

## 354 - Office Hours with Kendra

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 354 - Office Hours with Kendra! Office Hours episodes happen once a quarter, and in them, I help you Lazy Genius your life! I take questions from Instagram and answer them here on the podcast, helping you see how to use the 13 Lazy Genius principles, the five-step Lazy Genius method, and any other Lazy Geniusisms that might help make your situation a little easier.

Because we have a lot of parents in this crowd, a lot of the questions are parenting related. As I usually do in Office Hours episodes, the first half will be non-kid questions and the second half will be kid. That way if you don't have kids, you can know when to tap out and use your time on something else!

One quick note before getting into the questions. When I wrote the initial caption for the Instagram posts asking for questions, I reminded everyone to make the problems small. That's one of our most important approaches in Lazy Genius anything, right? Start small in your steps but also in what the problem actually is. Big problems require big solutions, but small problems are a lot easier to solve. What's funny is that I think some folks took my "keep problems small" encouragement as "use fewer words." So just remember that when you're trying to name your own problem to solve, the smallness isn't about how quickly you can summarize it. You might need a whole mess of words to find your way to what's actually frustrating you. I know that's true for me. So this is my encouragement as you work through your own questions and Lazy Genius your own stuff that you give yourself plenty of room to find the problem. Small doesn't mean short. It's really about shrinking the problem to a point small enough that your response can be put on a to-do list. As we learned last week in the episode about finishing a project, you can't put a project on a to-do list, right? It's too big, just like comments like "declutter the house" or "deal with aging parents" are too big. You can't put "declutter the house" on a to-do list because that's a massive project and even an ongoing rhythm. And yet we all feel that pull to declutter, right? Instead, make it so much smaller. You'll notice that the questions I chose for today's episode are just that... relatively small and therefore easy to answer, even small enough to be a task or two on a to-do list. Pay attention to this process so that you can make your own challenges small enough to solve, too.

Okay, let's jump into some questions!

First up is @katherina.joy.stegerman. Katherina writes, "This problem might be too big but I have a hard time using day planners, calendar reminders and to-do lists, but I would like to remember what I have going on and have a more organized schedule. How do you change your attitude around lists and planners and start learning to use them well?"

This could be a whole episode and almost is. I loved talking about time management; it's my favorite thing. I have some very old episodes where I already have. Episode 127 is The Lazy Genius Chooses a Planner. Episode 124 is The Lazy Genius Weekly Plan. And there's also a blog post that went almost viral several years ago about how I Bullet Journal like a Lazy Genius. Macaulay Culkin tweeted about it. Still the most hilarious thing. Anyway, I do really like talking lists and planning and time management. Why? Because this question from Katherina is so common for people. We want to be organized. We want to have our lists. We want to have everything in one place. And yet it feels like we're always chasing that. It's never quite right.

This problem is a bit big, but I want to help Katherina and any of you struggling with this to make it smaller by highlighting what's really going on. I would almost guarantee that the problem is not that you haven't found the right system or the right notebook or process or whatever. It's the perspective. I would stake just about anything on that.

When we see videos and photos and even sales pages of planners we're looking at online, we're being presented with an ideal organizational situation, particularly marketed to women. If you look at planners marketed to men, the approach is wildly different. For women, there are colored blocks, cute handwriting, stickers, places to organize work and domestic stuff, habit trackers, all kinds of things. Planners marketed to men have calendars, to-do lists, and maybe places for goals. The way that planning is marketed to women is markedly different than how it's marketed to men. And because marketing at its core is all about telling a story, showing us what we should want and what our ideal scenario is, we have a faulty, incomplete ideal scenario in our heads. We have been told what planning and organizing and calendaring should look like and how it should operate by so many voices for so long that it's hard to see clearly enough what's really happening.

You can live your life day to day. You can have a simple notebook where you write down what you have to do and what you hope to do and cross things off when they happen. You can lean into the rhythms you already have and be content with them, maybe adding one small new thing at a time. You don't have to have color-coded days or time blocks that look cute enough for Instagram. You don't have to use the same system every day and definitely not for every season.

I know that there is a legitimate need to learn how to manage your time and get your stuff done, and we have some great content lined up on the podcast and in other places in 2024. But for now, I want to remind you that the problem likely isn't that you just can't find the right system. If you're a woman and most of you listening are, the way that organization is marketed to you is decidedly different and heavier on expectations than the way organization is marketed to men. So do whatever simple approach works for you today. Not forever. Today.

The next question is from @tishwolf, and I love how small and specific it is. Tish writes, "Decorating my bookshelves. I know there must be a formula...all my sentimental books are in my office but I need something like 3 stacked books + 1 plant+ 1 picture. I'm paralyzed with indecision!" Oh, the styled bookshelf. I love a bookshelf. If you're someone who loves books, you want your shelf to be reflective of that love, right? From Tish's question, it sounds like the shelf being pretty matters. For some people, the styling part is irrelevant. You just need your books to go somewhere. If you, like

Tish, want to decorate your bookshelf, here's my handful of suggestions. First, a bookshelf only full of books is also beautiful. If you have enough to fill it up without plants and pictures, you can do that! Remember that styled bookshelves we see in magazines and online are beautiful, but they are professionally styled. You can have a bookshelf of only books, and it's beautiful and awesome. You can also do rainbow order which some people hate, but by grouping spines according to color, the shelf is automatically beautiful no matter what you do with the rest of it.

Now, let's say you don't have enough books to fill the whole thing, or the bookshelf is more about decoration than actual book storage. What are some ways you can simplify or start small in styling? First, if you feel like the stuff you have is plain, you could paint the back of the shelf a bright color. No matter what you put in front of it, the shelf will have a personality. Second, put baskets or bigger things on the bottom to ground the shelf. It makes what you do on the top half a lot easier to balance. Third, put all of your books on the shelf and then just grab a group and turn them to the side. Adjusting the positioning of the books themselves adds interest. Fourth, think about dimension rather than a formula. The formula of book + plant + picture is great, but then it might look repetitive and not lived in like you want. Instead of a formula, go for dimension with books, plants, and pictures. Lean a photo against a stack of books, not just next to. Stick a plant in there but one that's got tendrils so it adds dimension when it hangs. Again, turn the books different directions so it's not all upright spines. Think about dimension. And fifth, don't cram it full. One of my favorite bookshelf levels or whatever is a horizontal stack of maybe five books in pretty colors with a ceramic hand statue next to it. That's it. Other shelves don't have that much white space, but when you ground a shelf and then add dimension, the white space just makes it sparkle. Also a bonus sixth tip is to pin a bunch of photos of styled bookshelves and notice what you love. Then do that thing.

Finally, this is a project. Styling a bookshelf is a project. Treat it like one or else you'll be frustrated and quit because you think you're doing it wrong. You're not. It requires a lot of decisions and trying things out, and again, people are paid to do it. It is a skill. So be kind, be patient, and be realistic about what you're actually doing, namely a project.

Next question is from @bethburson. Beth writes, "Dirty towels in a small (SMALL) home. The problem is in the kitchen and the bathrooms: towels and washcloths. Is the answer just hampers in every room? They are TINY bathrooms." I can hear the frustration in Beth's question, can't you? These daily challenges like dirty towels feel even bigger because we're confronted with them every day. Some challenges are less cumbersome because you can essentially ignore them. This is situation where Beth is probably confronted with "is there a better way" every single day since she's dealing with dirty towels and washcloths all the time.

This, to me, is a classic case of needing to choose what matters more. Ideally, we'd like to have as few steps or requirements of ourselves when it comes to daily housekeeping, right? That's why I have a little bucket in my kitchen we call "the napkin bucket" where dirty clothes from our kitchen area, like cloth napkins and stray socks, can go without having to go to the other end of the house to our bathroom hamper. That little bucket saves actual, physical steps. We also love saving space, right? The less we have to clutter our homes, the better we feel, both aesthetically and even emotionally. For some people, a cluttered space causes a cluttered brain. So there's another priority

of wanting to eliminate clutter and keeping a room from feeling crowded. In most situations, you have to pick one - fewer steps or fewer things. In my home, I choose fewer steps. I'd rather have an extra thing in my house - the napkin bucket - so I don't have to take more steps. The same is true of having hairbrushes and scissors all over my house. I'd rather have extra things than take extra steps.

Beth, to me, it sounds like you might need to choose extra steps. Maybe not! Maybe you're willing to have extra things, even small ones, in your kitchen and bathrooms so you can just put the dirty towels in there and be done, but because of your all caps use of the words SMALL and TINY twice in your comment, I think that you might prefer taking a few more steps as opposed to adding a few more things. If that's the case, I'd encourage you to systemize how you get the dirty towels every day. Maybe they just hang on doorknobs or over sinks when they're dirty. But since you're in a small space, find a time during the day when you or someone you live with is already doing something home related and rhythmic, like feeding the dog or cleaning up after dinner, and go to all the room and gather up the towels. Have one place for them, whether it's in a separate laundry basket tucked in a closet or a bag hanging on a hook on a door, but what needs a place is the *system* of gathering the towels every day, not the towels themselves. If you're home all day and looking at dirty towels lying across surfaces is making you crazy, make that rhythm in the middle of the day instead of the end. Notice when you're the most frustrated by the problem, and see if you can put a rhythm in its place before that frustration hits. But ultimately for anyone struggling with this kind of very relevant problem, choose which matters more - fewer steps or fewer things.

This next question is also about laundry and will be easier to answer now that we've talked about Beth's question. @rev.alicia.reads writes, "Apartment complex laundry! Specifically doing laundry in an apartment complex in the winter. My apartment is upstairs and literally as far as it's possible to be from the communal laundry room, which means that I have to lug my laundry downstairs and walk basically an entire block to get there. In the winter when it's rainy or snowy or literally 10 degrees outside, doing laundry means I have to get in and out of all my winter weather proof gear all day and I just can't make myself do it, but then the laundry pile becomes so big that the task is overwhelming and suddenly I'm trying to wash a single pair of pants in the sink. SEND HELP." Alicia! This sounds so frustrating. Who wants to act like they're getting ready to go skiing just to do laundry? But that's the reality of your situation, so let's try and make it a little easier.

Some situations, y'all, are just a bummer. Lazy Geniusing something doesn't mean it's easy or without trouble. When people ask me how to Lazy Genius a big change or grief or something huge because they've done everything they can and it's still hard, the first thing I say is that the point isn't to remove how hard it is. Some things, whether emotionally heavy or just practically annoying, are hard. You can't always make something easy or void of any resistance. Some stuff is just a pain. So the way we Lazy Genius it is by for sure being kind to ourselves in it, naming our season and living in it, and also by lowering our expectations to something more reasonable, like "I'm going to try and make this just a little easier." We're not making frustrations go away because that's how rarely how life works, but let's see if we can't make Alicia's laundry situation just a touch easier.

We already discussed the practical choice of fewer steps or fewer things, right? In this case, Alicia, you're confronted with a similar choice. You mentioned getting in and out of winter clothes over and

over to do laundry all day, but I wonder if you're piling on to an already frustrating situation. Instead of figuring out how to both get back and forth to your laundry *and* not have to worry so much about the winter gear going on and off over and over, I wonder if you picked just one. Maybe you could treat your laundry room as a laundromat where you stay there. Bring a book or knitting or an iPad with a great movie and wait until it's all done. That way you're only taking the one trip and having to put the clothes on just the one time. I'm also guessing that because you're putting it off, the laundry is piling up and therefore takes even longer to all get done when you actually go to the laundry room. What if you added a rhythm of when one load is ready to wash, you set aside an hour, go down and take care of that load while you read or work or have a snack or go for a winter walk since you're already bundled, and then you're done until the next load is ready. I think trying to eliminate getting dressed over and over again combined with the waiting so long because you hate is exacerbating your problem. The laundry will take so much longer because you have so much more, and it's harder to stay in that the laundry room for as long as it takes to wash all the clothes and fill all the time you need. So if you can lessen the amount of laundry you're washing at a time, staying in the laundry room might feel more manageable. Choose an hour you always go, or have a House Rule where when a load is ready, you do it within 24 hours. Or combine doing a load or two of laundry with something fun or necessary that already exists, like figuring out your grocery list or something. And if none of this works because the apartment complex laundry space is not set up for you to hang out there, you could just go to an actual laundromat. Sometimes we get stuck with a problem because we forget we can do something completely different. Just because that laundry room is there doesn't mean you have to use it, especially if it's tough to use it in the way you need. So maybe your winter shift is to do laundry at a laundromat and then have a different rhythm in your apartment complex when the weather isn't an issue. Laundry is a pain no matter what, so I think we all know the answer isn't going to be a party, but when we have appropriate expectations about a solution, we can slowly work our way to an easier and easier scenario.

Okay, let's pivot to questions that involve people with kids.

This first one is from @kcarney86. "How to lazy genius adjusting to baseball season with 2 littles and my husband coaching. Our usual schedule is eating dinner at 5:30 and bedtime at 7. But now we have practices 3 days a week right before dinner, and there are weeknight games that blow through dinner time and right up to bedtime. What matters is giving my kids the nourishment and rest they need, feeding myself well, having some sense of rhythm, and not dreading/resenting/complaining the entire season." Oh, the sports season. And that word matters - season. This is a season you're in, and seasons definitely require both practical adjustments and perspective adjustments. It won't always be like this, but it is like this now. How can you pivot your perspective and your rhythm to account for this new season?

From a perspective standpoint, I'm guessing the kids enjoy playing and your husband enjoys coaching. Most people don't commit to sports or extracurricular activities without some enjoyment attached. But what I'm guessing is that everyone else is into it and gets to benefit from the actual sport while you're left with the management of it all. That's a tough place to be. So the first thing I'd suggest is adding your own enjoyment into the process. It can be as simple as being present at the game. Loving when your kids hit the ball or they cheer for a teammate or when your husband gives a

kid a high five or laughs. If you're focused on when everyone is going to eat or checking the clock or worrying about your plan, it's hard to be present with the good parts. You can also add enjoyment to this season by getting some for yourself at another time during the day. During baseball season, focus on having a lunch or breakfast you love since dinners are likely a little more kid-friendly and quick than usual. Or on game nights, you don't do anything productive at the end of the day. Once the usuals are done, like getting kids in bed or basic resetting for the next day, you take a bath with a book or something. Have something for you on gamedays that you can look forward to, not out of resentment for your family in a "I'm going to get mine" way but to honor the season and the extra energy it requires of you.

Practically, dinner will definitely not look like it does outside of baseball season as you know, so here are a couple of thoughts. One, if you haven't already, make a list of meals that are easy to have for dinner during the season. It could be takeout, crockpot things, freezer meals you put in the oven before you leave for practice... have a list of options, even if it's three things. That way you're not reinventing the wheel every week of what to have for dinner. Another idea is to switch afternoon snack and dinner. No one says that the nourishing meal has to happen at the end of the day. See what happens if you have dinner ready after school, and instead of Goldfish and a banana, kids are eating a bowl of chili or meatballs or whatever you made. Then they're nourished and connected at home, and the snack happens after the practice or game. They're eating the same amount of food; it's just flipped. And the last idea is to talk to other families on the team! What are they doing? Can you share the load? You can picnic before games or once a week get a meal together at a fast food place so there's some community help and connection? Involve the people already involved in that same season as you.

Tricky seasons often require a little practical creativity, so whether these ideas work or just give sparkle to other ideas, think outside of the regular season box. You'll have to do things differently, but you can do those with more energy and even enjoyment than you might realize.

Next up is @samanthawarmack. Samantha writes, "Hi! Mom of 2 boys, 4 years apart! How to say a polite, "no thank you", to more toys being given by my parents. We have so many, we just keep rotating them, but I really want to donate them." I think I've talked about this before, but holy moly is this not a real problem for so many parents. In the same way that organization is marketed to women different, a kid's experience of a fun childhood is also marketed very specifically. Kids are supposed to have toys. It's just what they do, and frankly, toys are fun! There's nothing wrong with toys. But when you're the one left managing them, it's hard to communicate that with well-meaning, loving grandparents or family members who are simply responding to the messages they're receiving about what kids want. It's a cycle that makes all the sense and also drives commerce. Remember, when Kelly Corrigan was on the show, and she said, "Contentment does not drive economic activity." Contentment is something that doesn't exist in most situations regarding kids and toys, so this challenge makes sense.

I think the most important piece of this is not just communicating that you'd like fewer toys but offering up something else for the grandparents to do. I'm not a grandparent yet, but I know that connection with your grandkids means a lot. And for a lot of people, we assume, again, because of

those marketing messages, that the way we can show love to kids is by giving them something that will make them happy. Presence isn't enough. An experience is delayed and not enough. A tangible thing is more appealing to the giver because there's almost a guarantee of immediate pleasure from whoever is getting the gift, and that's never more true than with kids. Walk through the toy aisles of Target and see how many kids are losing their minds over just getting this one thing and how happy it will make them. So I would suggest honoring that desire to connect with the grandkids by asking your parents or in-laws or whoever to give experiences more than gifts. This is a common suggestion and one that works well. For birthdays or holidays, request memberships to museums or that they take the kids on a fun trip to a closeby city to go to the zoo or get ice cream or something. If the gifts are pop-in gifts where they don't feel like they can visit without bringing something, offer an alternative there too. Instead of bringing a new toy, ask them to bring a snack to enjoy together or offer to play a game with them you already have. Maybe the grandparent brings a coloring book, and everyone sits together to color right then. Make it about being together more than a thing. I think most of us are worried we're not enough for people, and that doesn't stop with grandparents. So tell them not only is there presence enough, it's more preferred than a new toy! I think that could go a long way.

One more. @sara.ingmire writes, "Figuring out a vacation that everyone will like. I have two eighteen year olds and a fifteen year old all with different interests. And the pressure is on - my oldest two are graduating high school in three months!"

Ooo, Sara, I think that pressure is adding to the stress of this. When we are coming to the end of a season, it's so easy to make something like a vacation count. We want it to be amazing since it's the last one in this season, but that expectation can be a lot to navigate. So I would start by reminding you and anyone else who is in a similar situation that it doesn't have to be the most perfect vacation ever. It can be mediocre and still matter. So release some of that "last time" pressure.

Practically speaking, if you haven't already, I'd talk to your kids! What do they want to do? Where do they want to go? It could be that everybody gets a day to choose the itinerary wherever you are. Or it might be that they all are content hanging out at a lake house where the active one can ride a jetski and the chill one can read by the water or whatever. Another option that I think helps with family vacations with kids who like different things is that they can all bring a friend. I know that's slightly chaotic and more expensive and also not ideal for family time, but I also think that in this season, depending on how willing the family is to hang out, it's sometimes easier to offer some social release that can't be found in the family. Let's say the 15 year old is actually where things get tricky because your 18 year olds naturally buddy up together but the younger one is left on their own. Maybe that kid just brings a friend. Regardless of how you approach, including the kids in the process will be important to finding a vacation approach that works for everybody. Together you can name what matters. This is our budget, we can travel this far, do we want to be in a city or in a quiet place? If there's a split in that, how can you find a quiet place in the city or a quiet place close to a city? That kind of thing. Being the solo parent Googling "vacation spots for families" late at night will not solve this problem, and that's what I would totally do first so I get it. Instead, involve the family to help make this vacation something everyone looks forward to in a reasonable way.

Alright, thanks for your questions, everyone! I hope you got a little help for your own challenges somewhere in this episode! We have other office hours episodes in the archive, so if you're interested in hearing more episodes like this, search "lazy genius office hours" and you'll find the handful we've already done.

And since we heard from so many of you this week, the Lazy Genius of the Week is all of you who follow me on Instagram and helped me out with this episode. If you'd like to check out the other questions and comments, you can find it @thelazygenius.

This episode is hosted by me, Kendra Adachi, and executive produced by Kendra Adachi, Jenna Fischer, and Angela Kinsey. The Lazy Genius Podcast is enthusiastically part of the Office Ladies Network. Special thanks to Leah Jarvis for weekly production.

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