

Ep #82: How to Improve Your Experience of Life



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode #82. I'm Kristi Angevine, your host of the *Habits on Purpose* podcast and today we're exploring the power of how you interpret your primary experience. And by the end of this episode, you'll know exactly what a framing narrative is and how this interpretive framing narrative affects your experience of everything.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits that give more than they take. You'll get practical strategies for mindset shifts that will help you finally understand the root causes of why you think, feel, and act as you do. And now, here's your host, Physician, and Master Certified Life Coach, Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello, everybody. Welcome to this episode. I am recording this episode deep in the trenches, so to speak, of so much smoke from forest fires. I live in Central Oregon and fire season happens. And this is around the time that fire season gets pretty intense. And there are a bunch of new fires, old fires, fires that are not so well contained, a bunch of them that are adjacent to one another.

And just the right amount of wind and all the things coalesce to create really horrendous air quality so that you wake up, it's a beautiful sunny day, the temperature is gorgeous. You look out the window and it looks like we're just in smog or we're in fog. Like you can't see the hillsides. You can barely see a part of town that's like two miles away because it's all obscured by this really thick, dense smoke.

And if you pull up the IQ air app and you look at the air quality maps, everything is red and purple, those are like the really bad air quality. And normally the air quality are these little green and yellow dots. And when the smoke gets really bad the air quality number goes up.

And typically they cancel things like soccer practice when it's above 150, and lately we've had multiple days where it's been over 200 and in the three hundreds, which you can go outside in that. It's not like you physically can't or you're not allowed to. But we all know it has an impact.

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So despite it being summertime here and our kids being home and this beautiful summer weather, we've had a lot of time on the inside of our house. And you never really know when it's going to happen, because it can be a gorgeous day and then the winds change or a new fire and all of a sudden your plans for doing outdoor things are just, they change.

So we've had this time inside, and frankly because of having some sort of unexpected changes in plans related to weather and related to smoke, there's been quite a bit of negative emotion. Mainly disappointment, but things like overwhelm, frustration and irritation. The whole family is a little stir crazy, so it's brought up a lot of opportunities for feeling our feelings.

And I will make this into a topic for a future episode specifically talking about disappointment. So if you experience disappointment on a regular basis and you really don't like it, like some of us, ahem, me, we will be diving deep into that in a future episode.

So all this to say my family and I have been a bit stir crazy. And this is my segue into this cute little story. The other day we were getting ready for bed and because we'd been in the house all day long we were all kind of getting on each other's nerves just a little bit. And I had said that we could watch a movie. But to watch a movie, we needed to get everything done and we needed to do it by a certain time.

And as my daughter was getting her things ready she was running a little bit low on time. And she recognized that she had more to get done than would be easy to get done in the time that she had. And she was getting a little bit overwhelmed.

And it was really cool because she recognized the discrepancy in what she needed to get done and the time that she had and so she asked her brother for help. So she's almost 11 and he's seven. So she asked him if he would do both of her chores, instead of him doing one and her doing one.

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And he said yes. He said, “sure, no problem.” And later on, I heard him say, just sort of out of the corner of my ear, I heard him say, “I have to do both chores.” And it was super interesting because I heard him willingly agree.

He was actually kind of happy to help out. I think it made him feel really good that she asked, and it feels good to be really helpful. Within minutes his story about the chore was I have to do both chores. It wasn't that I have this extra thing to do because I said it would help you. It wasn't this vision of I chose to do both. It was, I have to do both chores.

And what was so interesting to me was, number one, the narrative itself. And number two, how quickly this interpretation formed for him. So how quickly do you do something similarly and then fill in the blank with some sort of task? How often do you do that?

So the topic of this episode has to do with the narrative that we have in our minds for how we frame and how we interpret things. So where do you tell yourself “I have to” in ways that leave you a passive recipient to this task on your to-do list. So listen and see if any of these sound familiar.

I have to finish this note. I have to get the kids from point A to point B. I have to show up with a smile on my face. I have to get this project finished. I have to exercise. I have to make dinner. I have to be here at this time. I have to talk to so and so. I have to write this email. I have to finish up these discharge summaries.

What these have-tos are, are essentially themes to a framing narrative. So what the heck is a framing narrative? A framing narrative is a story about something. It's what you make something mean. A framing narrative is the context you assign to events and experiences.

So there's the primary experience of something, and then there's what we make it mean. It's the story we tell about it. It is the context that we assign. So framing narratives can be nourishing, or they can be depleting. And I have-tos are generally the latter. They're generally depleting because of how they make us feel.

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So what does “I have to” feel like? Well, usually it feels heavy. It feels like a burden. It feels like an obligation. You feel stuck, without options, without choice, discouraged, maybe like a victim. So think about yourself when you say “I have to...” how do you feel? And then what other framing narratives might you be telling yourself that don’t feel so great, that aren’t actually very useful?

So you know a fixed, unhelpful framing narrative by how it makes you feel. It usually generates emotions somewhere in the family of disempowered, helpless, powerless, and stuck. So the most common fixed framing narratives that I see are the following.

I have to. I’m just a person who... The all or none indictment, which sounds like it’s all terrible, it’s all ruined. The perfectionist perspective, which is it’s all right, but it could be better, it probably should be better. The confusion framing narrative, which is I don’t know what to do. I don’t know how to figure this out. And then the final most common fixed framing narrative that I see is, this isn’t how it’s supposed to be.

Can you relate to any of those? If you can, you’re in great company. I do have a side note for the last one, for the “This isn’t how it’s supposed to be” narrative. I personally ascribe to the idea that there’s a time and a place for this sentiment. The sentiment of, “something has gone wrong, this is not how it’s supposed to be,” that is actually useful.

So say, a loved one dies. Say you witness a really horrible injustice. You see somebody who’s being bullied. It can actually feel empowering to think, “This is not right. This is not how things should go. This is not how it’s supposed to be.” That could generate something like clean anger.

Clean anger from the sentiment of this is not right, this needs to be fixed. I’m going to do something about this injustice that I just witnessed, as opposed to more of a woe is me, powerless, helpless, like this isn’t how it’s supposed to be. I can’t handle it. This isn’t right. Something has gone wrong. You can feel the difference, right?

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So when we have a framing narrative, when we're making an interpretation of what things mean in a way that doesn't serve us, so what? What's the problem? Well, the problem is it influences how we show up. So how do we show up in real life when we have a framing narrative that's not very useful? What do we do?

Let's take the example of I have to. So how about this, I have to go see this patient. I have to write my note. I have to get caught up. I have to call so and so, and I have to do it now. And I think so many of you can relate to this, right? This is probably my most common inner monologue I had at work on busy days when I would be on call. And, for me, it would feel very pressured and very heavy when that was my framing narrative.

So what would I do when I felt pressured and heavy? When I felt overwhelmed and stressed? Well, I would be curt with people. I would be curt with people that I usually wasn't curt with. I would wish people would hurry up. I was super impatient. I wanted people to get the show on the road, talk a little bit faster.

And I would see somebody who would seem really relaxed and I would compare my overwhelm to their chill affect. And I would think either something critical about them or something critical about me. Like, oh my gosh, they are so clueless. They have no idea what's involved in doing a good job. No wonder they're so laissez-faire. Or I would say something critical towards myself, like what is my problem? Why can't I catch up? Why can't I be like them?

When I felt pressured, heavy, tense, and overwhelmed, I would catastrophize. I would go to the future. It's always going to feel like this. There's no end in sight. I can't even catch a break. I would think of other things that were hard and I would create the mental equivalent to a 10 car pileup.

I would have work stress compounded by personal life stress compounded by parenting angst, family stress. It would be like a pile of pancakes. And I would see myself as the victim of these terrible circumstances and say things like, this freaking place. This job. What the heck? And I would

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generalize. I'd see the entire world as bleak, and I wouldn't appreciate any of the positive or neutral things around me.

So when my son says, "I have to do both chores," notice how there's a heavy obligation or sort of a tense pressure there. When he's in that state if I say something like, hey, but do you need any help? Is anything going on that you need help with to keep you going in a forward direction? If his framing narrative was, well, I'm helping my sister and I'm doing both chores.

If that's where he was, when I ask, hey, you need anything, instead of saying, I have to do both chores and feeling kind of ugh, you might say something like, is there any way that you could help get the sponge ready for me? He would just be a matter of fact. He wouldn't feel heavy. He would ask productive questions. Things would just be no big deal.

Now, if you haven't read the book *Mindset* by Carol Dweck, it details so much about what a fixed mindset is versus a growth mindset. A quick example that I think demonstrates the difference between the two is a fixed mindset would sound like, I can't do this. I can't figure this out. And a growth mindset would sound like, I don't know how to do this yet. I have something to figure out here.

A fixed mindset would say something like, I'm just not good at this. And a growth mindset would say something like, what am I missing here? So what would be the more growth-oriented alternative to I have to? And what would be the impact of that alternative?

So let's think about this. There is very little that you actually have to do. To stay alive as a carbon-based mammal you have to breathe, you have to hydrate, you have to eat. To have money you have to have a means of accessing money if that's something that you want. But when it really comes down to it, there's not much that we actually must do.

What we do, we are choosing to do. So notice the simple but profound difference between I have to do both chores and I choose to do both chores. Notice the simple but profound difference between I have to see

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these patients, I have to write these notes, and I'm choosing to see these patients. I'm choosing to get my notes done. I choose to sit here and listen. I choose to go see this consult.

I choose feels so much better because I choose is actually closer to the truth. So think of the last time that you thought I have to. What would you feel emotionally if you converted that to an I choose to statement? Most of the time when we say "I choose" we feel things like matter of fact, we feel focused, empowered, centered, grounded, connected, something better than obligated, pressured, stressed.

So this simple yet profound shift is available to you just by changing the simple language of your thinking. So let this be a reminder that the power of words shapes your experience. So every time you hear yourself under your breath or in your mind saying, "I have to," consider that the truth is you don't actually have to.

Unless it's I have to take a breath because I need to breathe. But consider the truth is you don't actually have to do anything. And consider changing it to right now I'm choosing to and see what shifts for you.

Another amazing, very concrete exercise that you can do that I love is to look back on your life and tell the story of everything that you did from I chose to and put it in the light of I chose X based on the information I had at the time. What I chose made so much sense.

When you look back at your life or you look back at an interaction or experience, even like yesterday or last week or last year, when you do a look back and you look back on all the things that you did and you put them through the lens of I chose this and what I chose makes so much sense, you open yourself up to recognizing the current choices that you're currently making all day every day in the current time period.

And this is one way that you can shift from the habit of having a depleting, less than useful fixed framing narrative to having a habit of deliberately acknowledging choice. So one of the most powerful things about doing this,

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about shifting I have to to I choose to, is that you might actually uncover that you are choosing things that you don't want to keep choosing.

You may realize that there's an incongruence between your choice and your values and your life's purpose. Or you might realize that what you're choosing, although it's not your favorite, is what makes something you value possible.

And when you reframe the narrative to I choose this and I choose this for reasons I love, then you might actually feel encouraged or you might feel more flexible or you might even feel empowered, even when you are doing tasks that are in the arena that are not your favorite, like discharge summaries.

So this is my question to you. What changes when you stop telling yourself I have to, and you start telling yourself I choose to? Let that marinate in your consciousness and bring any questions you have to the Facebook group, Habits On Purpose, and I will see you next week. Same time, same place.

Would you like to start exploring your own thought patterns and your own beliefs about yourself in the world? Are you at a point in your life where you're really ready to be deliberate with your approach to life and deliberate with your habits?

If so, I would love to connect. I would love to help you with the exploration and the application of the concepts that I teach. I keep a small private practice panel. And if you're interested in private one-on-one coaching, you can learn more about if we're a match by going to HabitsOnPurpose.com/private.

Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit www.HabitsOnPurpose.com. Tune in next week for another episode.