

Ep #122: How to Stop-Second Guessing & Make Decisions Faster



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 122, Making Decisions. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and my mission on this podcast is to help you understand why you think, feel and act as you do. So that you can be intentional with your habitual patterns, intentional with your habits, and be more intentional with this one life that you have.

Today's episode delves into decisions, decision blocks, the difficulty with making decisions, and how we can stop floundering with analysis paralysis, second guessing, and worrying about making the wrong move. Ready to say goodbye to taking forever to make decisions? Let's dive in.

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. I am recording this episode on my birthday and it occurs to me today that I actually want to start celebrating a birth week instead of a birthday. Now by celebrating, I don't mean anything extravagant, just really taking some time to savor and appreciate being alive. Taking some time to reflect back on some of the things that are good, some of the things that have been difficult and honestly just have some fun all in the name of a birthday/birth week.

Now, I'm pretty laid back when it comes to my own birthday and I don't tend to make that big of a deal about the particular date. And given that this time of year feels really busy for me, with the end of school, prepping for upcoming summer plans, all the things related to kids sports and being the Uber driver to get kids to their activities. Having a birth week gives me more time to really soak in some of the fun of just adding a number to my chronologic age.

So, by the time this releases I'm going to be in the thick of my birth week fun, which is most likely going to be just regular life stuff with a bit of added reflection and kind of a boost to being more deliberate about what actually

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matters. And as I was preparing for this episode and thinking about getting a year older, so to speak, on the calendar. One of the things that I realized I've gotten so much better at is making decisions.

One of my specialties in the past was analysis paralysis and these excruciatingly long decision making processes. And while this didn't necessarily show up in every area of my life, when it did show up, the decision block was massive and I had just internal stress that was out the roof. So, what I've realized has been a paradigm shift for me is this. When it comes to decisions, there's actually no right decision. There are just neutral decisions about which I have thoughts and thus there are decisions that I choose to make right.

And I'm going to explain what it means to make a decision right. And I'm going to elaborate on the single obstacle that makes decision making so difficult for highly thoughtful over-thinkers. And then I'm going to give you a really practical technique to help you be more decisive. So, if you are new to the podcast, welcome, we are going to dive straight into something that is a really great topic to discuss as well as give you something practical that you can apply this week.

When it comes to changing habits, we have to have awareness about the habit itself, awareness about the pattern, and being mindful of when it's happening. But then we have to be able to bridge the gap between theoretic, and intellectual understanding of things and actually apply what we know into our real everyday life. So that's what this podcast is going to do. I'm going to give you an overview and then give you something you can really sink your teeth into.

And if this is your first episode, I'm so glad you're here. And I recommend that you go back and listen to some of the earlier episodes, whether you start at number one and do those foundational ones, episodes one through ten or you just kind of pick and choose, doesn't really matter. But I welcome you to go back and listen to some of the other episodes so you can get a really sturdy foundation for talking about habit change.

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Alright, so let's dive into decisions. The single most problematic obstacle to being decisive is believing that there's only one right decision. Believing that there's one good ideal perfect way to do things, and that anything besides this one correct way is bad and wrong. This is black and white, all or nothing thinking that it's most torturous. This is the underbelly of perfectionism. So, is this you? Do you notice a part of you, clutches to the belief that there is a right decision?

Well, if so I want to systematically unpack this idea so that you can really clearly see the painful ramifications, and then we can work on changing it. So, if you start with the premise that there is one right decision, aka one right way to do things, one correct way to go for your goal, one right way to start a project. This means that anything other than that single right decision is the wrong decision.

And now, internally this might innocently sound something like thinking, you know, I just need to get this right. I want to make the best choice. I wonder what's going to work out best. What makes decisions troublesome is in many situations we can't actually know if a decision is going to be good or bad, useful or terrible until well after we have made the decision.

Now, if you're in traffic and you're trying to get somewhere at a certain time and you run into a big block of traffic and you have to decide, do I go left or do I go right, to gamble on a shortcut to actually get to where I want to go on time. Sure, the decision to go left or the decision to go right, one of them might be quicker than the other and you might find that out pretty quickly.

Or if you're dealing with some sort of emergency, deciding, do I start this medicine or that medicine? Do I call for a CT? Do I have surgery? What intervention do I do, this one or that one? Indeed, these types of things can have a very clear cut, quickly discoverable consequence. But for a lot of our everyday decisions or big life decisions, we quite literally cannot fully know the consequences of the decision until a while after it's made.

The kinds of decisions that I'm talking about here are the ones that are less immediately concrete in their results. Deciding, should I take this job,

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should I take that job? Should I get a dog, should I not get a dog? Do I freeze my eggs, do I adopt? Do I start a podcast, do I not start a podcast? Should I get my master's or should I just do a self-study program? Do I initiate this hard conversation with my sister-in-law or do I let the whole issue drop? Which refrigerator do I buy? Should I run or go to spin class? Should I get up early, should I press snooze? Who do I talk to first, my boss or my colleague? Do I go part-time or do I go all in on more work?

Since with these types of decisions, we can't actually know what's going to work out best until afterwards, from the premise that there's a right decision and a wrong decision, a self-imposed hell emerges. Now so that you can really understand what I'm talking about, I want to flesh out what it really looks like when you have a deeply ingrained belief that there are right decisions and wrong decisions. Listen and see where you can relate to this in your life.

When you believe there is one right decision, you get what I call a decision block. Decision block is a bit like writer's block. If your decision needs to be the right one, you feel pressure. You might mentally, emotionally freeze because you run the risk of making the wrong decision and that signals DOOM, in all caps. So, you decide nothing, which is its own decision. This is analysis paralysis at its finest. It's hemming and hawing, overthinking, decisions take forever. Extensive research precedes any forward action or decision.

You create endless pros and cons lists because you can't risk the wrong decision. You need to know everything before you act. You research, you explore, you get in the weeds of minutia. Should I use this font or that color palette or this format or what about that wallpaper? You vacillate back and forth, and this is exhausting. If I do this, then I'm going to have to deal with this, but if I do that, I might miss out on this. Now I have to deal with that.

You end up missing the present moment as you imagine a bleak future where you made the wrong decision and the wrong choice and you're riddled with regret. When you believe there is one right decision, you procrastinate. Starting comes with a ton of pressure to do it, so you put off

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deciding, you kick the can down the road because later, maybe later you'll have more clarity. Believing that there's one correct best decision can also fuel chronic crowdsourcing and chronic comparison with others. What have other people done? What do other people think? Maybe I should ask so and so what they would do.

Now, to a certain degree, doing some research and some inquiry of other people who have been there and done that can be really useful, especially when you're doing it in a really strategic way to educate yourself. But when it's from this all or none, there is only one right decision mindset, there's a compulsive nature to it that delays your decision and leaves you basically not even sure what you think.

So, believing that there's one correct decision, one right way to do things, fosters decision block, analysis paralysis, procrastination, comparison, and frankly, outsourcing your own ability to make decisions. And all this makes sense. When there is one singular right decision, you run the risk of picking the wrong path, the wrong choice, making the wrong decision. So, you'd better do everything you can to prevent that.

So, let's take a little side trip and just stop and ask. What's actually really so bad about making a so-called 'wrong' decision? Now, as you hear this, some of you might object with, well, my wrong decision at work could harm somebody. My wrong decision while driving could cause an accident. My wrong decision while doing a surgery could really cause long lasting harm. And I want to validate the fact that there are certain decisions in urgent, emergent or high stake scenarios that do carry immediate life or death consequences.

So, let's think about this. Why will you potentially feel badly after making a choice that you don't like? You'll only feel badly because you will tell yourself something mean, something like I should have known better. I messed up and messing up means I suck. I don't know how to get out of this. What is my problem, other people would have been able to do better than this.

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When you make a decision that has consequences you don't like, the alternative is you could think, well damn, that is not what I was hoping for. Or you could think, well, you know what, I'm either winning or learning, and I have to learn a lot. Now I know. Now I know so now what am I going to do? But when you tell yourself, I should have known better, this is all my fault, I suck. And you conclude that you're a terrible, broken, defective human, you will feel awful.

So, when this is your pattern, in the aftermath of things not going how you want, it adds an extra layer of suffering that reinforces why you better make the right decision. And in this way, analysis paralysis, where you don't make a decision, kind of keeps you safe from this impending judgment and regret later. But what if we turned this whole thing on its head and what if there wasn't a single right decision in the first place? What if that didn't even exist? What if there wasn't just one correct choice? What if the idea of a single right decision was just a romanticized Hollywood construct?

If there isn't one right decision, there's so much less risk and pressure because instead of the right or the wrong decision, there are just decisions, decisions about which you have thoughts and feelings. And since we have agency about what we're going to choose to think and since we have agency about the narrative that we choose to tell ourselves about the decisions we make, decisions need not be so weighty.

So, here's the antidote that I propose to analysis paralysis and decision block and overthinking and procrastination and second guessing. Remember there is not a right choice, a right decision, there is simply the decision or choice that you make right. So let me get really concrete with an example so this makes sense.

Say you're trying to decide what to do for vacation, where to go. You want the vacation to be so fun, so relaxing, great for everybody. Now, of course, you can't know in advance how the weather's going to be, how the flights going to go. The people who you're going with, you can't know their moods, you can't know all the travel wrinkles that are going to come up, what's going to be fun, what's going to be hard. But when you start off this process

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of figuring out what to do for vacation and you start it with the belief that there's one right decision.

You might extensively research, make lots of lists, ask your friends, spend lots of time passively wondering, how will it go, what should we do? You might forecast different vacations in your mind's eye. And then when you can't decide between all the different options, you'll ask around. Then you'll put off deciding until later, because maybe later on you'll know more. Maybe clarity will just descend and you'll know exactly what to do next week.

You hem and you haw and you wonder and you worry about what could go wrong, what you're going to miss if you pick one versus the other. And it takes you months to decide. Then it comes decision time, it's crunch time. Airline tickets are going up, hotel spots are getting unavailable, and you scramble, you force yourself to hastily pick. And then your brain keeps doing what it's been doing this whole time and you second guess, what if that is not the one? Then you picture it going poorly, you picture yourself feeling awful, everybody griping one another.

You imagine people hating your decision, judging what you chose. And you imagine coming back feeling just awful, all you believe there is one correct, right decision. Versus let's do the contrast, say you believe that there's not one decision that will make or break a vacation, but rather there's a vacation that you can choose and then you can make that vacation choice into the right vacation choice for you. When you do this, you can calendar a finite time in which you'll decide. You can do some research.

You can scroll on the internet, pull all your family, crunch some financial numbers, then you get a few days and you pick where you're going to go because you know that you're going to make this decision into the right one. And you know you won't be doomed to a lifetime of anguish, if and when things aren't perfect. There's no need to imagine and mentally try to avoid worst case scenarios. And when there isn't a right or wrong decision, it's easy to trust your instincts and decide without so much drama.

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So let me reinforce and be really clear. With most of our decisions, we cannot know the outcome of that decision until after we've decided. But when we tell ourselves, there's a correct one, a correct decision, and that we must figure it out in advance, we put ourselves in a bind. It's like perfectionism meets magical thinking, where the criteria for the right decision is that nothing goes wrong and we have no regret even when we have no data and we cannot have the data that will help us decipher between 'right' and 'wrong'. And this is the hallmark of a decision block as a personal hell.

Let's take another example. Trying to figure out where your kids should go to school. Now, if you've got kids, this will make sense. If you don't have kids, just apply all of this to deciding where you might go to school, deciding which program you might do. For the parents listening, regardless of age, this decision about where your kids should go to school, this is often one that tortures so many parents. Should they do private or public or traditional or non-traditional or home school or in district or out of district?

Should you unschool your kids? Should they go with their friends or towards academics? Should they pick the program with the sports? How to pick the right one. From the premise that there is one right school and all of the rest of them are not as good, there is a baked in pressure to figure out the difference. Yet until your kid's actually in school, you're not going to know. Was it a good fit? Would a different school have been a better fit?

So, if you start the process thinking, there is a right decision and there is one right decision, this is what often happens. You do some preliminary research, but you're still ravenous for more information. And you don't just ask a handful of people their experiences, you ask tons of people, anybody you can get your hand on. "What do you think about this school? What was your experience? What have you heard?" You might make spreadsheets with pros and cons for each.

In the back of your mind, you're constantly thinking about it. You imagine the perfect school experience. And this fantasy stands in abject contrast to the wrong decisions that are looming, waiting to clobber you and make you

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and your kid miserable. You picture your kid getting bullied or lagging behind academically or not having the emotional support they need or having to change schools and hating you for the school that you chose and regretting the decision.

You might flash forward to a time in their 20s and 30s where their entire personality, their job choice, their happiness, and all of their relationships are negatively affected by the school that you chose. The guilt and the pressure. So, you ask more questions, you wonder more and you get no closer to a decision. And even when you do make a decision, it doesn't feel very sturdy. It's like this wobbly house of cards, and you're left with a part of you desperately hoping it's going to be okay, but worried it's not.

Verses when you start the school search with the premise that you know there are going to be different experiences at different schools, each with pros and cons, none of which you can know in advance. You approach the choice with some ease. If you believe there's not a right school but a school that you and your kid will make the best of and you believe that you'll figure it out as you go along. You can make a thoughtful decision without it taking an excessive amount of time. Less hemming and hawing because you don't get bogged down in the bleak worst case scenarios.

And you just know, your kid's going to learn a ton no matter what happens. You're going to make the best of what you face, even if there are some missteps, failures, and things that you wish you'd done differently. Even in the so-called worst case scenario, you're going to deal with that too. And when you do this, you can more easily see the good and see the neutral in all of your options. And it's easier to use your instincts, your intuition, and trust that you're going to be able to handle whatever the consequences are. See the difference between these?

The difference here is, there's one right school, and if we don't pick right, we're doomed. Or there are school experiences that have different flavors and we're going to make the best of all of them because we trust ourselves to figure it out. When you start off making a decision from the place of, there aren't right decisions, but there are decisions that we will make right.

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This is how you open the door to making faster decisions. Fast intuition driven decisions are not hasty, but they are fueled by clarity and self-trust and a willingness to experiment.

When you do this, you open the door to resourcefulness in the face of whatever comes. In internal family system terms, you are facilitating access to Self with a capital S, with all of the authentic wisdom and sturdiness that comes with it.

Now, before I referenced that decision block is akin to the straightjacket freeze of writer's block. One technique to get out of writer's block is to commit to a bad first draft. You basically just commit to starting writing and you give yourself a timeline in which you must finish. And you expect that the writing that you're doing is going to be imperfect. Similarly, when it comes to making a decision, when you realize that there is not actually one right decision to make, it's like giving yourself permission to do a bad first draft.

You shift from a mindset of this decision has to be the right one, to this decision moves me forward one step. So, it's not a risk for a lifetime of regret and suffering. It's just like a bad first draft, I give myself permission to make a decision that feels right at the time.

So, to recap, when you consciously or subconsciously hold the belief that there is one right decision, this is a recipe for decision block, confusion, perfectionistic analysis paralysis, and fear of regret. In contrast, when you set that idea aside and you believe that there are no right or wrong decisions, but there are decisions that you make right, that you make work for you no matter the consequences, you free yourself. You make faster decisions from a confident, calm, clearer headspace.

But let's touch base on something. What if you make a decision and later on you look back and think, if I knew then what I knew now I would totally have made a different decision. Does that then make your old decision the wrong one? If you believe in right and wrong decisions, then yes, which will

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possibly lead you to a cascade of discontent about the past and a present day feeling of precariousness.

You don't trust yourself to make a decision in the face of not ever having all the information, because gosh forbid, you make a decision and later on you learn more and you look back and say, "I wouldn't have made that same decision." This way of thinking simply serves to make you wrong all of the time. And what I find to be a more useful way of looking at things is choosing the narrative that the decision that you made in the past was the best decision based on what you knew at the time, which honestly is the best we can ever do.

So how do you know if you are plagued by the idea that there is one right decision, one right way of doing things? Well, ask yourself this, how easy is it for you to make big decisions? How easy is it for you to make small decisions? If they are really hard, you probably harbor some sort of version of a deep belief that there's a right choice and a wrong choice, a tendency to beat yourself up when things don't go as planned.

So, if you have analysis paralysis, second guessing, comparison and crowdsourcing as some of the patterns surrounding making decisions. I have a practical way for you to start changing this. First thing, ask yourself this. If I knew there wasn't one right choice or one right decision, if I just knew there was a decision that I was going to make right. If I trusted myself completely to handle whatever came up, what decisions would I make right now?

I want you to get your computer or your phone or a sheet of paper and answer that. If I trusted myself completely, if I knew there wasn't one right choice, what decisions would I make right now? And make a list. What are all the things that you would just decide to do? Once you have this list, which might be really long or might be two or three things that have been really nagging at you.

Your next step is to learn what's in the way of executing on these decisions. The way you understand what's in the way of confidently making a decision

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in the face of the unknown is you check in and see, how do I feel about each of these decisions? Look at your list and with each decision you wrote down, ask yourself, how do I feel? What emotions are coming up for me? Tune in to any angst or objections.

And I want you to listen in like you're a journalist interviewing someone for a story. Listen with curiosity and compassion and listen to all the parts of you that show up that have a bunch of opinions about the decision. Maybe you have a Chicken Little part that's like, "Oh, mio, mio, if we do that, then all these terrible things could happen. And then this could happen and that could happen and oh my gosh, what are we going to do?"

Maybe you have a pessimistic cynic that says, "Well, if you choose that, it'll probably go sideways." And it's going to show everybody that you're a fraud and everyone's finally going to see how incompetent you are, and you're going to regret it forever. Maybe you hear a part that worries about what other people will think of your decision. Whatever you discover, just take some notes about the objections.

The objections are coming from the different parts of your psyche that are uncomfortable with executing on a decision. And many of these parts hold inside the idea that there's a right and a wrong decision. Now, conventional advice around this negative inner self-talk is to find a way to tell these voices that they are wrong. So, you sort of pick apart or invalidate their objections to persuade them to be really quiet, or just make them go away.

I'm going to tell you something that I think is so much more effective because when you try to quiet or invalidate or make go away, inner parts, it basically exiles or temporarily banishes these concerns. It's kind of like sending a grouchy relative to your back porch when company comes over. You temporarily push something to the side, but you don't actually deal with it head on.

So instead, the deeper, i.e. more effective work is to get really curious. How come these objections are here? What concerns do they reveal? How do these objections make sense based on what you've experienced in your

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life? How does the Chicken Little part make sense based on what you've gone through? If your decision has to do with something professional, do you have similar parts that show up in other areas of your life? Taking time to get to know these different parts is essential.

So, get to know the concerns and fears and worries, not with an agenda to change things or figure things out and fix silence and exile them. But simply with a goal to really understand these parts that come up as objections. Doing this helps you better understand why you may feel uncomfortable or torn about making decisions. And then once you're armed with this better understanding, you can still make a swift choice and execute on it, while you simultaneously tend to the parts of you that need tending to.

And what this looks like is practicing kind self-talk. It sounds like this. On your list you see a decision you're going to make. You go make that decision and then when you feel uncomfortable, you remind yourself, of course, once I pick this thing, I'm worried I'm going to regret it later. I worry because I care and I can't know the best choice in advance but a part of me wishes I could. It makes a lot of sense, I would worry.

And when a part of me believes there's a right and a wrong choice and that my choice comes with irreparable consequences. No wonder this feels uncomfortable to commit. And what you're doing by talking to yourself in this really kind, compassionate way is you are addressing concerns instead of sort of whitewashing them or making them go away into the recesses of your mind. And you're simultaneously being decisive.

So, if you knew there were no right decisions, what would you decide? If you trusted yourself completely to handle whatever comes up, what decisions would you make right now? How do you feel about these decisions? What concerns and fears and worries do these feelings about these decisions reveal? Doing this will guide you to the inner work that you need to do concurrent with being more decisive. And then when you're armed with this knowledge, you can still make decisions, execute on them, and then kindly tend to the inner concerns and fears that you have.

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So, if you struggle to make decisions, you might do this because you've internalized this socially constructed idea that there is a right and a wrong decision to all the things. When we operate from this premise, all we do is cause ourself to struggle when we make decisions. The truth is, there's not a right choice or right decision. There are just the decisions that you choose to make right. And when you shift this belief, this is how you stop decision block and how you stop analysis paralysis. It's how you untangle the underbelly of all or non-perfectionistic thinking.

So, this week I want you to remind yourself, there's not a right or wrong decision, there's simply the decision that you choose to make right. I hope this is valuable for you. And if you have any questions, please come join the email list. Go to habitsonpurpose.com and you'll see a little link that says join the email list. And when you join and you get your emails you can press reply to any email. Talk to you next week.

Like what you're hearing on the podcast? Want help taking these concepts and ideas and applying them in the trenches of ordinary everyday life? That is what coaching helps you do.

In my coaching practice, I help high achievers change their habits from ones that take more than they give to ones that are much more nourishing. Turn your inner critic into your inner cheerleader and strategist. Convert your overthinking into a habit of swift, creative problem solving. Trade in the habit of perfectionism for a habit of resilience and resourcefulness. Learn the skill of emotional processing, asking productive questions, and compassionately witnessing your cognition through coaching.

My coaching comes in two flavors, private coaching, with just you and I. Or small group coaching in an intimate group just for women physicians. If you're interested in connecting for either, go to my website HabitsOnPurpose.com and join the email list.

The waitlist for the next round of Habits on Purpose for Physicians, the small group coaching program which starts in October of 2024, will go live

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soon. When you're on the email list, you'll be the first to hear about early enrollment, where you can place a deposit to hold your spot.

From the website, you can also see a link to learn more about private coaching. For private coaching, before we connect we meet by Zoom for a consultation call to see if we're a fit. The way you can do this is go to HabitsOnPurpose.com/private, and you can schedule a consult call and get more details. Take care my friends.

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