

Ep #193: Values Blindness: Align Your Actions with What Matters Most



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With Your Host

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Have you ever looked up from what you're doing and realized that hours had gone by? And you still hadn't done the thing that you originally sat down to do?

Maybe you got lost in researching something, organizing, perfecting, or maybe you're just tending to everyone else first. This is time blindness.

But what if there's a similar phenomenon: values blindness? When you lose track of what truly matters most. And that's what we're going to unpack today. So let's get started.

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 think is really fun is to record my podcast in my mobile studio, my mobile office. And one of the things that I love doing is being able to be in really interesting different locations and look out my window and see something a little bit different than I would normally see in my regular studio.

And the other, I think it was maybe a week or so ago, when I looked out the window, it was to my left, there was just this huge, well I say huge, a really large group of deer. And there's lots of deer around where we live. They live in our neighborhoods. They're all around. But this particular group just seemed much larger than usual. There were a bunch of little babies and it was just really fun. And they just stayed right outside my window literally like 4 or 5 feet away for most of the podcast. And today when I look out the window, I do not see those, but they are in my memory as just a really fun part about being able to record as I move around in the world.

So, let's talk about what the topic of today is, which is exploring time blindness and its corollary, values blindness, and how both of these things

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affect how you use your attention, your energy, and ultimately shape many aspects of your life.

I'm going to start with time blindness.

So with ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, as you might know it, people can experience something that's called time blindness. So with time blindness, it's a difficulty sensing or accurately estimating the passage of time. And it's not about laziness. It's not disorganization. It's truly a neurobiological difference. The brain simply doesn't keep track of time internally.

So in real life, this looks like saying, you know, I'm just going to check one more thing. And maybe you go to your email box or you go run to your kitchen to get something. And then suddenly an hour has disappeared. Or you're starting to get ready 10 minutes before you need to leave, when it actually takes you 30 minutes. Or you realize the afternoon has vanished, and you didn't get to the thing that mattered most that was at the tip top of your list.

Time blindness happens because there's no reliable internal clock that monitors the passage of time. Without external anchors or reminders, you become effectively blind to the flow of time.

So the neuroscience behind this involves the prefrontal cortex. And it's the part of the brain that handles working memory and temporal awareness. For people whose brains work in an ADHD fashion, this system doesn't naturally update how much time has passed. Dopamine also plays a role when something is interesting or novel; time feels different. Either it's expanded or compressed.

And there are pros and cons to time blindness. The pros, you can get into deep hyperfocus, completely immersed in a project or an idea. You're spontaneous, you're flexible, you're open to creative flow states that maybe somebody else might struggle to reach.

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But there are cons that are really real also. With time blindness, you might spend too long on something that actually isn't critical and then run out of time for what you actually needed to do. I have personally had this experience where I head to the grocery store to go for a quick errand. And then in the grocery store parking lot, I remember there was something I wanted to do: send a voice memo to somebody, check an email. And then 30 minutes later, when I was already planning on being home, I'm still in the middle of whatever that little incidental task was.

You might miss deadlines. You might run late, even when you had the best intentions. And you might constantly feel behind, anxious, or disorganized, no matter how many organizational systems you employ and no matter how hard you try.

Now, whether or not you have ADHD, most humans have experienced time blindness in some form or fashion. When high achievers notice the negatives of time blindness, they usually don't respond with compassion. They respond with blame. They beat themselves up. What is wrong with me? Everyone else manages their time. Why can't I? They assume they're broken or incapable of change. It sounds like, this must just be how I am. They compare themselves to others to the tune of, "She does it all, and she still makes it look easy. And she has more kids than I do, and she's working more hours at the job. Why can't I do that?"

Or they catastrophize. If I can't get this one thing under control, I'm never going to make it. Or they avoid the problem completely because the shame of it just feels too heavy. And it's easier to say, you know what, I'll just figure that out later. And these self-critical or avoidant patterns really keep people stuck.

So, the good news is there are very specific ways to work with your brain instead of against it, ways to harness the strengths of time blindness and soften the parts that make life harder.

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But before we go there, I want to introduce to you a related concept that's parallel. And it's one that might surprise you. It's something I call values blindness.

Values blindness is when you lose sight of what truly matters most. And you start making choices that are out of alignment with your deeper values. And similar to time blindness, you don't notice that you're doing it.

In everyday life, this can sound like saying yes to every request and then realizing later that you said no to yourself. It can look like numbing out or staying constantly busy instead of doing what's truly meaningful. It can be feeling strangely hollow or just restless even when everything looks good on paper. It's that subtle drift away from what truly matters.

So why does it happen? It can happen for a few reasons. You're not totally clear on what your current values are, what truly matters to you now, maybe not what mattered 5 years ago, and what truly matters to you as opposed to maybe what mattered to your family, your friends, your boss. You haven't identified where or why it's hard to live in alignment with your values. Life moves so fast that reflection falls to the bottom of the list.

And if you've spent years overperforming for approval or belonging or a promotion, it can be really easy to forget about you. And just to lose sight of your actual priorities. When you're constantly in go mode, the brain's reflexive systems, the parts that help you connect to meaning and purpose, they actually quiet down. They kind of fade into the background. And you become really efficient, but not necessarily aligned.

So here's the fascinating thing. You can use the same executive function tools that help in ADHD with time blindness to address values blindness.

So let's start with the familiar ones for time blindness. For time blindness, the best tools include external reminders: timers, alarms, visual clocks, sticky notes, things like that. Breaking tasks into small, visible chunks.

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This is where you might have a task where you need to check and send 3 emails. And so you can use a sticky note that says check 3 emails. And then another sticky note that says reply to 1 email. And then a sticky note that says take a 1-minute break. And then another visual cue or a timer that says respond to the next 2 emails, proofread, and send. So that you have your tasks really microscopically reduced, but in a visual way.

You can work backward from a fixed point. I need to leave at 3, so I'm going to start getting ready at 2:15. And then you can practice time estimation repetitions. This is, you guess how long something will take, and then you check your accuracy. And of course, for time blindness, there's a rule of 50%, where if you're chronically underestimating or overestimating, you can look at how long you think something will take and add 50% so that you have a buffer there. And if you do lose track of time, you have come up with some sort of way to demarcate when you're going to stop based on that extra 50%.

So let's apply some of these same principles to values. For values blindness, you can use external reminders to cue you into what matters most. So you write your top 3 values down on a sticky note, or you make them your phone wallpaper, or something else that you will see regularly. I know some people will take a sticky note and they'll put it on the mirror at their own eye level in the bathroom where they brush their teeth.

Chunk alignment is where, once a week, you pick 1 area, your work, your family, your health, and you ask, "Am I living in sync with my values here?" And you do just an assessment to see, okay, these values, are they here? Are they not? Reverse engineer decisions. So, just like you would work backward from a time that you need to leave by, this is where you start with your value, and you go backward. If connection is my value, what would connection look like right now? If freedom is my value, in this particular area, what would freedom have me showing up and doing? What decisions might be different? How would I be using my time?

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And then values estimation reps. This is when you make a decision, you pause and ask, "Is this choice true to what I really care about most?"

And this is how the same structure that helps you navigate time can also help you navigate meaning.

So let's talk about the benefits of this. The benefit of addressing time blindness is a sense of steadiness and agency with your use of time. There's less rushing, there's fewer surprises, there's less drama in the aftermath of getting engrossed in something when that wasn't part of your plan. And there's more reliability. You can trust yourself more, and other people can trust you, too.

The benefit of addressing values blindness is a sense of integrity. Your life starts to feel congruent, maybe even a little more peaceful. And even in the chaos of every day, there can be a sense of internal alignment and things can feel meaningful. And together, all of this builds trust with yourself.

So let's recap. Time blindness distorts your sense of when things happen. Values blindness distorts your sense of what matters most. And both of these things can pull you out of alignment, mess up your schedule, make everything feel really wonky. And yet, both of these are really manageable with awareness, compassion, and some pretty straightforward, simple external supports.

So when you bring in some gentle structure to your time and intentional awareness to your values, you can create something really powerful, a sense of agency alongside internal integrity. And from those, everything flows so much more easily: your habits, your decisions, your relationships. And that means more joy.

So when you move through your week, I want to invite you to try not just noticing where your minutes go, but where your meaning goes. What's going on with your values as you go through the day? Is your value of, for example, connection, is it getting dropped to the bottom of the list for a

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value of being perceived as a team player? What's happening with your real values? Because the more you practice awareness without judgment of where your time goes and what's happening with your values, the more you're going to feel like you're coming home to yourself in your everyday life.

So that's what I have for you today. And if you would like some more prompts to discuss this further, to reflect on these questions, and you want to hear about the upcoming projects I have, make sure that you're on my email list because that's where I share with you tools and questions, as well as anecdotes that I don't share anywhere else.

So to get on the email list, just go to habitsonpurpose.com, and you'll see on the middle of the page, it'll say sign up to the email list or sign up to the newsletter, and that's where you can join me.

So until next time, take care, stay as curious as possible, and remember, you are more resourceful than you give yourself credit for. And awareness is the stepping stone to feeling that integrity.

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.