

#103 Keeps the Car Clean

Hi, everyone! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, 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 103, The Lazy Genius Keeps the Car Clean. This episode obviously assumes you have a vehicle and don't use public transportation, so if that's not you, feel free to skip to another episode. Maybe you're feeling the push of spring cleaning, so check out episode #52 The Lazy Genius Spring Cleans. Otherwise, let's talk about keeping your car clean.

Mine isn't clean. Not usually. But that's not super important to me. In fact, I wrote a post awhile back called Why I Don't Care That My Van Is a Mobile Thrift Store. Here's the thing - I choose to be lazy about my car. It doesn't matter a ton for it to be pristine, so I don't try to be a genius about it. What I do care about is making the times I actually do clean it out pretty easy. I don't want to be surprised by rotten bananas or permission slips I forgot about, so I do have some systems in place in the car to make the mess make sense and not be a health hazard. Now, clearly I've found a rotten banana in my car before, and it was unpleasant. I'm not saying it never happens, but I don't have to jump to the extreme of having a spotless van at all times to counteract it - because, let's be honest, isn't that what we do sometimes? One thing goes wrong in the van, in our health, in our time management, and we try to build it bigger. We go extreme and vow to never leave any trash in the van again, to never eat sugar again, to eliminate Instagram from our lives forever and ever! And then when the motivational momentum wears off, it's kind of sad and we don't feel great about ourselves or our ability to follow through, even though the thing we required of ourselves was kind of extreme and impossible in the first place. So let's find the regular middle. I personally don't need to have a clean car; I just want to make tiny moves that keep things manageable and easier to clean up when I have the time or interest. I'm not abandoning my van to entropy, but I'm not a dictator about it either. And remember, in anything whether it's your clean car or something completely different, don't swing big until you're willing to start small. Small is way easier, and if you don't care enough to take small steps, the big ones definitely won't work.

So here are some ways to keep your car clean. The first is the biggest: have a place for trash. At one point, I tried to have a rule where I'd always take the trash inside whenever I came home, but what about when you also need to carry groceries and backpacks and toddlers. I never wanted to make another trip back to the car just to bring in the trash. Such a waste, at least for me. The solution I've used for years is quite lazy - just put a grocery bag or some kind of trash bin in the car. Ours is in the middle of the two front seats. I can easily reach it, and my kids think it's funny to chuck their applesauce pouches and granola bar wrappers at the bag. They're hilarious. But at least everything ends up in my general vicinity and I can put the trash in a bag. The trash bag is just a holding place until it gets too full. It's the same concept as the holding places for paper in the episode The Lazy Genius Organizes Paper. You don't need to tend to a type of item every single time you come in contact with it. Just have a place for it collect, out of the way of everything else, and deal with it when the time is right or the container is full. Easy. And because I use a grocery bag for car trash, I literally just pick up the whole thing and put it in the trash and then replace it with another bag. Of course there's trash throughout the van, but on the random day I say to everyone "grab a piece of trash on your way out" there's at least a place to put it, and when I do clean out the van, the trash bag is already there so I don't have to make annoying piles of trash in the car and get frustrated. That might be a silly thing to find frustrating, but I hate piles that aren't contained. Like a lot, especially piles of trash. I need piles to be visually constrained. So have a place for trash in your van, and you're already halfway there.

Another idea is the same idea as the trash just not for trash. You likely have stuff that doesn't belong in your car but that isn't trash. For my van, it's books the kids have brought with them, hair bows Annie ripped out of her hair, random gloves, stuff like that. Some of those things actually serve a decent purpose in the car, like the books when I need to distract the kids when they're fighting, so it's great to have a bin or basket or some kind of holding place for stuff that doesn't really stay in the car but doesn't urgently need to come in the house right now. Again, it just keeps the car visually less cluttered. When the container is full, bring it inside, and put stuff away.

Because here's the thing: your car likely feels dirty because there's stuff everywhere. It might not be the amount of stuff as it is the distribution of stuff. The same is true in our homes, too. If your living room feels like it's a mess, there's a huge visual difference in a dozen things being scattered all over the floor and those same dozen things being in a pile on the coffee table. Visually, there's less clutter, and really that's all you need. In so many ways, the goal isn't to clean up every single thing; it's to *feel* like the house is clean or the car is clean. And the feeling comes when it seems like it's cleaner than it was before. So in your car, having all the stuff in one container feels tidy and relatively clean because it's not spread out everywhere. Doing that with both trash and random stuff will change the way your car feels because honestly what else is there? There's trash and there's stuff that isn't trash.

Now if you have things in your car that don't fit one of those two categories - maybe you have a job that has a lot of equipment that you need to keep in the car for example - you can still apply the same concept. Give everything a holding place. Contain it somehow, and the car will feel cleaner.

Remember I said I wrote a post about my van being a mobile thrift store? That aspect of it isn't my favorite, so let's hit a really good tip for all of those bags and boxes of kids clothes and old lamps you've been meaning to take to Goodwill. When you put donation items in your car, do not under any circumstances put them in the trunk. They will die there. You will forget. Out of sight, out of mind. To make sure you actually donate the stuff, put it in your front seat and then drive the stuff to where it needs to go. Having the passenger seat covered in full garbage bags is an excellent motivator to run the errand.

Now let's finish out this episode by talking about little ways to put trash in the bag and stuff in a box or whatever else you need to do to make your car feel clean. If you get my monthly newsletter called The Latest Lazy Letter, a couple of months ago, you heard me talk about a book that you've likely seen on Instagram a bunch called Atomic Habits by James Clear. You guys? This is the best book on habits ever. I was so encouraged because so many of the things he teaches in the book are concepts I've been sharing with you here in podcast episodes and blog posts about goals and failing and all of that; he just says them better and with research to back them up. It's a fantastic book. We'll put a link in the show notes so you can grab a copy that you will highlight within an inch of its life. But in that book, he talks about the concept of cues. We experience a cue that triggers an action. I've definitely lived with the cue of kids screaming in the afternoon that triggered my opening the fridge to get out of a ball of cookie dough. For sure. But we can actually manufacture cues and triggers to encourage actions that matter. For example, when it comes to your car, use getting gas as the cue that triggers the action of throwing away trash. Maybe you just stand there pumping gas or you put on that gas pump lock and check your email. Instead of doing whatever you usually do, throw out some trash. Or put all the stuff in the stuff box. Check the trunk for anything that could be moved to the front seat so you'll remember to take care of it. Does that make sense? Choose a cue to trigger a small action that can help keep your car a little cleaner. You can use any cue you like - pumping gas, loading up the kids at the end of a Target run, waiting in the carpool

line. Choose a cue that happens often and let it be a trigger for a small, simple action like throwing out the Starbucks cups or gathering up all the discarded school papers or whatever. It's a huge help.

In terms of cleaning the car like wiping down dashboards and washing the actual car, I'm out. My husband does that every few months because I hate it and he likes it just fine. Or just go through a gas station car wash. I'm definitely lazy about that part of keeping a car clean, so I basically have zero to say about it other than I guess it's good to wash it sometimes? I'm so helpful.

But these tips of having holding places for trash and stuff in combination with some cue that triggers an action to keep things clean, man you'll be in such great shape. Keep it simple, y'all. No need to have the expectation of a spotless car unless that just really matters to you. And in that case, you probably already do keep it clean without needing any help from me. We're usually pretty good at giving priority to things that matter when we name them, so name how you feel about your car and then let your actions line up.

Alright, that's it for today's episode! If you're interested in checking out Atomic Habits, check out the show notes, and if you'd like to hear about all the books I'm reading every month plus favorite podcast episodes, recipes I've tried, and all kinds of news and content I don't share anywhere else, join the mailing list by going to thelazygeniuscollective.com/join or clicking the link in the show notes. The Latest Lazy Letter always goes out on the first Wednesday of every month, and I rarely email otherwise, so if you don't get anything from me for awhile, don't sweat it. It's probably because I haven't sent anything yet.

Okay, guys, thanks so much for listening! I'm Kendra, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. See you next week!