

332 - How to Enjoy Your Evening Hours

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 332 - How to Enjoy Your Evening Hours. I'm really excited about this topic because it is something every single person likely struggles with. Most of us have a typical weekday, and that weekday is probably exhausting. Whether you work at an office, work from home, or work as a stay at home parent, most of us live our days kind of the same. We are getting stuff done. We are in some kind of rhythm or repetition, whether it comes in the form of our job at a desk or our job on the floor building the 72nd tower of blocks with a tiny human. Once the evening comes around and meals have been eaten, desks have been left, and routines have been completed, we feel a little frozen. It's almost like evening hours - or off hours of any kind - are suddenly *ours*. The evening especially feels like time that we can use however we want. It's not dictated by someone else, and that freedom often leaves us flailing. It's so precious and valuable, and you want to make the most of it. How do you do that? That's our episode today.

If you were to list all the things you could do during your evening hours, it would probably be a very long list. Tidy the house, actually scrub something, prepare for tomorrow's schedule or meals or outfits or projects, work out, relax and just be still, go to bed early, do something fun like watch a show or see a friend or read a book, tend to a hobby, play a game or watch a movie with your family, do that skincare routine you keep thinking about. And those are just the obvious ones. There are a lot of things you would love to cram into your evening hours, and unfortunately, the decision fatigue of that time of day just piles on to the existing exhaustion.

Last Sunday I was texting with my friend Amy about cross-country carpool for our kids that week, and after a comical exchange where I did not have any of the cross-country meets in my calendar, I said to her "I need two Sundays. I need a prep Sunday and a rest Sunday." Then I thought for a minute and added "And a church Sunday. I need three Sundays." I think most of us feel that way about evening hours. We need a chore evening, a workout evening, a fun evening, a self-care evening, a connection evening, a get ahead of this crazy life evening... we need a lot of evenings. And when we feel that kind of overwhelm, it creates a sense of urgency in our brains that we can't shake. Suddenly everything feels equally important if not vital, and the paralysis of not choosing and therefore not doing any of it leaves us feeling more overwhelmed than before. Plus, now we're also behind or tired or not emotionally filled up or we have a dirty face. We've wasted another evening not doing any of our things well, and we keep getting progressively worse off. That's how it often feels in our bodies and brains, so I think this topic is incredibly relevant.

The process here today is pretty simple. We are going to apply the five Lazy Genius steps to our evening hours. Those steps were originally created for my second book, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*, but these five steps work for so many things, especially overwhelming things. I don't know that I've ever said this before, but this is an important statement I'm about to make. Whenever you feel big system energy, big black trash bag energy, big I'm doing this all wrong I need to start over energy, use these five steps. Some problems are smaller, and therefore the

solution is pretty small. In those cases, you just apply a Lazy Genius principle like Start Small or Ask the Magic Question or Decide Once, and you're well on your way to feeling better. But when things feel big, when you're just overwhelmed and find yourself getting a new notebook to create a new approach to something that you will probably abandon in 48 hours, spend that frantic problem-solving energy here. Spend it thinking through these five steps. You will actually land somewhere helpful. It's a great way to honor your big system energy and even utilize it a little bit without creating something that's too big to work. These five steps are the Lazy Genius way to leverage that kind of energy, so that's what we're going to do today with our evening hours.

However, the first thing you need to know before applying those steps is the problem. You need to know specifically what it is you're trying to Lazy Genius. In this case, it's not just evening hours. We're not trying to Lazy Genius evening hours. That's too broad. What's the real problem here? A likely answer is that you have what feels like to do much to do in what feels like too little time. I don't want to say you have too much to do in too little time because that creates a sense of scarcity and urgency within you that we don't need right now. So it's not really that there's too much to do in too little time. That would be true if your goal is to do it all and still go to bed at 9pm. That's an unreasonable approach to this problem anyway. We need to add some elasticity not just to our evenings but to how we see them. So let's inject honesty and fluidity into what's really going on by saying that the problem is that you have what feels like too much to do in what feels like too little time. If you have a different angle to take on enjoying your evening hours, by all means, use that problem. It's yours, and you should tend to your specific problem.

As we move through this, I want you to have confidence in what you choose. I want you to trust that however you approach your evenings is a good way that works for you. You shouldn't force yourself to fit into someone else's box. You shouldn't shame yourself for spending your evening hours in a way that you assume someone else would see as wasteful. This whole exercise is so you can see what you need and move toward a decision with confidence and kindness. You can choose what you need for you.

Okay, now let's apply the five steps.

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If you're new here, the five steps are one, prioritize or name what matters; two, essentialize or get rid of what's in the way; three, organize or put everything in its place; four, personalize or feel like yourself; five, systemize or stay in the flow.

We start with prioritize or name what matters. This is a vital component, our first component, but you might need a little more direction than a big, general priority. So for this situation and any other, narrow it down a bit by asking yourself what matters in this season. It's tough to name what matters without any parameters, and you might think you have them by naming what matters about evening hours. However, if you are in a new job, if you just had a baby, if you've got a crazy project at work that's getting you home later for a stretch of time, if you're recovering

from sickness, if you are doing anything that impacts how you might need to see and spend your evening, name that. Name that season. It could be a week, a month, a quarter, whatever timeframe you need. Live in your season. That's one of the 13 Lazy Genius principles, and in order to know what matters this season, you need to name the season.

So set your scope of time. My guess is that it'll be easier for you to go through this process on the smallest scale, like a week. So if you're listening to this episode on a Monday, ask yourself what matters about my evening hours this week? Don't set up some big system for the rest of your life. Choose small solutions, and make specific choices for that finite amount of time. Maintaining choices during a small timeframe is so much easier, but those small timeframes build on each other, creating rhythms and routines and trust in your own choices over time. So rather than ask "what matters about my evening hours for the next six years while my kids are suddenly teenagers and up later than I am?" start with just this week. In other words, start small.

As I thought about what matters most to me about my evening hours this week, I had about four or five things come to mind. As it usually goes. So what's our process when we can't land on one thing that matters? Name what could matter, then what does matter, and finally what matters most. Choosing the thing that matters most does not eliminate the other things. It simply shows you what this week's priority is so that you are using your time wisely on something that genuinely does matter to you more than the other things. You prioritize the thing that matters the most so that if something does have to wait or fall through the cracks or happen next week, it's not the thing that matters most.

For me, some things that could matter are sleep, being with my family because I'll be out of town over the weekend, getting the logistics of our life set up for my being out of town over the weekend, and alone time to be full of energy because I'll be out of town over the weekend. That's a lot of things, and that doesn't include what I really wish mattered, which is routine. I like repetition. Sometimes I feel wonky because my evenings don't always follow the kind of predictable pattern I wish they did or think they should. I don't have a regular bedtime. I don't always do my skincare or put on my pajamas or read at the same time every night. Most of the time, I'm really present with what I need and what my family needs, and I go night by night. Honestly, that actually works for me. I enjoy my evenings. I don't always know what they'll look like, but I really do enjoy them. So this is permission to myself and any of you that just because your evenings aren't super structured or routined doesn't mean they don't work. That doesn't have to matter, and you can let that go.

So of my list of things that could matter, what does matter this week? I think it's being present and around for my family and feeling rested so I'll have energy for my weekend. The logistics can fall to the side. I'll tend to a lot of them, but Kaz is a grown man. Our usual division of labor has me handling logistics, but he is capable. If something gets dropped, he can pick it up. I don't need to break my neck trying to get that stuff done, especially at the expense of rest and just being with my family. So it's rest and being present. That's what really matters this week. What matters most? I think it's being present. Because I'll be gone for several bedtimes in a row and some of my kids get really bummed by that, I don't want to skip any bedtimes I could be part of

just because I need to get to bed early. I can maybe do some things to get to tend to both, but when push comes to shove, being present with my kids, particularly around the “goodnights” is the most important thing.

Okay, step two, and we’ll move through these faster now. Once you name what matters, the rest falls into place fairly easily. Step two is essentialize or get rid of what’s in the way. What’s in the way of your evening hours being enjoyable?

I think it’s likely a version of one of these three answers. One, you’re trying to do too much and haven’t really named a priority. Two, you are paralyzed by the decision for so long that you don’t do or enjoy anything. Three, the Internet. Those three things or at least a version of one of them is probably the thing in your way. So you need to either remove the pressure to get it all done, you need to remove the decision paralysis by just picking something, or you need to maybe have some off hours on your phone. Even in working on this episode, I have probably “wasted” twenty minutes getting distracted by stuff on my phone. I had to look up a couple of things for the episode, and I have gotten sucked into all the things. It just happens. It’s made to do that. The Internet and our phones are built to keep us there. It’s not your fault. But what that means is that if your phone or the Internet is in the way of what really matters about enjoying your evening, you have to work a little harder to remove that obstacle. You can use downtime functions on your phone or charge somewhere far from you or get one of those Light phones that doesn’t have the Internet when you want to go Light. There are ways to remove that distraction, but I’m here to tell you that it’s hard and you’re not a simpleton or giving into the man because you enjoy scrolling Instagram and look up 45 minutes later confused at how much time as gone by like the rest of us. It is made to do that to us, so be kind when it happens. If you’d rather it not happen, think about how you can creatively remove that distraction just this week.

So step two is essentialize or get rid of what’s in the way of what matters.

Step three is to organize or put everything in its place. What needs to be in place for you to enjoy your evening hours? Is it a choice already made for the TV show you’re going to watch? It’s nice when you get into a show with someone because you know what’s next. I mentioned this last week in the What’s Saving My Life Episode, but we’ve been watching Marvel movies. When the boys come into the living room, we don’t have to ask what to watch next. We already know. It’s been decided. Maybe you need to have that decision made for you too before you sit down.

What else needs to be in place? I think that by the time we get to the evening, we’re just tapped out. We have so little decision-making ability left, and we’re also the most tired we’ve been all day probably. That means that perhaps you need a loose plan in place long before the evening arrives. You can decide earlier in the day “what do I need tonight? What would be an enjoyable way to spend my evening hours?” Decide that at breakfast or lunch. Do some kind of midday check-in and *decide*. The decision is the thing that keeps us from the enjoyment, so just make one.

Other ways you could organize might be to have a little checklist if you love those. Maybe every night, you shoot to do one chore, prep one thing, care for yourself one way, and do one fun thing. You could use categories like that, like chore, prep, care, and fun to help you make sure you're catching the pieces that matter the most to you. But the purpose of step three is to make sure you have the things in place to enjoy your evenings. Most of the time, what you need is just a decision that's already made.

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Step four is to personalize or feel like yourself. This is a great place to remind you again to do this the way you need to. Your definition of enjoyment, your parameters of what an evening is even are up to you. They are personal. You can do the same thing every night, you can change it every night, you can make a plan and then pivot as you go along. The point though is to feel like yourself in the process.

I also think that the evening is the place where we most likely try to find ourselves again. Throughout the day, we're tending to so many things, answering to so many voices, and the evenings is when we want to come back to ourselves. But we feel guilty, especially as women, doing that because there are still things we could be doing. I mean, can you really "waste" your entire evening painting or reading or going for a long walk or whatever you want to do and *not* pack lunches for the next day or clean up a room or do whatever responsible thing you should do? That's why evening hours in particular hold so much pressure. It's the time we need the most to come back to ourselves, to feel like ourselves, but then when we try to, we feel bad about it. That cycle is so dumb I hate it.

Instead, honor that you need to feel like yourself. I'm not saying shirk all responsibilities. Y'all don't do that anyway. But if you need to do something responsible during your evenings, feel like yourself by first being kind to yourself. Staying grounded is more important than staying on task. At least that's what I think. But use your evenings to enjoy being with yourself, to enjoy feeling like yourself, and to enjoy things you love. Not all three of those can always happen at the same time, but honor your own humanity as you enjoy your evening hours. I enjoy washing dishes a lot more when I remember that it's a privilege to care for my family, to have the tools and water to clean, to know that it never takes as long as I think it will, and to listen to a great audiobook while I do it. See what I'm saying? Personalize your evening hours and feel like yourself. What do I need tonight?

And finally step five is to systemize or stay in a flow. This might not happen, nor does it have to. For me, the only thing about my evenings that's in a flow is that we clean the kitchen before any rest happens because it helps my brain and that I always do my skincare. I do it at different times, but I always do it. The kitchen sometimes gets cleaned right after dinner or two hours later, and sometimes I do, sometimes Kaz does it, sometimes we pull the kids in to help. It all varies. But the flow lies in those two things being done. Outside of that, it's a bit more of whatever I need on that day, and I've done this enough to have really good practice and permission to enjoy those hours. I read, I watch TV, I paint, I sometimes go to the gym if I need

to get out some energy I didn't have a chance to earlier in the day... the guilt does eventually give up. I'm proof of that. Because you shouldn't feel guilty enjoying a nice evening at home, no matter what it is you're doing.

If you do need more of a system, more of a flow, you can use alarms or calendar settings on your phone to help remind you of what you'd like to be doing or not doing at that time. You can have a friend you text at 7pm every night and excitedly share what you're going to do that night. You can put theme nights in the calendar if you do that whole breakdown of a chore evening, a fun evening, a rest evening, etc. Whatever it is you've decided to try, notice if there's a way to help keep that thing in a flow with some kind of reminder or rhythm.

Honestly, I feel like I could talk about this topic for hours, but I'll stop here. Ultimately, I hope you recognize that this is not just a you problem. This is something that so many people struggle with. How do I use this time? This special evening time? The funny thing I didn't mention is that you will probably get many many many evenings. How you spend this one doesn't have to impact how you spend the next one. It doesn't have to be perfect every single time. That's not a thing. Just notice what you need, name what matters, honor yourself in the process, and slowly learn to enjoy your evenings.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Hannah Hantho. Hannah writes this "My decide once of being helpful to a friend who is moving is to always offer to take their donation items to the donation place for them. I work near one, so I'm there often, and it's getting one errand off their plate and stuff out of their house which is already in chaos from the moving process." I love this idea, Hannah. It's such a kindness, it's something you can easily do which makes you more willing to help, and it truly is such a load off for people who are drowning in boxes and overwhelm. You can apply decide once to so many things, and how to help someone in a move is yet again another example. Thanks, Hannah, for sharing this, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the week!

Okay, y'all, that's it 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!