

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm



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With Your Host

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Most of us know that feeling when everything's going wrong. You're late, you're arguing, you've done the thing you swore you wouldn't do, and everything just feels like one enormous mess with no way to fix it. Well, today I want to teach you a technique that hinges on one simple phrase that you can use in these stressful moments. It's a way to pause, get space from the overwhelm, and access perspective, care, and patience. And the phrase at the center of this technique is "at the end of the day." Let's dive in.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, I'm Kristi Angevine, a physician, Master Certified Coach, Internal Family Systems informed practitioner, and host of this podcast, where we explore the deeper psychology behind why we do what we do.

Hello, hello, everyone. So, one of the things that I've been experimenting with lately is finding different ways to access a shred of calm, perspective, compassion, something when life feels really harried and really tense. And I currently have, thank goodness, a different relationship with tension and difficulty than I used to. I no longer make it mean something terrible about me automatically. But that doesn't mean that my life on a day-to-day basis is some sort of glossy magazine spread with serenity and no hiccups and no crazy awkward moments. Everyday life, as I experience it and as most of my clients and friends experience it, it has curveballs, speed bumps, road closed signs that weren't there yesterday, emotional ups and downs.

The best-laid plans and thoughtful preparation don't magically come in and remove crankiness, miscommunication, misinterpretations, and disappointment. These things, they don't prevent running late, even though you had an extra hour of buffer time built in. And sometimes just knowing that life is just like that sometimes can be radically soothing, especially if your go-to is to assume that life is crazy because there's specifically something deficient or broken about you as a person.

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

But even if you don't make some of the crazy things that go on during your day mean anything negative about you or the people you're around, having a way to reset and recalibrate when things do feel bonkers is gold.

And I've talked about this type of thing in a few different episodes. But today I want to just give you something that's really simple. And this is something that can be used really easily anytime.

So, as I'm talking, I want you to think of the last time that you felt really profoundly dysregulated. Maybe you felt really tense or tight, irritable, reactive, and especially one of those times where you didn't feel like there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

So, let's talk about this simple technique that uses a simple phrase that you can use to anchor yourself when things feel haywire and out of control. The phrase itself is "at the end of the day." So, here's when to use it, and then how to use it.

So say things have gone sideways. You feel powerless, overwhelmed, sad, angry, inept, defeated. Things feel tight or tense. You're scowling, you're stewing. The plans you had are crumbling before your very eyes. You are swept up in stress. Nothing is remotely going well. Things are not even a little okay, and you don't know how to fix it. You just keep swirling through defeat, sad, angry, mad, overwhelmed, powerless, inept, over and over.

So, step one, first you have to notice that you're in the thick of things. You need to know what it feels like when you're stressed, when you're tight, when you're tense. You need to be able to have physical indicators. Once you notice that you are in the thick of things going sideways, you identify what you are riled up about. What's the pain point? What's the fear, concern, need, worry? What is the hardest about this moment?

Step two, pause. Just pause. Just take a minute. Step three, say to yourself, "At the end of the day..." and then finish the sentence by adding these inquiries. "At the end of the day, how much does this really matter?"

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

"At the end of the day, what's awful about right now, does it matter as much as it feels like it does?"

"At the end of the day, what's the worst-case scenario I'm working so hard to avoid? And if that actually happens, what am I actually going to do?"

And usually, when you pause and you say, "At the end of the day," and you ask these types of questions, you'll discover that the crux of what's gotten you spinning often doesn't matter nearly as much as it seems like it does in the moment.

So let's put this into an example. Let's say you're running late to get out the door. I think that is almost everyone's pain point when it comes to sort of starting your day on the wrong foot. So, you're late to drop off, to an appointment, to some really important thing. You notice you are tense, you are snapping at the people around you, maybe you're irritable at how people are driving. Maybe you're blaming yourself, blaming other people. You're bracing for the fallout.

And say you're also late because you're helping someone else, and maybe that someone else was having an awful day and they were ornery or ungrateful. And now they are also upset that they will also be late to where they want to go, and they are actively blaming you, or irritable or dysregulated.

So, if you can relate to this, you are not alone. But step one here would be to just notice you're in the swirl of feeling undone. This sounds like going, "I am in it. This sucks. I am so stressed out over getting there late. I don't like having other people be disappointed. And this is going to mess up the rest of the day. This is not how I thought things would go. This is not what I had planned. This is not what I had in mind."

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

Then you just pause. Just pause and see if you can just be still for a moment. And then step three, at the end of the day. At the end of the day, how much does being 5 minutes or 30 minutes late matter? Hmm. At the end of the day, it's going to be inconvenient. It might mean I am late for an important meeting later in the day, and my kid might be annoyed. Hmm. And then, at the end of the day, does the punctuality and possible fallout matter as much as it feels like it does right now? Maybe not.

What's the worst-case scenario I'm working so hard to avoid here? And if that happens, what will I actually do? Well, I can park at school. I can go sign my kid in. I can ask for a delayed start to that meeting. I can call ahead and tell the office that I'm running late. For interpersonal strife, well, later on, we can sit down and talk. I'll explain where I was coming from. I'll apologize. We'll reconnect. At the end of the day, what matters more than punctuality is how I show up as I'm getting to where I want to go.

And that type of shift from "This is catastrophic" to "This is hard, really hard, but it's manageable." That type of shift lets you access calm, perspective, some patience, and maybe even some compassion. So let's talk about why this works. This technique is not whitewashing with some sort of fake reassurance. It's not a superficial reframe. This is an eyes-wide-open acknowledgment of what's going down. Yes, it is true. You might be late. Yes, it is true. Things might not go as planned. And yes, it is true, this may be less than ideal. This may not be what you had in mind. And there may be fallout that is really frustrating to deal with. But at the end of the day, you'll handle it. You'll figure it out. It will be manageable.

At the end of the day, what actually matters? And when you open this question up, that's when you can start remembering some of your core values, and then decide on purpose what it is you want to focus on in that moment. And this reconnection to what matters most helps you recalibrate sort of your north star and what you want to align with, being your core values as opposed to what seems the most important from the lens of short-term stress.

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

So, short-term stress says, "Being late is the end of the world." And I don't know about you, when I say that out loud, I can see the absurdity of it. But when I am thick in it, being late does feel like the end of the world. From that perspective, it's not just being late. It's all the things that happen downstream from it. It's all the interpersonal bickering that happens from it. It's starting the day off from feeling nice and serene to shifting down into this deep, dark ditch of just negativity and then being stuck with that all day long. It really does feel intense.

So short-term stress says, "This is the end of the world." Core values say, "Hey, at the end of the day, connection matters more than the clock." Short-term stress says, "Nothing's working. This person is impossible. That is it. I can't handle this." Core values say, "At the end of the day, connection, understanding, and compassion, that's what we need." And as I'm saying this, I'm remembering a friend of mine who left a voice memo, and in her voice memo, I remember distinctly that she said, "At the end of the day, the word is compassion."

Now, here's the bonus that comes when you practice this technique. When you reduce the anguish in the moment, it doesn't mean that you're tolerating circumstances that you want to change, that would be important and meaningful to change.

Say, for example, you're repetitively having morning get-out-the-door drama, and there's a very clear solution. Maybe you need to make some sort of operational change so you can set the stage for more ease. When you are able to get a bit calmer, get some perspective, this will pave the way for you to have more clarity and have some creativity so that you know exactly, precisely what you can do later on to prevent recurrences.

Versus, if you make a decision about changing something from a state of overwhelm, fear, scarcity, urgency, you will more likely than not overcorrect and come up with some unrealistic plan to fix this terrible problem you have

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

in front of you. But from calm, you're going to make better plans and better decisions.

So let's recap. Step one, notice you're in the thick of it. Then identify what you're riled up about. What's the pain, the fear, the concern, maybe the unmet need? What's the worry? What's the most difficult? Step two, pause. Step three, say to yourself, "At the end of the day..." and then finish the sentence. "At the end of the day, how much does this matter?"

At the end of the day, what's awful about right now, does it matter as much as it feels like it does? At the end of the day, what's the worst-case scenario that I want to avoid? And if it occurs, what will I actually do about it? And the extra questions you can add on if they feel accessible are as follows. At the end of the day, what matters most here? At the end of the day, how does this knowledge and this reconnection to my core values, how does it shape how I feel and how I could show up right now?

So, the next time you are in the middle of stress, try this pausing and saying "at the end of the day" technique and see what opens up for you. It is a simple reset that helps you shift from being swept away by stress to staying connected to what really matters.

So, thank you so much for listening. If this episode resonates, I would love it if you gave me a rating or review, shared it with a friend, or just press reply to one of the emails you get from the email list. These small little actions not only help you and I stay connected, but ratings and reviews or telling friends about the podcast, they are huge gifts to me. And they help more people find the show so they can start learning how to change their repetitive patterns and habits without using hacks, but by using practical approaches that are based on curiosity, clarity, and compassion. Until next time, I'll talk to you soon.

Ep #191: Stress Reset: How to Find Calm and Perspective in Overwhelm

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.