

Ep #105: Building Confidence amid Life's Struggles



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 105. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and I am here to help you understand why you do what you do, so you can live your life on purpose instead of on autopilot.

In today's episode, I discuss confidence, the myths around confidence, the paradoxes, and how to tap into more of it for yourself. Let's do it.

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. Happy February. It's a Leap Year this year, which I think is really cool. Many of you reached out and told me that it was really fun to hear Episode 97, where I made a list of all the things that I loved last year. You loved it because it let you get to know me a little bit better on more of a personal level.

Today, I have a bit more of that, as I frame this episode about confidence with my own personal situation that I'm going through at the moment. So, despite having all sorts of first world safety, creature comforts, a great family, etc. I've been really struggling with my mood lately, and doing lots of deep personal work to navigate it.

It's not easy, and on some days, I can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. But for the most part, I do know I'm in the thick of some really precious learning. And I'm sharing this here because I find that all too often we tend to keep our personal struggles quiet.

We minimize them or dismiss them, or we compare them to people who are worse off than we are. We fear how others might interpret us, that other people will judge us or gossip about us or think that we're defective and lose trust in us. We think that other people won't be able to relate to what we're going through. That sharing is TMI, that sharing is whiny and frankly ugly, when there are so many bigger, more tragic, more extreme problems in the world.

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We inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of secrecy and shame surrounding not being okay. So, this is my effort to break that trend. I am not doing okay. And I know it sounds trite and a cliché, but I'm not doing okay. And that's okay.

For me, I found that I carry this legacy burden, which is an idea that's passed down from others, that it is not okay to not be okay. And I'm going to do an episode on this specific idea one day, but for now, I share my current state of struggle in an effort to normalize, and be matter of fact and transparent about what's hard. Not just share what was hard but I'm on the other side of, but what's currently really difficult right now.

So, one way that the difficulty I'm having with my mood is showing up for me right now, is that tasks are taking an inordinate amount of time for me to complete. Goodness knows my poor podcast team, my poor assistant, people who've given me deadlines, and gosh, my everyday stuff, all of that is on the receiving end of my slog-fest.

I'm going in slow motion in a way that is remarkable, and thankfully, more the exception than the norm. In this slow motion, sort of wet cement, gloomy state of mind, I've been reflecting on what enables me to feel confident and optimistic and have hope, even when things feel really heavy.

So, what creates confidence and what hinders it? In this episode, I'm going to outline the myths and the lies surrounding confidence, the paradoxical nature of it, and how to create and feel more of it even in the hard times.

In preparing this episode, I've wondered how to best define it. And it means different things to different people, in different generations, and in different cultures. But to me, confidence is a state of believing you're capable and can handle whatever comes your way.

Self-confidence is based on liking and appreciating yourself, your strengths, and warts and all. I like how the folks at kidshealth.org describe it. They say that, "Confidence means feeling sure of yourself and in your abilities – not in an arrogant way, but in a realistic, secure way. Confidence

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isn't about feeling superior to others. It's a quiet inner knowledge that you are capable.”

So, if they were two models for self-confidence, it would be, “I can, and I like me. I can give it a try. I can figure it out. I can trust myself to handle whatever comes. I like me well enough more days than not.” That's what confidence is to me.

Now, this is not a rah-rah-rah formula to be all you can be, those of you who know me, and if you've been listening for a while you know that that stuff makes my skin crawl and makes me wince. This episode is also not a prescription for the one correct thing that everyone must do to feel confident.

Rather, it's an offering for one way to think about confidence that will hopefully be helpful to you. And of course, confidence is complex. But I'm going to start with some of the basic myths that surround confidence. So, here are the four myths, or lies, around confidence.

Lie number one: You were born with it or not. We are sold the idea that people are intrinsically confident or intrinsically not confident. That it's some genetically predetermined quality that you have, or you are stuck living without.

And for much of my adult life, I believed that. Now, I didn't really realize I believe that, but I lived most of my life with that in the background. This was mainly because I didn't have any confidence, and my self-esteem was really precarious. But it is a myth, and I don't buy it.

Lie number two: Confidence is the absence of insecurity, stress, challenges, anxiety, depression, self-doubt, etc. It is not.

Lie number three: economic status, finances, and intellectual and social capital, create confidence. The more money you have, the more you learn, the more you produce, the more others value you, the more you do for others, the more confident you'll become. This is not true.

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If it were true, all the wealthy, the famous, the folks with high IQs, would report feeling great confidence all the time. And there would be no death by suicide in actors, athletes, physicians, and the brilliant people. And there will be a linear relationship between money, education, likeability, and confidence.

Lie number four: You have to be pretty and thin, or at least be smart or rich, to feel confident. Confidence is an inside job. It is not contingent on size, or societally dictated beauty norms. The person who comes to mind for this is my step mother-in-law's dad. Now, he's no longer alive, but when he was, he was not what you would call pretty. He was strong as an ox. But he was not thin. He was not stylish in any modern way.

I remember him wearing old T-shirts and jeans that were held up by suspenders. And he was brilliant with common sense and street smarts and farm smarts, but he wasn't college educated. I could have this wrong, but I think he finished part of middle school. And he was definitely not rich.

But this man, humble, kind, full of integrity, was totally confident and clear on what mattered. He had a sturdy confidence that had nothing to do with these external or material things.

So, confidence is not something you're born with or not. It's not a state of being bereft of insecurity, doubt, or anxiety. It is not created by financial, intellectual, or social capital. And you don't have to be smart, rich, pretty, or thin to have it.

Now, these are the main myths and lies that crossed my mind about confidence, but there are many more. And this will be 'to be continued' in a future episode, for sure.

I recently heard author Anne Lamott speak; she wrote *Bird by Bird* and several other bestselling books. She said, and I'm paraphrasing, "You might think I know what I'm doing and have great self-esteem, but I don't. I'm just like you."

She went on to describe that she doesn't actually love to write, but she loves to have written. In large part, because when she sits down to write,

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she often hears what she calls “the bad voices.” The bad voices tell her things like, “Boy, is this beating a dead horse.” And she referred to the bad voices as the narrative that comes from the radio station in her mind, that she calls “KFKD;” that's K-Fucked.

She said you have to do something with the bad voices on KFKD. Notice, she didn't say you have to get *rid* of the bad voices. And she didn't say there's a problem if you have them. You just have to *do* something with them. As Rachel Hart says, “Confidence isn't the absence of anxiety. It's knowing what to do when the anxiety shows up, and trusting you know what to do.”

Now, let's take a minute to elaborate on Lamott's radio station, KFKD. What is KFKD? The K-Fucked radio station is the radio station that plays the top 40 most negative, pessimistic, cynical, and discouraging songs in your mind. Songs that have a collection of repeated thoughts, that come from negative beliefs that we hold about ourselves in the world.

And many of these beliefs are ones that we've just absorbed because of socialization, or inherited from our friends, our family, or our professional culture. And you know what it's like to hear KFKD in the background, right? But the mere existence of KFKD in your mind isn't a stop sign, but it can feel like it if you don't have a clue what you can do when it's there.

I've said this before, not knowing what to do is totally normal, because no one sat you down and taught you how to relate to and how to handle the negative commentary that runs through your mind like a news tick. No one told you, when KFKD comes on, that you don't have to automatically believe it just because it's there.

Your version of KFKD can seem like an obstacle to confidence, but it doesn't have to be. Currently, for me, KFKD in Kristi Angevine's mind is really loud right now. Yet, it doesn't preclude confidence.

So, how is this possible? Where does confidence come from? This is where I've landed. Confidence is something all of us have. It cannot be irreparably damaged, but it can be obscured, and some days feel harder to

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access. Confidence is filled with paradoxes. Sometimes it shows up spontaneously. Sometimes it takes practice.

It's both a skill to cultivate, and it's something that emerges naturally when our limiting thoughts and beliefs soften. It comes from how we think. It also comes from actions we take. Meaning, when we try something and we see that even if we mess up that the world doesn't end, when we do this we set ourselves up to realize that we can handle whatever comes our way.

We are then able to believe the idea, "I can handle it." And this thought, 'I can handle it,' when we believe it, it invokes confidence. Confidence can come from doing something repetitively and improving. Because this type of mastery gives us the chance to more easily believe things like, "I can do hard things. With time, I improve. Learning isn't easy, but it's worth it."

So, it shows up spontaneously, and it takes practice. It's a skill to cultivate, and it emerges naturally. It comes from how we think, it comes from the actions we take.

Given these paradoxes, what can we actually do to feel more of it? Now, there are many, many, many things that we could spend a month or more exploring, in terms of the neuroscience, the social forces, or the mindset work, that influence confidence.

But today, I'm going pretty concrete. I'm going to give you three things to think about. What follows, these aren't hacks, nor are they quick fixes. But they are really practical, and they work if you apply them.

The first thing is the most abstract on the list, but it hinges on awareness. And if you've listened to the podcast for a while, you know that awareness and understanding precede all change. So, the first thing to do is to recognize the myths and lies of confidence, and really notice how believing these things has shown up for you in your life.

Do you perhaps believe that other people are confident, that it's not possible for you, so you just settle? Do you think that if you get a better job, another degree, you make more money, you get your eyelashes done, or whiten your teeth, you lose weight, you win that teaching award, that then

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you can feel confident? How could believing these things keep you striving, comparing, and chronically discontent? How do the common myths about confidence show up for you?

If this is the only thing that you take from this episode, just noticing how the myths show up, you are going to notice your mind and awareness expand in ways that are so useful for confidence.

Secondly, I recommend you pay attention to the micro moments in your day when you do feel confidence. What's going on? What are you thinking? If you're like most of us, you won't really know what you're thinking but you'll recognize how you feel. Use these opportunities to find what your subconscious is believing in those moments.

This gives you the kindling to build a fire. This gives you thoughts that you can practice believing in other areas of your life. You might notice, for example, that you have this vague sense of 'I think I can handle this. I trust myself to know what's right. I'm okay. I'm funny. I'm pretty organized. I'm kind. I'm self-aware.' Fill in the blank with some sort of strength you notice.

Noticing these thoughts helps you find things that you can borrow, that you can use in other areas of your life.

The third thing focuses on myth number two, that confidence is the absence of anxiety, doubt, stress, insecurity, overwhelm, etc. The truth is that confidence can exist concurrently with these, but confidence in the situation, it's not flashy, it's really subtle. But we aren't often taught what that looks like or how to do it.

Let's take anxiety and its sister emotion, self-doubt. When you believe in your ability to handle things, confidence, when you're feeling doubt or anxiety looks like noticing that you're feeling anxious, then reminding yourself it's normal and understandable. Then, instead of concluding some mean indictment like, 'I'm no good. I can't do it. I'll never figure this out,' confidence is making space for doubt and anxiety.

Confidence looks like being curious, and figuring out, how come these other emotions are present for me? What's the concern driving the doubt?

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What's the real core desire or value underneath that anxiety? What do you really need right now? Confidence looks like patiently being with these other emotions, learning from them, and reminding yourself 100 times if you need to, that it's human to feel this way, it's temporary, and you'll figure it out.

So the approach is this: Confidence in the face of uncomfortable emotions looks like noticing your emotion. Reminding yourself it's normal and understandable. Noticing any tendency to make sweeping, mean self-criticisms. Being curious, and finding what the real concern or message is behind that emotion. Reminding yourself to be patient. Reminding yourself it's human to feel as you do, and that it's temporary. And reminding yourself that you'll figure it out.

And the cool thing is, you don't have to remember all the steps or do this in a particular sequence. It's not like a specialized gymnastics move, where timing and sequence and form are really critical. You just pick one, and it will help you make room for confidence. And when you do this, you're actually practicing the art of cultivating more of it, without whitewashing or denying the difficulty you're experiencing.

So, I would love to hear what you think of these ideas. If we aren't already connected, you can join my email list. You can see a link for that on the website HabitsOnPurpose.com. I send emails with practical and interesting ideas about being intentional, and about the intricacies of our automatic beliefs and habituated ways of being. And on any email you receive, just press "reply."

If you're a woman physician, and you're interested in understanding your habituated patterns better, so that you can start being more purposeful in your life, keep listening to hear the details about enrollment for the next cohort of Habits on Purpose for Physicians.

Until next week, I'll talk to you soon.

Are you a woman physician interested in being more intentional? Maybe you're feeling a bit haggard with all the pressures of work in life. Maybe you

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know, you have the tendency to overthink things, to second guess, and to feel inordinate guilt when you take time for yourself. Perhaps you bring your work home, you use your screen or a drink or shopping or food to wind down and take the edge off more than you'd like to.

Perhaps you'd like to feel less reactionary and more present, more in the driver's seat of your life. If you want to better understand habits like perfectionism, a harsh inner critic, people pleasing, difficulty articulating boundaries, buffering or numbing, ruminating, overcomplicating, and procrastinating, the next round of the small group coaching program called HOPP, Habits on Purpose for Physicians, is perfect for you.

HOPP is a small group, with a max of 30 physicians, who meet weekly for six months and get practical and deep-dive coaching and teaching for me. As you know, I love Internal Family Systems, and I'm passionate about helping people unlearn habits that take more than they give. So, I blend cognitive, somatic, and IFS approaches in a way that's really accessible.

Enrollment information can be found at HabitsOnPurpose.com/HOPP. If you want to join and the price is a barrier, do not hesitate to fill out the easy application to see if you can qualify for a partial or full scholarship. This is linked in the main signup page.

In Habits on Purpose for Physicians, you will unpack and unlearn old habits, so that you can create new ones in a sustainable way. I hope you'll join me. The signup page, all the details, and the dates, etc. are at HabitsOnPurpose.com/HOPP.

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.