

310: How to Pivot Around Any Obstacle

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 310: How to Pivot Around Any Obstacle.

One of the most beautiful things about being a Lazy Genius is that you can Lazy Genius literally anything. So rad. That's what this podcast is: a collection of over 300 episodes so far of how to Lazy Genius so many different kinds of things! Some of those solutions are linear, but frustratingly, a lot of them are not. There isn't always a straight line from a problem to a solution. Or is there? Today's episode is as close as we're going to get, and we're going to get really really close.

We're going to walk through the process of how to pivot around any obstacle, and this is actually a new process, y'all. Even if you're an OG LG, this order and pathway will be new to you, and I'm so excited.

But two important clarifications before we begin. First, we have to lay the groundwork for anyone who is new. So if you're new, hello! And you need to know what a lazy genius is. It's someone who is a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't, and you get to decide what matters. It's your choice. Now, depending on the situation or area of life, do you also have to consider what matters to other people? If you've ever taken a family vacation, you know the answer is yes. But ultimately, that's our paradigm. Be a genius about things that matter. Be lazy about the things that don't. You decide what that is. Score.

Now, the second clarification. When I say "how to pivot around any obstacle," it is vital to distinguish here between an obstacle and trauma. If you are experiencing something traumatic, whether it's a new trauma or an old one that has been triggered, your process is different. Some elements might be similar, but dealing with trauma is not linear nor would I ever try and reduce it to the same kind of problem-solving process as figuring out what's for dinner. So just know that going in. We're talking about obstacles, not trauma.

Okay. Let's get linear. I don't get to say that too often around here, so this is fun. How to pivot around any obstacle begins with an obstacle. Right? That's our starting block on this linear path. What is your obstacle?

It could be a forgotten appointment, a missed deadline, a kid who's late getting home from practice, chicken that isn't thawed, or you literally hit a physical obstacle, say your foot on a rogue Lego. There are a million answers, but essentially they throw you off your game. Or if you were already out of the game, it's the obstacle that kind of breaks you as a person. If you step on a Lego after you've already had a really bad day? The inward collapse is quite something.

Okay, so our process begins because an obstacle has presented itself. This happens all day, every day. A kid has to poop when you're about to walk out the door, you can't find your insurance card and you're already late for your doctor's appointment, the outfit you carefully selected in your head for your big interview looks ridiculous (to you) and now you don't have anything to wear. You get a phone call that sidetracks your project. You have a headache. You discover your toddler sitting in a pile of cereal next to an empty box. You find ants in the pantry. Your drive-thru order is wrong, and you don't discover that until you're already home. I could go on and on and on, and so could you. These are the kinds of obstacles we deal with everyday and the kind I'm referring to here. So what do you do?

Step one: breathe. Literally breathe. My kids hate it when I ask them to do this, and I get it. It's small and annoying and I have some kind of nerve asking a person who's trying to get past an obstacle to breathe. But still, breathe. When we face an obstacle of any size, our body's general response is survival. We become deeply self-preservational, and usually that is not a great vibe for very long.

Obstacles are also unmet expectations on full display. We did not expect the kid to poop right now. We expected the insurance card to be in our wallet. We expect a lot of things to happen according to our plans, even the unnamed ones. Have you ever heard me or anyone else say that sometimes you don't know you had an expectation until it's unmet? Yep. That's this.

So when we encounter an obstacle, we are trying to preserve ourselves and our expectations.

And guess how that comes out? Sideways. Sometimes with anger or shallow breathing, we feel ourselves crumble on the inside, we're literally in pain, we lash out to cast blame on something... obstacles can create responses in us that make it very hard to rationally get through the obstacle.

And that's why our first step is to breathe. Slow, deep breathing tells your body that you're okay. You're literally communicating with the parts of your brain that are panicking and telling yourself that everything is okay. Survival is not necessary here. We need to pull out of self-preservation mode a little so we can see what's going on for real. So breathe.

Step two: Actively seek softness. Your breathing will begin to calm your body and allow you to access more parts of your brain because remember: some of your brain goes offline when you're panicked in the face of an obstacle. Not great. So as you breathe, your body and brain are calming, and then I want you to actively seek softness. Invite things like compassion, kindness, empathy, and connection into your breathing and eventually your thinking. That might be directed at the kid who left the Legos out or toward yourself for not knowing where your keys are or toward the person who gave you the wrong order at the restaurant. Actively seek softness. I know some of you don't like that because you feel like softness means you don't get justice. If you're soft towards the Lego kid, they're never going to learn, right? Or if you don't angrily call the restaurant and tell them their order was wrong, they're never going to learn either. I get it. Justice is a big drive. But people who live with a tight grip on making sure that

anyone who screws up at your expense knows it? That's my default person, the person I've kindly and slowly moved away from for over a decade of real therapy, and I can tell you that actively seeking softness is way better than the girl at the drive thru knowing she made my sandwich wrong. Do you never get justice? Not necessarily. And I'm not saying you can't follow through on certain obstacles that involve other people. But the point here is to actively seek softness. It doesn't take away the obstacle, but it helps you connect with the humanity of the situation. And that's never a waste.

We'll be right back...

Step three: Name what matters. Now we're here. Now we're at what matters. I know I say that naming what matters is where we always begin, and in a podcast episode when we're talking about a specific topic, that's usually right. But when you're listening, you're not actively upset or in the middle of that obstacle. We can start with what matters because steps one and two aren't necessary right then.

But when you're in the obstacle? First breathe. Then actively seek softness. Then it's time to name what matters. The good thing about being smack dab in the middle of an obstacle is that when you are breathing and you are accessing kindness at the same time you are directly impacted by this obstacle, the combination of those things creates this laser beam on what matters. If you're standing in your kitchen, foot held in the air, lightly throbbing after stepping on the Lego, but you are also breathing and accessing softness, when you ask yourself in that moment "what matters right now?" your answer will come so fast. And my guess is it's something like "what matters is that Annie doesn't feel shame for leaving a Lego on the floor and that she knows we're still connected and okay. Even though I asked her to put them away, I'm not going to blame her for my foot hurting. That's not important right now." The intersection of your obstacle or pain point (sometimes literally) and calm kindness is something truly special.

So step one, breathe. Step two, actively seek softness. Three, name what matters. Four, make the problem smaller.

I was about to choose a different example than the Lego for this step because the problem doesn't need to be made smaller here, right? Then I realized, oh no. Very wrong. If you're standing there, your foot isn't the problem. Your foot is fine. But you might feel like a problem to solve is figuring out how to get your kid to recognize the need for responsibility and how when they leave stuff on the floor, there are consequences for them and other people.

I'm no Dr. Becky, but I think that problem is too big to solve. You need to make that problem smaller. Because if we try and solve a big problem, we get a big solution, and we know how well those work. If I were to go to Annie and give her a lecture, even a super kind one, about the importance of responsibility and make this problem big, likely especially big in her mind? That will weigh her down just like our big problems and their big solutions weigh us down. We feel guilty when we fail. We feel shame that we can't get it together. We feel overwhelmed by the expectation of "responsibility." So this Lego thing is actually a really good example.

So let's walk it through from the start. I step on a Lego. It is not pleasant. But I breathe and then actively seek softness. Cool. Doing that shows me that the obstacle isn't the Lego on the floor or the pain in my foot but Annie's sweet little heart feeling bad for hurting her mom and worried she's going to get in trouble and not knowing how to regulate all of those feelings at once. So instead of my stepping on a Lego and immediately jumping to "no one ever picks up anything in this house," I breathe, access softness, name what matters which is connection, and then make that problem so small. It's not about childhood responsibility. For right then, it's about restoration with Annie. In that moment, the problem to solve is her little heart. I'll go to her, hug her, and tell her that I'm okay, I just stepped on a Lego, that sometimes when our bodies get hurt, our feelings do too, but that we're okay. For me, that is not the time to solve the problem of responsibility. That can come another time.

But ultimately, make the problem smaller. And maybe even see if the problem or obstacle could use a little tweak in its accuracy anyway. Breathing and softness will help you do that.

Step five is to put what you need in place. For the Lego example, it's a hug for Annie. It is addressing the Lego that's on the floor but continuing to access that softness and say with a smile, "Shall we pick up the rest of these Legos so everybody's feet stay feeling good?" And because things like this have happened with my kids, I can tell you that when I move through this kind of obstacle this way, they actually do internalize the idea of responsibility for real. Not from a place of shame but from a place of love. They don't want anyone to get hurt or themselves, so they're still learning the thing we want them to, but we're going in a different order with a different posture.

Putting what you need in place can come in so many forms obviously depending on the obstacle, but we can more easily put something we need in place when we're calm, when we're accessing compassion and kindness toward ourselves and others, when we know what matters, and when our problem is smaller. We can actually solve it pretty well and put what we need in its place.

Step six is to stay connected to yourself. Stay connected to your breathing, to that compassion, and also to how you're processing the obstacle. Sometimes we can spin out even though we breathed because we started connecting to the rightness or justice of the situation, and then we lose the thread. We disconnect from what really matters and from that softness in ourselves, and then we're back where we started. So stay connected to yourself. Pay attention to what you're thinking, if you're perseverating or resenting, even in a tiny way. Stay connected to yourself, so you can stay connected to the movement you've already done.

And finally step seven is to ask The Magic Question. The Magic Question is one of 13 Lazy Genius principles from my book *The Lazy Genius Way*, and the broad version of the question is "what can I do now to make something easier later?"

The “something” can be anything. In this case, what can I do now to make this particular obstacle easier later? I love ending with this question because the answer is anything you need it to be. For the Lego example, something I can do now to make this particular obstacle later is to make sure that Annie can get to the basket that holds the Lego bricks. Maybe as we clean up together, I see that it’s a little tricky to get to if you’re three feet tall. I can Magic Question this by putting the basket in a better place. Or I can implement something called Lego Check where I literally playfully shout “Lego Check!” and the kids scan the floor to make sure there are no rogue pieces waiting to ruin everything. Ask the Magic Question. Your answer could be anything. It could be connected to any of the previous six steps. It might be an answer that works for the immediate future or something that’s a little longer lasting. There’s no right or wrong or even something that’s comprehensively perfect. Just answer the question simply and with the first thing that comes to mind. Then try it. If it doesn’t work, try something else.

We’ll be right back...

A couple of weeks ago, I shared a video on Instagram that I recorded in my car in real time after navigating an obstacle. Let’s walk through that situation and see how the seven steps worked.

I had groceries delivered because I am a grocery delivery person now, and my order was incomplete. There were seven items missing, three of which I needed for that night’s dinner. Not ideal. But on top of that, I scheduled the grocery delivery to happen right before lunch so that I could make dinner while I came in the house for my own lunch so it would be ready when I got off work. This happened on my long workday where I work until just before dinner. So not only did I not have the ingredients I needed, I was losing the time I had planned to cook.

And when that happened, everything in my body just went “whoosh.” Everything felt big and too much to handle. Not to mention, this happened the day after the most recent school shooting in Nashville, and I was already on edge. So even though not having my cans of beans for dinner wasn’t the worst thing that could’ve happened, it felt bigger than it was because of all that was already happening in my body. Plus, we just do that. We automatically go into survival mode which is not a rational brain space. We can’t break things down or problem solve in a rational way when our bodies are reacting to an obstacle that feels enormous.

So that was my obstacle: an incomplete grocery order when I was planning to cook dinner. First, breathe. I did that. I stood in my kitchen in front of the culprit delivery, and I breathed. It always helps. Then I actively sought after softness. I wanted to be mad at the person who did this. I was already mad it happened, and that anger needed to hit something. The natural place in that situation would be for it to land on the person who delivered the groceries. But by actively accessing softness, I grabbed what Dr. Becky calls the MGI or “most generous interpretation,” and I realized very quickly that people make mistakes. That my order could’ve been next to someone else’s in the car and that the driver could also have been a mother and was just as off and distracted and scared as I was for my own kids at school that day. And even if I was wrong, even if that grocery store employee was just being super lazy and didn’t care or did it on purpose because she could, I’d still rather believe the best and live in that softness than assume

the worst and just stay mad. Remember, we're talking obstacles, not trauma, and I'd rather just be soft toward the obstacle.

Then I named what mattered. Frankly, in that situation, it was that I got my missing groceries. My mom was coming for dinner that night, and my mom is gluten-free. I don't know if you've noticed the types of meals we tend to cook in the Adachi house, but there is much gluten very often. I didn't have ingredients for a fall-back meal my mom could eat, so what mattered was that I got those groceries as quickly as I could.

So I made the problem smaller. Rather than try and get the right people on the phone to see if the groceries were still in the car and waiting on all that, I just got in the car to drive to the store myself. Now did I call the store on my way? I did. Because maybe they'd have a quick solution. But I was already checking out with my groceries before the woman on the phone in the very store I was in said that she was sorry but there was nothing they could do outside of a refund for the missing items. So I solved my smallest problem, which was to get the missing beans I needed for dinner.

Next is put everything in its place. I made the chili during my lunch break. Was that break shorter? It was. But I had a little time to make things happen, so I took that time. I didn't crumble or stay mad or let my emotions stew and impact how I spent my time. I just put on a podcast and made the chili.

Sixth step is to stay connected to yourself. I kept breathing if I recall. I had to remember what mattered and let go of the person getting the order wrong. I noticed when my thoughts started spiraling and responded with more breathing and softness so it wouldn't impact me and become an obstacle a second time.

And finally, ask the Magic Question. For this, my answer was to notice how long it took me to solve the problem and get the groceries. I said it in the Instagram post, but I'm pretty sure from the point of grocery delivery to pulling into the driveway with the missing items, it was something like 23 or 28 minutes. It was not long. So I can see that a way to make that easier later is to remember that things take less time than we think they will. I can solve problems quickly without something like that ruining the entire day, which is what I was expecting when the delivery happened.

So after you hit an obstacle, breathe, actively seek softness, name what matters, make the problem smaller, put everything in its place, stay connected to yourself, and ask The Magic Question. And that's how to pivot around any obstacle.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's SK Griffin who sent me a message specifically about using both Put Everything in Its Place and Ask the Magic Question, two of the principles we talked about today! Very appropriate. SK says, "When I open a text that I need to remember to come back to, I pin it at the top of my messages! That way I don't have to remember what to remember. I check my pinned messages at noon and after work

to keep them in the right lane.” This is such a great, simple approach to staying on top of what matters. Such a simple idea but versatile in lots of areas. A great example of using both Put Everything in Its Place and Ask the Magic Question. Which again are two of 13 Lazy Genius principles in my book *The Lazy Genius Way* if you’re new around here and would like a foundation to everything we talk about here. Thanks for writing in, SK, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, that’s it for today. Thanks so much for listening! Two quick reminders. One, if you’d like a robust podcast summary every other week where we basically take notes for you so you don’t have to, I highly encourage you sign up to receive the Latest Lazy Listens email that goes out every other Friday. You can sign up at thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens. And the next Latest Lazy Letter, my monthly newsletter, goes out in a couple of weeks, and I’ll be sharing details from my recent trip to Europe! Kaz and I took a cruise to celebrate our 20 year anniversary, and I have words about packing, taking a cruise, things we enjoyed in the different cities we visited, and more. Plus all the book reviews from the month which are a lot. So if that sounds interesting and you’re not already on the list, you can sign up at thelazygeniuscollective.com/join.

Okay, thanks for listening! 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!