll be left dealing with X, Y, and Z, etc. So feeling torn or unsure is like having the gas pedal and the brake pedal depressed simultaneously and wondering why you're not going forward and wondering why you're having to struggle so hard to stay stationary.

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So, the first step when you are torn is to identify the different conflicting and opposing stances that are going on inside of your system. All you need to do is simply name or list them. A part wants this, another part wants that. A part wants sleep, another part doesn't want to miss out. A part is livid and wants to scream. Another part is keenly aware of the outcome that might have. Naming the different opposing stances is your first step.

Then, consider the idea of an internal mediator, which is inspired by David Hoffman, who is an attorney, mediator, arbitrator who teaches a mediation course at Harvard Law School. What if, in addition to your conflicting parts, what if you could tap into your inner mediator and could listen to all the different sides and see a way forward that would serve you really well without denial, without suppressing, without bypassing what's real for you?

You have an inner mediator who's wise, calm, patient, has a big picture perspective. And when you can listen to yourself and your different sides from this inner mediator, this is how you can access a way forward.

So, let's just talk about what a mediator does. What does a mediator in their ordinary job do? Well, mediators facilitate people who have different points of view, different perspectives, different agendas, to find a mutually acceptable way forward. Well, how do they do this?

Well, mediators need to be able to listen to and understand each party's point of view. They need to be good at exploring potential constructive solutions. So, to be a good mediator, you have to be able to be patient, and you have to also have compassion. You have to be persistent and simultaneously focused on the overall mission at hand. You can't take sides. You have to be impartial and actively listen with kind of an agenda-less neutrality.

So, when it comes to accessing your own inner mediator, the optimal approach is to meet your own conflicting parts with these same qualities. And here is a simple way to do that. After you name your internal conflicts,

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first, validate the different points of view. You can do that by asking yourself, what's at the heart of this point of view? What's the main concern, the main priority? What's most important to this point of view? And do that with each of the points of view.

And then after you do that, then you ask yourself, what if there was another way? If you have two opposite decisions that you think you might make, what if there was a third way? Or ask yourself, in this situation, what else might also be true? And then when you ask yourself that, simply listen. Just wait and just notice what surfaces for you. This approach takes a little practice, but generally helps you quickly get a little space and perspective from any inner turmoil.

So, let's outline this approach with an example. Say you're not sure what to do about your massive to-do list and your need for rest. It seems like there's too much to do and too little time, yet you need rest, self-care, exercise, white space.

On one hand, you can see the solution is to become more efficient, to work more, get up earlier, micromanage your day into five-minute blocks to ensure you don't waste anything. And on the other hand, you're a little bit freaked out with panic because of this incompatibility of your list and the available time. So a part of you wants to burn your to-do list and simplify, get rest, go for a run, read a book, unplug, and never look back.

So, the first step is to name the conflicts around your circumstance. Fact, you have a list with a bunch of tasks. And you have 24 hours in a day. A part of you wants things done. A part of you wants to do that by working more and working harder. Another part of you is overwhelmed. And another part wants to completely check out and sees how critical space, time, and self-care are. So sometimes just naming the different parts surrounding an issue is sufficient to help you see a way forward. It's sort of like stepping back from the trees so you can see the forest.

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But to take it the next step, this is where you validate each point of view. And you ask, what's at the heart of all these different aspects? What's the main concern, main priority? What is important to each perspective? So, of course, a part of you wants things done. Maybe you want to meet a deadline. Maybe you want to move on to the next thing. Maybe you just enjoy having groceries ready in the fridge, or you want to stay connected to a friend and really want to fit in that 10-minute phone call. Because these things bring meaning, and they're in line with your values.

And when there's not enough time, the overwhelm makes sense. You're trying to fit things in that actually don't fit. And you really want it to, but you don't know what to do. So in that situation, overwhelm comes up as a signal because you don't know what to do next. And in the face of the goal, it's reasonable to want to work harder. But what's the main concern? If we don't work harder, we will feel forever behind, forever reeling in panic. And so what if we're reeling in panic? Well, if we're feeling behind and feeling anxious, we are squandering what's actually most important.

And with all this going on, no wonder a part of you wants to check out, just burn that to-do list, never look back. Because the thing that's not tended to when you have this to-do list drama is your need for space, time, self-care, fun. And without these things, you can't actually really do what you want to do.

So this stepwise internal validation is simply a means of looking at how each conflicting point of view actually makes good sense. Now, similar to naming things being sometimes sufficient to get a sense of clarity, and sometimes when you understand the essence or the concern or priority of these different facets, that is also sufficient for you to get a sense of clarity.

The third step is to tap into your inner mediator. And the way you do this is you ask a question like, what if there is another way? What could it be? What's a way forward that would address all these concerns? Or what else might also be true?

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So in this example, maybe it's true that there's too much on the list to do this week. But maybe it's also true that the things on the list for this week could actually be accomplished over the course of two weeks, and that would be okay. Perhaps another way forward might be to delegate or to take some mini breaks, or to batch or to change a deadline, or to completely rest today and revisit this decision tomorrow.

Another way forward might be to do something fun and relaxing while you get something done. Bring in some music while you fold laundry, gamify your tedious email deletion project. Only you will know what's best for you. And the way that you can access this creativity and clarity is by stepping back from the particulars of the different conflict and accessing your inner mediator.

So, a quick recap. When you're conflicted or torn, this signals the presence of different parts of you, different thoughts, different feelings, all under one roof. And the first step towards finding some clarity and finding a way forward that does not bypass or suppress or strong-arm any particular point of view is to name the different conflicts.

Then, validate and seek to understand what is at the heart of the issue of all the different sides. And then tap into your own inner mediator and see, is there another way forward? Is there something else that could also be true? Is there a way forward that addresses all of the concerns in a way that lands really well with all of you?

And you can use this approach with concrete, small decisions. Which event do I attend? How do I best approach this problem? Which appliance do I buy? Which book do I read first? What time do I go to bed? Or you can use it with bigger decisions. Do I stay in this job, or do I quit? Do I move to this town or do I move to that town? Do I take that new position, or do I fight for a change in my old one? Do I speak up or do I not? So give it a shot, tap into your own inner mediator, and let me know how it goes. And I will be back with you next week.

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