

295 - How to Start Fresh Without Starting Over

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 295 - how to start fresh without starting over. I think that might be one of my favorite episode titles we've ever had, and before we jump into what this means and what a gift this perspective can be for you as we enter a new year, I would like to give credit to Leah, the Director of Content and Strategy on Team LG, who helps me develop these episodes and who sometimes names them. Today's is one of her best, and I'm really excited about how this phrase will direct us for the next 20 minutes or so.

Because isn't that really what we want? It's January, it's the beginning of a new year, and our options used to be either lazy or genius. We would just not care about a new year and roll our eyes at people choosing words and setting goals because we know they won't stick or whatever, but I do think viewing a new year through a lazy lens is fairly rare. This is where geniuses come to play. January is a genius's Super Bowl. This is where it all comes together. We've been trying to be geniuses about the start of a new year for too long, but the alternative is not ignoring it or dismissing it or saying that the new year doesn't matter. I think it does. I think there can be something really special about coming out of a busy holiday season, getting a new planner, and starting fresh. But starting fresh does not mean you have to start over, so today we're going to talk about the Lazy Genius way to approach a new year.

The first thing we're going to do in this episode is compare the Lazy Genius way to the other way, to maybe just a genius way of looking at a new year. I made a little chart in my notes of these comparisons, and I plan to share that chart with you on Instagram so you can find that @thelazygenius if you're interested.

Geniuses see the new year as beginning, and Lazy Geniuses see it as continuing. Beginning versus continuing. Your life doesn't stop and reset. A lot of things continue, but we're almost groomed to see it differently. Everything gets a reset button. Everything restarts. In some ways, that thinking is appealing. Chances are you're pretty tired after the holidays, you are confronted with some of your choices and patterns that you wish were different and you think *should* be different, so the idea of a restart sounds awesome. That's why in January we get that Big Black Trash Bag Energy. We've added to our homes in the form of stuff, we've left the busyness of the holidays, and now we're like should we just move? Just start over? That is a normal response to an even slightly stressful situation. But you can start fresh without starting over by remembering that the other way to see this is a beginning. But really it's just continuing. Can you change as you continue? Sure. But you're still the same beautiful, important person living the same beautiful, important life. It doesn't require a full reset.

A second difference is that other voices are fixing. Lazy Geniuses are tending. Fixing versus tending. I would bet a lot of money that most of the things you think should be fixed or completely changed cannot be fixed or changed with one attempt. They can't. Life doesn't work that way. We know that but we forget that. Tending. Think about tending. Think about the small

things you can do in your life in one area to care for and nurture and tend to. Tending is so kind. Fixing isn't unkind. If my toilet is broken and then it is fixed, I'm very happy about that. But fixing in the sense of our lives and personhood and our daily rhythms, that kind of fixing feels harsh and robotic and kind of soulless. Tending is kind, it is soft, it has empathy, it can see when we need to rest, when we need to push, when we need to ask for help, we need to take a break, when we need to take an even smaller step, when we have the energy to take a bigger. Tending is dynamic and human. Fixing usually isn't. So during this time of year, even choosing that word can make a difference. Tending instead of fixing.

A third way is big versus small. We talk about that a lot. January is a time for big swings. A lot of productivity people try and massage big swing language out of big swing choices. I see it the same way I see diet culture. There are a lot of people I hear saying things they think are separate from the language of diet culture, that we should change our bodies in order to be happy or healthy or accepted or energetic or valuable or whatever. It's so nuanced, and I hear it leaking out of seemingly innocent words from lovely people all the time. It's pervasive. It's kind of like a virus that just doesn't go away. And the longer it stays in our thinking and in the voices around us, the harder it is for us to see the truth, to see the nuance. That's true in diet culture, and I think it's also true in productivity culture. There are a lot of people, experts even, trying to make it sound like their approach to a new year is not full of big swings, but they are.

One example of this could be SMART goals. Smart is an acronym that stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely. If you set a goal and it's not those things, you won't reach it. Now I tend to agree with that. Choosing something specific that you can measure that's not super vague, that you can actually do, that makes sense for who you are and the life you live right now... that acronym is not far off base. It makes sense. And yet productivity experts encourage folks to set no more than three smart goals across 3 to 5, maybe even more, areas of life. And all of those goals are generally about fixing, not tending. They're about beginning, not continuing. And I don't know about you but no matter how smart the goal is, if you give me even two of them to measure based on a future me I think I should be, I'm out. But setting three goals across 3 to 5 areas of life? So 9 to 15 measurable things I'm supposed to add? And that's not big? That's enormous. That's absolutely enormous.

Now listen, if you love smart goals and you thrive on them and they support what matters to you, I'm all for it. I mention them only as an example of how the industry and the voices we hear that are buzzing with a lot of genius energy are focusing on big swings even as they say the swings are small. Lazy Geniuses start small. Very small. And when you bring in these words alongside the smallness, words like tending and continuing, and a couple of others I'm about to mention, it changes how you see those small steps versus those big swings. You've broken the code. You can see it in the words of productivity culture, words that are just sneaky and nuanced and so common we don't notice them anymore. That's why I'm setting up these comparisons so that you can see it better and know when it's great to listen to an expert and when their advice might not be for you.

A fourth difference is evaluation versus reflection. Evaluation versus reflection. Lazy Geniuses reflect. We simply look back with no agenda to start. We're just noticing. And the truth is the end of one year and the beginning of the next is a natural time to do that, to reflect. But we hold a spirit of reflection instead of a spirit of evaluation, of deciding how well something went or how disappointed in ourselves we are or what we need to do differently because we really failed at that one thing. Reflect. Don't evaluate, at least not in the beginning. Just reflect. I'll share some ideas of how to do that in a bit, but for now, that's an important difference to notice.

Let's look at one more difference, and that is annual versus seasonal. Right now, goal gurus have us looking at the entire year in front of us, and while there is merit in that depending on the lens you're using which we'll get to, for the most part you guys, we have to think seasonally. We have to think about where we are right now. Your season can be a week, a month, three months, whatever. But seasons of life impact how we live in them. That's the most obvious statement, but we forget that so often. Seasons of life impact how we live in them, and we don't know what series of seasons we're going to experience over the course of one year. We don't know if the house will get hit with Covid or a job opportunity falls through or a sump pump breaks or your car gets rear-ended or a kid is suddenly terrified to go to school or your co-worker who is your closest friend at work gets transferred or promoted or just doesn't sit next to you anymore. Our lives are full of seasons and transitions between those seasons, and you cannot guess. You cannot manufacture. You cannot manipulate. You cannot plan your way into or out of them. You have to learn to pivot and adjust and manage expectations when a new season lands at your feet, sometimes really suddenly.

It is a very Western, very capitalistic, very male idea that we can control an entire year that is before us, that we can evaluate and assess and then systemize a way to get to some optimized, desired end. But we all know that is not a thing, and yet the voices around us and the tools they're offering us say it is. So that's a key difference here. We have to think seasonally, not annually.

Now I do think there are some beautiful ways to capture an entire year that lays in front of us and approach with these words of tending and continuing and reflecting and starting small... we can create boundaries around the year 2023, and I'll talk about some ideas for that next, but ultimately, we are not in control. We're not. Covid taught us that and continues to really. We're not in control, so let's spend our energy living well, being ourselves, being kind and gentle and thoughtful and intentional, as opposed to spending our energy trying to craft and maneuver and systemize and optimize and make everything fit and work and matter. That is not how a Lazy Genius approaches a new year, and that is definitely not how you start fresh without starting over. That's big starting over energy, and we don't have time for that. That's now how we want to live, so next let's talk about how we do.

We'll be right back...

Now let's get practical. Let's talk about *how* to start fresh without starting over. Those words are our undercurrent. They're the culture we're creating around this idea of starting fresh to help us keep things in perspective, but now what are some practical steps to doing this?

The main thing to consider before you get practical is to remember that the turning of the calendar doesn't change everything, but it does change something. You just get to decide what it changes for you. That's all. So all of these exercises and ideas are simply to help you name what change you might want the new year to bring for you.

We begin by reflecting. I mentioned reflection already, that we reflect, we don't evaluate. If you haven't already, I think a small little session of reflection is an essential place to start. Remember, we're continuing. We're not beginning or starting over, so that means that we are part of a story that's already being told. We're already living in rhythms and routines, with responsibilities and relationships, and we can't ignore where we are in those things before we look ahead.

Let's talk about how you could reflect right now, and then I'll share a couple of resources or ideas that you could carry with you throughout this next year to aid in your reflective practice in the future.

Here's how I reflected this year. I read back through my one-line-a-day journal. That's it. It's on my bedside table, and every night, I write in it and then use cuticle serum. That's my little "get into bed" routine. So I read through the entries from 2022 and made a list of things that jumped out. Moments I had forgotten, the significance of mentioning the same thing several times, when relationships began, celebrations to mark for work or family. I just wrote down what sparked a little. Then I grouped them together and made a bunch of top 10 lists. Top 10 family moments, top 10 friend moments, top 10 personal moments, top 10 work moments, top 10 things I watched and read and listened to and all the things. Now, I have a job where I might consider sharing stuff like that, and I am. All of my reflective top 10 lists are this Wednesday's Latest Lazy Letter, so if you're already subscribed, you'll get those on January 4th. But it was a beautiful practice for me. I didn't evaluate. I just reflected.

If you don't have a journal like that, you can look through your camera roll. What photos did you take? What memories and moments do they trigger? You can look through your social media feeds and see what you posted, what resonated, what you celebrated, who you were with. You can also use reflective questions that are all over the Internet. I have a list we'll put in the show notes, and I personally love them. You could answer one of them or all of them. You can also talk to a partner or a friend or someone you spend a lot of time with and ask them "what's a favorite moment we had together this past year?" You can reflect via conversation. You can look back at a journal or if you write newsletters for your business at what you were sharing with your community. There are lots of ways you can look back, especially if you're like me and you don't remember much.

If you're looking for ways to maintain a practice of remembering important things throughout the year, you can follow Laura Tremaine's advice and have a note in your phone where you just list your favorite things or moments as they happen. Maybe you can set an alarm on your phone to remind you once a week or so to add anything to that list. Another resource is *The Next Right Thing Journal* by Emily P. Freeman. It's a seasonal journal you can start any time, and it is a simple, soulful guide to catching those things that happen and also giving yourself space to reflect and see what they might mean.

And this is where we ease into evaluating. But I don't want to use that word. I would rather use the word notice. As you reflect on what happened, what do you notice? And often when we notice something, it leads us to some kind of choice.

For example, when I reflected on 2022, I noticed how many memorable moments I had with friends, both old and new. When I made my top 10 list, there were actually 15 with friends and I wouldn't cut any of them. The cool thing about that is that 2022 was a year I really prioritized my friendships. This was the year I scheduled lunch hours without anyone in them yet so I could find time with people more easily. I went out on a limb with a couple of new friendships that grew. I took the time to travel to be with certain people so that those relationships could grow. Friendships mattered to me in the beginning of 2022, and in reflecting on them, I noticed that the small steps I took to make them matter worked. I experienced a deeply fulfilling year in my friendships. Now does that mean in 2023 I'm starting over? No. That doesn't even make sense, does it? But I'm noticing that I feel really fulfilled in those friendships, and I'd like to keep those structures and practices and intentions in place. They are already there, so I don't need to change anything.

But as they are already in place, is there another area of my life that I notice was a bit disappointing or took me out of myself or prevented connection of some sort? You can notice what was beautiful, and you can notice what you wish had been more beautiful. You're not evaluating and making judgments. You're just noticing as you reflect. You can notice and continue, or you can notice and adjust. That's the first step.

The second step after you've reflected and noticed is to name what matters for you to consistently feel like a person? To consistently feel like yourself. I truly believe that when we are operating out of the deepest, truest well of how we're made and how we move in the world, the other areas of life settle much more easily. No matter your circumstances or the seasons of life you go through, if you are consistently keyed into what makes you feel like yourself, what reminds you of the truth of your value, what you find deep fulfilling purpose in, what makes you come alive within yourself no matter what you're doing, I believe you will experience changing circumstances and difficult seasons quite differently. You are the only consistent thing in your changing life, so the more you can tend to what makes you feel like yourself, the greater your ability to pivot and manage expectations and have meaningful relationships and all the things.

And that's why the second step is to name what matters for you to consistently feel like a person. There are likely multiple things that do this, but I encourage you to start by naming one.

Start small. What is one thing that you can consistently do to feel like yourself? Maybe it's regular therapy. Maybe it's centering prayer. Maybe it's reading or running or tending to plants or being with puppies or laughing or solitude or any number of things. But name one thing that makes you feel consistently like yourself, that grounds you into the truest version of who you are and reminds you of your value. And then the next step is practically figuring out how to do that thing.

We'll be right back...

So as we close, what can you carry through the entire year to help tend to who you already are? Maybe it is a word of the year. Maybe that word can be an anchor to you and help you see yourself and your seasons of life in a unique way this year. Maybe you can slowly start creating a daily rhythm where you prioritize your own personhood every day. It could be standing outside and breathing deep and listening to birds or reading 20 minutes every day or doing a daily sun salutation to the Lord's Prayer. Simple simple things. Focusing on that thing is a way to start fresh without starting over. You're not trying to become a new person. Who you are is already really lovely and matters. Don't change that person. Don't start over on that person. But if you want to lean into the gift that January and fresh starts can bring, allow it to help you notice what you can do every day to feel like yourself.

Then and only then do I think you can move into other areas of life that are more practical and work out tangible small solutions for them. We have almost 300 episodes that can help you with practical things in your life, some of which you'd like a really big fresh start on this year. But if you do not begin by tending to who you are right now, no multitude of solutions, even Lazy Genius ones, will really make as deep an impact as this will. So start with you. Start with you honoring who you are, how you're made, and where your value and purpose come from, whatever that is for you. Then you can move into the other things.

So let's recap. First, this is a season where the geniuses are loud. That's okay. They can be loud, but you can also choose not to listen. Think about continuing, not beginning. Tending, not fixing. Start small. Don't take big swings. Reflect and notice, don't evaluate. And live in the season instead of trying to control the whole year.

And in all of this, as you reflect on these words and also on your own life, remember to match your expectations to the energy you're willing to give. Think small, and think seasonally. And be kind to yourself in all of it.

And that's how to start fresh without starting over.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week, it's Rachel Curry! Rachel emailed us this: "Hi, Kendra! I have a little Lazy Genius tip that I wanted to share with you and your listeners. When I do the dishes, I mentally divide up the cutlery area into fourths. One is for knives, one is for forks, one is for spoons, and one is for random items like whisks, serving utensils, etc. And that way when I go to unload the dishwasher the next day, putting away the

items is much faster. I spend less time thinking and sorting and dropping. I know what's where in the dishwasher, where it goes, and the flow is just faster and better. It seems so silly, but I swear it's a little something that just is that much easier and makes me that much happier." Rachel, I love simple things like this, so of course we'll share it! What's funny is I do a version of this but a little different. We used to do the knives in one divider, forks in another, and so on, but that actually slowed down my loading of the dishwasher. Plus, my husband really does not enjoy when the spoons actually are spooning and don't get clean. Our utensil holes are also a bit small, so here's how I do this in a slightly different way that does the same thing your way does for you which is to make things easier and therefore happier. Our utensil caddy is long and skinny, and there are eight compartments. One half is just for actual silverware. It doesn't matter what compartment a spoon goes versus a knife, but everything that is regular silverware related that goes in one drawer is in the front half of the caddy. The four compartments in the back half are organized by where the thing gets put away. So there's one compartment for things that go in a knife drawer - our vegetable peeler and cheap paring knives for cutting up fruit which I do not wash by hand. Another compartment is for plastic kid utensils. Another might be for baking tools that go in one particular drawer. Another is probably for utensils that go in the counter caddy. Regardless, I put those things away by where they end up, too, but my categories are different just like everyone listening could have their own unique categories based on their own needs. This is what it means to be a Lazy Genius everybody! You apply a principle - like Batch It - to your own need. Rachel puts spoons in one compartment because that matters to her. I put teaspoons and whisks in one compartment because they go in a separate drawer and that matters to me. You can do what matters to you, and the 13 Lazy Genius principles laid out in my book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, will help you do that. Also if you want to think about your kitchen in a way that actually helps you function in it well, a wonderful book to start the year with is *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*. It gives you the most practical steps to figure out how to organize your space, what you should shop for and how to store, how you should plan or not plan meals, what matters to you about gathering with other people around your table and how to let go of what doesn't. It's a fantastic resource that you'll turn to again and again. I promise you. So if you heard this tip and were like "huh, that sounds like that might help me," *The Lazy Genius Kitchen* is full of ways to create those kinds of easy moments in your kitchen, no matter how many people live in it. Thanks so much for writing in, Rachel, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today. Thank you 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.