

## 330 - How I Handle a Busy Season

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast. I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 330 - How I Handle a Busy Season. One might argue that most seasons are busy seasons, right? It seems like there's always something going on, something new or unusual on top of what's already happening, and it can feel like a lot. I think the time it most feels like a lot is at the beginning of a busy season. When you are transitioning from one season to another - like from summer to school or school to summer, from this job to that job, from being in a relationship to being single or being single to being in a relationship, from pre-diagnosis to treatment for the diagnosis - the time right before that transition often feels like the hardest. You don't know exactly what's coming, and you want to prepare as much as possible. Whatever your particular color of that energy is, I hope that this episode gives you some permission and some practical tools to handle your own busy season.

Today, I'm sharing what I do. You can do it. You can do some of it. You can do none of it. But I think hearing how different people handle challenging situations helps us see what we would or wouldn't do ourselves. So here's what I do.

For context, I am entering a busy season. It's a typical level of busy in that it's fall, and we just started school last week. For our family, fall means getting into the school groove, it means having to help Sam narrow down the 17 extracurricular activities he wants to do, it's seasonal celebrations that we love that we do every year, and it's also a season where we have 11 family birthdays, like significant family members, not rando second cousins, over a 13 week span. That's basically one birthday a week. And that doesn't even include friend's birthdays, of which there are another half dozen over the same span. Then, of course, there's Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas. Nothing crazy about those. There is my church's Christmas program that is one of my favorite things all year that has rehearsals and planning stuff all during the fall. I also have a job, and we have a couple of big projects happening right now that take extra work time. Then there are the regular things like meals and carpool and paying bills and all the things that just come with being a person. In short, this is my busiest season. It's also my favorite season because of all the fun things happening, but that doesn't mean it's easy to handle. So that's the context.

Now every year as school gears up and fall begins, this is what I do.

First, I panic a little. You just heard all of those things I listed. It's a lot of things! And in my head, the entire season exists as one giant thing that makes me feel quite stressed. So that's what I do first. I get stressed out.

Next, I think that for some reason, this season and how I handle it is finally going to be the exception to my often-repeated mantra "big systems don't work." I think, "well, maybe one will this time!" And I start to build one. Big seasonal systems where I plan out and systemize and mechanize and optimize every single thing have never worked. Ever. They always let me down.

And yet, at the start of every busy season, especially the fall, I wonder if this time it'll be different. Maybe this time I can build a life machine that works longer than three days. Sometimes I stop at the idea, and other times I take it a little farther than I'd like to admit. Lots of markers, a new notebook, Googling stuff about the best way to do stuff. Thankfully, I don't stay in that space as long as I used to. This year, it was only an hour! I was in big system energy for about an hour before I realized what I was doing, and I stopped. I call that progress for sure.

So after I feel stressed and panic and start building big systems, I breathe. I stop the building, and I breathe. I remember what matters. Not just about the season itself about *myself*. It matters more that I'm a calm, grounded person despite my circumstances. It matters that I learn to pivot more than I learn to plan. It matters that I release this idea that I can control my life and everything that happens in it. Things happen every single day that I did not anticipate or plan for, and that is the baseline. That is the normal we should all accept. Normal is not that things go smoothly. Normal is that things are unexpected and a little bumpy. We live in a culture where the normative idea of time management is ease, and it is not. Most of my days are not logistically easy. Now, can I make them easier with some Lazy Genius principles? For sure. I'm not saying you have to thrive in chaos all the time. But you can experience peace in chaos some of the time. You can release this idea that an ideal day is smooth and without any problems are arguments or tough decisions or changed plans. The goal is not to repeat the greatest day until you die. That is too much pressure. The goal is to just feel like yourself as much as you can despite how your circumstances are what you thought they'd be.

So after that stress and system building, I stop, breathe, and remember what matters. After that happens, things feel calmer on the inside which makes the decisions I make on the outside a little easier to come by.

### **We'll be right back...**

Now that I have turned down the planning intensity and have remembered what matters, it's time to actually handle a busy season.

First, I look back at last season. By last season, I mean the previous similar type of seasonal transition. So I'll think back to the previous year's start of school for this example. I think about what worked, what didn't, what I remember as great, what I remember as not so great, just a few notes about last time. If I need a deeper dive into the previous season or simply can't remember much of it, I'll look back at my Next Right Thing Guided Journal, my one-line-a-day journal, and even my camera roll or Instagram feed from that time to see what was going on. It depends on how contemplative or nostalgic or forgetful I'm feeling, but I look back before I look ahead. Emily P. Freeman taught me that, and it's an incredibly valuable practice for someone like me who does not naturally look back at all.

After I look back, I look ahead. What's coming? What are all the things? Can I name anything that matters most this season right off the bat?

Something new came to mind this year that I've never named in previous years. The other day, I mentioned to my husband, Kaz, that another parent was recruiting me to be on a parent committee at school, and he reacted a little more strongly than usual when I said I might do it. He said something like, "You just have a lot on your plate, and I don't know that you have time for that." Now, on the one hand, I really appreciate him wanting to care for me and my energy. You might think I'm the Lazy Genius because I'm naturally wired to remove the things from my life that don't matter, but you would be wrong. I've had to develop those skills over many, many years, but I will often let my caffeinated squirrel brain run wild and she is a bit of a terror who needs to be reined in. Kaz is often part of what helps me rein her in, so I appreciate his perspective. But I also found his concern a little fascinating. I do have a lot going on, but going to two meetings for the rest of the year and maybe organizing one or two email sign-up campaigns didn't seem like too much at all. When I said that, he said, "Well, you seem really stressed." And that's what led to the thing that really matters to me this season. I think that I exude more stress than I feel. Or maybe it's that I can handle a greater sense of stress as my baseline than my family can. But what I don't want is for my family to internalize my stress as their own and have it impact the vibe of our home. I'm not saying I want to hide from them or lie to them. It's not about protecting them. It's more than I have this curiosity around how I express my stress. I think I do give off a more stressed out vibe than I feel, probably to everyone. I'm a fairly intense person in how I communicate, I'm a verbal processor which means I say most things I'm thinking (a tough look honestly), and I talk loud and fast. I can totally see how doing that a lot would come off as being stressed out even though that's just how I am. But if I am stressed, those tendencies are more frequent and probably at an even higher volume. That's what I want to pay attention to this season. What matters to me is that I notice my level of stress and how my family might interpret it incorrectly. I don't want them to feel the busyness of the season in a way that is incongruent with what's actually happening just because I'm a little more tightly wound or louder. Does that make sense? That's a very specific thing that matters to me this season, but it really does. I can support that with regular daily check-ins where I ask myself how my stress is coming across? And is that accurate? I think that will be a helpful practice for me.

So I look back, I look ahead, and I notice if anything important jumps out. For me, it's what I just said. For you, it might be something else or nothing at all. That's okay too.

Next, I do some separating. My tendency is to make the next four months one big giant task, and that does not make sense. It feels like one big thing, but I most certainly cannot and will not treat it as one big thing. Instead, I do some separating.

The first thing I separate is existing systems and rhythms from season-specific projects or events. For example, I might look at this busy season and go "Oh man, I have all of life to do! I have to go to these meetings and buy birthday gifts and cook dinner and be a person every single day!" You probably relate to that feeling, but what's interesting is that some of things already have decent existing rhythms. Sure, dinner is kind of a bear, but it's also not that bad. I have my process of how I meal plan, and it works for me. You can actually listen to that episode - Episode 245: How I Personally Meal Plan. I feel good about the rhythms of my house even

though we're in a renovation right now and stuff is still everywhere. You can listen to that episode too, Episode 254: Chores I Do Every Day. I have some really great rhythms that work for me. Just because I'm entering a new season doesn't automatically mean they're going to fall apart or didn't exist in the first place. So I separate those existing rhythms from all the other season-specific things and do a quick assessment. What's working? Are there any of those rhythms that could use an adjustment based on what's happening this season? There's a chance that when I cook dinner will have to pivot a tiny bit depending on the cross-country carpool schedule, but likely not by much and only one or two days a week. Can I adjust an existing rhythm in one small place based on that? Yes, I can. Do I need to build an entirely new way to meal plan and make dinner because this season creates a slight shift? No. Not at all. Look at your existing rhythms and embrace what's working. If there is a system that needs to be adjusted, you can do that, but don't automatically start everything over. That is not how we do things, nor does that work.

Once I see what rhythms work, it helps me relax around the extra things. I'm not having to figure out my entire life at once. I just need to add these out of the ordinary things into a life that's already moving at our family's pace with our family's priorities. That makes the energy around what's coming feel a lot more calm.

So I separated the existing rhythms from the other stuff, and now I separate the other stuff from itself. First category, projects. Projects are things with an end date and lots of steps. A project is not an item on your to-do list, people. Stop putting projects on your to-do list. So I look at the calendar and what's coming up and mark what's a project. I don't do anything with it yet; I just note what's a project. Next, I separate events. Events often come with a couple of tasks, like getting the birthday gift or inviting the family over for dinner or whatever. Again, I don't do anything yet; I just mark what's an event. Finally, there are season-specific things, things like our fall opening ceremony where we go to the pumpkin patch and corn maze or making Christmas cookies. Basically, there are things that matter a lot during this season, and I don't want those things to fall through the cracks because life feels too busy.

Now, I put them in their place in terms of the month they'll happen. I use The Holiday Docket for this whole process by the way, and we have a page in there that has columns for months to help see all the out of the ordinary things together in one place. If I notice that October is just about to tip over because it's so full of things to do, I have to essentialize. I have to remove something that matters less to leave space and energy for what matters most. Busy seasons are hard because of this very thing. We have a lot to do, a lot we want to do, and without intention around those things, we end up not being able to do what we love the most. Just because you have to say no to a certain event or project in this season doesn't mean it'll never happen again, but it's really important to be vigilant in protecting your time and what matters most during a busy season.

Now this next and final step is important and one that I often overcomplicate. The step is to put everything in its place, but the word everything is what trips me up. After I see where things live month to month, I want to break them down into smaller, more manageable pieces and put them

in their place. Excellent! There is nothing wrong with that. However, I tend to take everything literally. For example, buying Christmas gifts for my family and friends is a project with an end date and many many steps involved, but I am currently living in the very beginning of September, and I don't really start thinking about gifts until mid-October. I don't need to break that project down into little pieces yet even though I might think I should. That doesn't have to be part of my "everything" right now.

So for this final step of put everything in its place, note what everything really means. It's not literally every single piece of your entire busy season. It's what is coming up next. Be where you are. What is happening in September that you can break down into smaller pieces? Then towards the end of September, do this again for the next batch of projects, events, and season-specific things.

The reason this is so important is because it takes invisible pressure off. For me when I go through this process, I think that I'll be in better shape if I have literally everything on the calendar or on a to-do list from now until 2024. But that really isn't helpful. I don't need that. I said this on Instagram a week or so ago, but the future is fine without my attention right now. It's all going to be fine. It's not bad if you want to break down your Christmas gift process right now, but don't do it because you think it'll give you more control. Only do it if you genuinely feel calmer about it. That goes for anything. In general, pay attention to where you are and what's coming next, not what's coming tenth.

This plays out for me beautifully because I can take this giant ball of busy season stress, breathe it out, remember what matters, and then notice that September is actually not that crazy. I do have a couple of events and a couple of birthdays, but the events are for work and have already been broken down and the pieces put into place in our team's project management app. We have a couple of birthdays, so I can just write on my to-do list decide the gift and buy the gift. Those are two different things by the way. Don't avoid making tasks so small it feels obvious. Deciding what to get someone often takes a different energy than the action of getting it, so notice if your breakdowns have both actions and decisions. If it helps, give them separate to-do's. It helps me. But as I look at this month and this month only, I see that everything is in its place. I see that everything is going to be okay. I believe that I am a competent person with some decent existing systems, and I can handle the busyness that is September without letting the anticipated busyness of the rest of the year color everything. Don't worry so much about things that haven't happened yet. Be where you are. Good is here now.

### **We'll be right back...**

When you put things in their place, there are a couple of places to consider. Your to-do list is obvious one. Another is your calendar. Make it an event or a task on your paper planner or your digital calendar. Another place is in an opening or closing seasonal ceremony. If there's something that matters to you, add it to a seasonal ceremony so that it gets the attention it deserves in your life. You can also add something to an existing routine or rhythm or give the

task to someone else entirely. Putting a task in its place doesn't just mean on your to-do list. There are different places for your things.

So to recap, here's how I handle a busy season. I freak out and try and build a system before realizing that doesn't work. Cool cool cool. Then I look back so the past can help inform where I am now. Next, I look ahead and what's coming and what matters. I notice what existing rhythms I have that are working well and stop myself from reinventing every wheel just because I have big busy energy. Then I put pen to paper and name all that's coming: the projects, events, and season-specific things, separating those since they have different requirements. Then I put those things in a column of what month they're happening so that I can see how saturated a month might be and let go of some things that might be in the way of what matters most. Then I break down the projects and events that are coming the soonest, putting those tasks in their place, whether in my calendar, on my to-do list, in a seasonal ceremony, in an existing routine, or into the hands of someone else.

Two final thoughts. One, this process for the fall specifically is already done for you in *The Holiday Docket*. It's the most adorable PDF with a guide to help you answer these questions for yourself and make things work for you so you can enjoy a busy season without drowning in it. We have been selling *The Holiday Docket* for several years now, and it's one of the best resources we've ever made. People love this thing. And the good news is that even though it has calendars, they're undated so that you only need to buy it once instead of every year. There will be a link in the show notes to get *The Holiday Docket*, but I made it because I wanted to put this busy season process on paper as a resource for y'all. It makes a huge difference.

The second final thought is something I have to tell myself all the time, almost daily in a busy season. Trust that something is in its place. If you put something on a list or on your calendar or whatever, stop worrying about it so much. For example, I'm recording this episode the week before it comes out, and I leave shortly for Colorado to celebrate Bri McKoy's new cookbook, *The Cook's Book!* This week is our first week back to school, so it has big new season energy plus a shortened week because of that trip. Well, I put the most essential work tasks on my to-do list for this week, and I put the others for the month on future weekly lists. Everything is in its place. Now, if I just look at everything as one big giant ball of stress and ignore that things are in place, I'll stay feeling stressed. So trust that something is in its place. It'll get done because it's been placed in the best spot for that to happen. It's not going to be forgotten or ignored. It might not even be pushed to a future week because I already did the work of dividing things out to the week where they make the most sense. Don't open your calendar and panic. When things are in place, you can see them without being stressed out by them. Just look at today, and today what is in place for today. That's it. Tomorrow will happen tomorrow, and you're going to be okay. Remember, learning to pivot is more important than learning to plan.

And that's how I handle a busy season. I mentioned a handful of really helpful episodes in this episode, and all those links will be in the show notes along with a link to buy *The Holiday Docket*. It's so great. Also in the show notes will be a link to sign up for our biweekly newsletter, *Latest Lazy Listens*. It is so fantastic, over 10,000 of you get that little email, and it is basically a

podcast digest. We share summaries for the previous two episodes, put extra resource links if you need them, we share the Lazy Genius of the Week, and there's also a little note from me of reflection after the release of those two episodes. It's short, sweet, and very robust. Also Leah, our team's Director of Content and resident creative person designed this email, and it's just a delightful addition to your inbox. So if you'd like to sign up for that, go to the link in the show notes or to [thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens](http://thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens).

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Elizabeth Whitaker who has this tip for kids with sports uniforms. "Hi Kendra! I have two boys who both play baseball, and each has several uniforms. Last year after having the constant conversation of 'where is my jersey,' I made a rule. Uniforms and baseball socks never leave the laundry room. When you get home, you put the dirty uniform in the laundry room hamper. I put up an old rack with pegs on the laundry room wall, and when I wash the uniform, it goes right on a hook where the boys can see. Now I don't have to search kids hampers for the right uniform to wash, and the clean uniforms don't get put away in the wrong place or stay hidden in a basket of clean laundry." Elizabeth, this is such a great idea and actually a fantastic example of how to handle a busy season. Seasons have unique aspects that we have to add into what's already ordinary, things like sports uniforms. Instead of coming up with a giant laundry system or a room organization system, just make a House Rule. Set House Rules is one of the 13 Lazy Genius principles, and this is an excellent use of it. Uniforms never leave the laundry room. Done deal. Dirty or clean, that's where they stay. So good. Also let's say that Elizabeth gets to next year's baseball season and feels the overwhelm of the busy that adds. She already has an existing rhythm that works for uniforms. Even though it's still a lot to coordinate practices and games and how homework and playing and all the things fits into a sports schedule, figuring out uniforms isn't one of them. Let existing systems and rhythms serve you year after year. Thanks so much for sharing, Elizabeth, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, that's all for today. Thanks for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!