

## 320 - How to Feel Good About Free Time

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 320 - How to Feel Good About Free Time.

Let's begin with a working definition of free time. Free time is time that is free of responsibilities, obligations, and being beholden to someone else's needs, wants, or whims. If that's the case, free time sounds absolutely lovely. I love time where I don't have to worry about other people's needs, wants, and whims. But free time, for women especially, comes with a slew of problems, namely guilt in having it and fear of wasting it. So today, we're going to talk about how to reframe free time and feel good about it.

This podcast has a high percentage of female listeners, and while this topic is not exclusive to women, I would bet a lot of money that women struggle with this more than men do. I don't have data to back up the emotional struggles of downtime, but I have a lifetime of anecdotal evidence to support, that, in general, women, more than men, struggle to take, accept, and enjoy any time that is disconnected from all responsibilities and expectations. It's really hard for women to naturally do this, and if you do naturally do this, you were likely raised by adults who were countercultural in gender roles and/or you've done a lot of work in this area over many years. In many ways, this idea of feeling bad about our free time is in our marrow, in our cultural conditioning, so you're not alone in your struggles.

As I thought through this episode, I came at it from a dozen different angles. There are so many ways we can approach this topic, and I couldn't nail it. It was actually a bit of a struggle. Then I thought, "Wait, I already have a system for this! We just need to follow the five steps to Lazy Genius free time!" So that's what we're going to do. The five Lazy Genius steps are: prioritize, essentialize, organize, personalize, and systemize. In fact, as I broke down free time using this process, I noticed that these five steps were almost made specifically to help you feel good about free time. One step in particular will get a little more attention than the others, but all five are fantastic for this topic. I'm super pumped. And also relieved because I've been working on this episode for a lot longer than most. We did it!

Okay, so our first step in feeling good about free time is to prioritize or name what matters, and this is important in two ways. One, what matters to you about how you *feel* about free time, and two, what matters to you about how you *spend* your free time? Those two thoughts are connected but very different from each other. If you only answer one, you likely won't feel very good for very long when you're presented with free time.

So how do you name what matters about your free time and how you feel about it? There are two questions to pay attention to if the answer doesn't land automatically. First, what season are you in? Your season of life is a crucial part of how you spend your free time and also how you feel about it. If you are in a season of taking care of tiny humans, you might feel desperation around free time. You have so little of it, and the pervasive feeling is the desperation to get

some. Anything really! And that feeling impacts not only what you choose to do but your experience of it, too.

Another season of life that could impact your free time feelings are being an empty nester. You might want to feel excited about your free time because now you have more than ever before, and you're learning how to step into new adventures and hobbies now that you're not taking care of kids all the time.

Maybe you're in a season of having to keep a tight budget, so it matters that you cultivate contentment with whatever you get to do during your free time, even things that don't cost much if anything at all. Your season matters.

The second question to help you name what matters is what is getting on your nerves? What's the pain point? What makes the lack of free time or your experience of free time so annoying? It might be that it's really short or doesn't seem free at all because someone else is always there. It might be that every time you plan some kind of free time, it gets eaten up by someone else's urgency, and that's super annoying. It could be that the trail you used to walk to enjoy your limited daily free time is blocked off, or maybe it's raining a ton right now and you can't spend your free time outside like you usually do and that's getting on your nerves. So if you're struggling to name what matters, notice what season you're in and what about free time is kind of getting on your nerves.

I used to feel so guilty about my free time, but I don't struggle too much anymore. That's because I'm one of those people that has done years of personal work to get the guilt out of my marrow. So it does happen. But even though the guilt is gone, I still want to prioritize the *feeling* around my free time. For me, that's to be present in whatever I'm doing. I don't want to be looking at the clock to count how much longer I have. I want to be where I am no matter what I'm doing. That presence is a driving force.

And the thing that matters most about how I spend that time is that I intentionally choose. It doesn't matter what I choose, but if I just settle for whatever is in front of me, the free time is usually less fulfilling. It's still good, but it's not great. Not every session of free time has to be the best ever, but if a little bit of intention from me creates a more positive free time experience, I'd like to use that little bit of intention. I'd like to prioritize it, if you will.

Once you name both things, you could combine them into one phrase. For me, it's to intentionally choose something to do and then be present in it. That phrase is specific to me and is in complete alignment with my priorities. What's nice is that it's also versatile. The *type* of thing I do or the energy required for that thing can change, right? My free time can look different across multiple experiences. I can do something restful, creative, social, exciting... it doesn't matter. What matters *to me* is that it's something I intentionally choose and then stay present in it. This is why priorities are so helpful. They help you focus in on what really matters so that you can make choices that really make a difference for you.

So prioritize what matters to you about free time. One answer for the feeling and another for the experience. If you need help figuring that out, pay attention to your season of life and to what's getting on your nerves. Once you name those two things, combine them into one phrase if you can. It's like a free time mantra. That phrase is your engine.

### **We'll be right back...**

Next is likely one of our biggest steps today, and that is the step *essentialize* or get rid of what's in the way. Why is this the biggest? Because there is a lot in the way of you feeling good about free time. Guilt that you're doing it, fear that you're going to waste it, frustration or self-shaming when you get to the end of it and it wasn't great, perpetual sadness that it's hard to come by, resentment of a partner or friend or family member who seems to have a much better time of it than you do. There is a lot that is in the way of us feeling good about free time.

Typically in this five-step Lazy Genius process, essentializing is easy, and I think that's because we're often dealing with tangible things. What's in the way of my clean counter? The pile of mail. What's in the way of my peaceful work routine? Checking email first. It's a lot easier to get rid of a broken soap dispenser in your bathroom than it is to get rid of incorrect thought patterns that have been implicitly taught to you over decades of your life. So I realize this is not an easy ask. But, it is worthwhile.

I'm curious about the impact of simply naming these things that are in the way. Just say them outloud. Don't keep them in or ignore them. I believe that honesty has the potential to do more for your situation than you realize. To say, "Oh. The thing getting in my way is that I'm never happy with how I spend my time. Huh." gives you a place to start. You can think about why. Why are you not happy when you get to the end of your free time? What's going on there?

Those feelings and internal postures have a lot more power over us when we keep them inside. Bring them out, be honest about them, and name what's in the way of you feeling good about free time, especially based on the free time mantra you just came up with.

It's important to bring your season of life back into this conversation. A lot of our guilt is cultural conditioning, it's implicit and sometimes explicit messages of performance and guilt and self-sacrifice and doing things for yourself is selfish and frivolous and women aren't supposed to be vain or selfish or leave their kids or spend money on things that aren't investments for the future or whatever. There are a lot of those cultural messages in the way of what matters.

And on top of that, your season of life will play a big part of what's in the way, too. If you work full time, you might just want to be in your own home without having to be at anyone's beck and call. If you are home with kids all day, you just want to leave. We all have different things that are in the way of our enjoyment of our free time, and your season of life will play into that too. This is also a great place to remind you that your season is not forever. Maybe you do need to make some specific choices for *this season* so that you can feel good about free time, and it's okay that they're not ideal. This season is not forever.

If we go back to my own example of intentionally choosing what I'm going to do and then stay present in that thing, something in the way of that is worrying if I chose wrong. That's for sure in the way. I have definitely spent my entire stretch of free time worrying about my choice rather than actually *experiencing* the choice. When that happens, it's a bit of a drag. Since I know that can get in the way, I can choose to release that there is a "right way" to spend that free time. I mean, how many of you have dropped the kids off at grandma's or walked out of your house where your family remains or you took a morning off from work, and you are *crippled* by the preciousness of this time. You're so excited but also a little panicked that you're going to waste it. Some of you feel that before the downtime even comes. You're worried that you'll waste the three hours before they even begin.

I remember the first time both of my boys were in preschool and I had my first real morning where they were both gone for four hours. I was a zombie. Part of that was because I left my babies at school and was catapulted into an emotional abyss because I had left them with someone else, but part of it was also having no idea what to do with my time. I was paralyzed with indecision *and* with anxiety that I would somehow waste my time.

For those two mornings a week, I would break my neck, trying to cram every bit of housework and every errand into those fours but then resent that I didn't really do anything for myself. But if I spent time doing something for myself, I spent the first hour trying to figure out what that was and the remaining three being distracted by what I probably should be doing. It was a whole thing. Personality and life stage play huge roles in this, but ultimately, I think this is an energy that at least in part all of us relate to.

There's a connection between our guilt and making the most out of the time because we're already struggling to take it in the first place. Just do it. Just choose. Not everything has to be perfect.

Next up is organize. Let's put our free time and our feelings about it in place.

What is free time? You're not beholden to anyone else's needs, wants, or whims. That is the purpose. That is the point. You are spending time for yourself. Do not forget this. If you do forget it, you will flirt with responsibility, and then you're opening the door to guilt. How many times have you thought, "I should be doing something else more responsible right now." But my answer is no you shouldn't! That's not the purpose of free time! Now, hear me. If you love doing something that is traditionally a should for someone else, that's fine! Do whatever you want! Sometimes things we love line up with what we eventually need to do. But don't get the two confused if they are in fact different for you. So put the purpose of free time in its place.

But really let's put actual free time in its place. Based on what matters and what's in the way, how often would you ideally like to experience the kind of free time that fits in your season of life? Be a grownup and think confidently and kindly about what really makes the most sense for you right now.

And *right now* is the operative phrase here. The way I prioritize and spend my free time now is way different than what it was when my kids were little and at home. Before all my kids were in actual school, my free time would be in the early morning before anyone got up. I would wake up an hour earlier than the earliest waking child and read and drink my coffee and just enjoy the silence. I was about to enter an entire day of being with a tiny human, so starting alone mattered to me. But also when your kids are younger if you have kids, they go to bed earlier. There were years where all my kids were asleep by 7:30pm. Amazing. So I could get that longer winddown that was even more fulfilling and effective when I was intentional about it.

Now, my kids are all in school, and I do get the house quiet and alone. But I also still have responsibilities and this job. So even though I have the quiet house, I don't necessarily have free time. I also have kids who go to bed a lot later. My boys are 11 and 13, and they don't go to bed until 10pm, even on school nights. Ben will put himself to bed and will sometimes say at 9:15pm, "I'm going to go ahead and go to bed" and then just do it. Sam is social and would stay up until midnight if we let him, so we have to make him go to bed. And in the summer they stay up later, sometimes 10:30pm. And I know kids their age who stay up way later than that! The point here is that my season of life does not allow me to have those longer evenings to wind down and be free of responsibility because any time one my kids is in the room, there will always be the chance of responsibility.

So based on what matters to me and my season of life, I don't really get up early anymore because I'd rather sleep, especially since I'm going to bed later because of the boys. But I do need a longer stretch to just be in my house without any humans or responsibilities. That's why I take Fridays off work. I work and do the grownup things for my job and my house Monday through Thursday while my kids are in school, but on Fridays? Fridays are free. Fridays I read or watch TV or go for a walk or paint and listen to an audiobook or take three naps or go to a thrift store or make a lunch that's fun to make. I do whatever I want to do, and it's really the thing that keeps the weeks and frankly my life moving at a sustainable pace. I'm getting that refuel once a week. I get about six hours in one chunk. Outside of that and my lunch breaks every day, I don't actually get free time. Everyone is home, or I have things to do. In the season of tiny humans, if I had to wait for a chunk once a week, it would've broken me. The energy to be with tiny humans is very different for me than working energy, and I needed daily refueling, not weekly.

Does all this make sense? As you choose where to put your free time, your season of life really really matters. Your free time needs and availability will shift depending on what's happening in your life. Like, right now, it's summer. In summer, Kendra does not get her Fridays. It is very sad. But I do get reading at the pool while the kids play. I do get Kaz home for several weeks in the summer where I can say "will you take the kids somewhere for two hours?" or "I'm going for a long walk" or whatever. I have the privilege of having another adult hold down the fort. But your season of life is going to change where you put your free time.

**We'll be right back...**

So name what matters, get rid of what's in the way, and then put your free time in its place.

Step four is personalize or feel like yourself. This one is the most fun. Just do what you want to do! Spend your free time the way you'd like. There's no wrong answer here. What gives you energy? What refuels you? What kind of rest do you need from your free time experience? Is it rest at all? Remember there are seven kinds of rest which is an old podcast episode we'll put in the show notes. But you might need to refuel, recover, or get ready for a big season that's coming. You might need to be with people or be alone or be heard or do something with your body. What feels personal to you? What sounds fun to you? What feels restful to you?

I'm lucky because what is both restful and fun for me is reading. That's why it's my favorite hobby and my favorite way to spend any free time. If I need to move my body, I can listen to an audiobook while I walk. If I just want to lay in bed and rest, I can read while I do it and fall asleep with my book on chest at any necessary moment. I can read for five minutes or five hours. Now, it took me some time to name that as my favorite thing and something that makes me feel like myself. So be patient if you don't quite know. Seasons of life also change what once made us feel like ourselves. We become different people over time with different needs and things we enjoy. It's okay if the thing you used to do doesn't really work anymore. Be patient as you practice, try things, and figure it out. Ultimately, personalize your free time. Feel like yourself. If you don't, what's even the point?

And finally, step five is systemize. You need to keep this in a flow. I'm going to start this one with a personal example of how your flow will change.

During the school year, the way I systemize my free time is by using the Lazy Genius principle Decide Once. Fridays are my day off. Boom. But in the summers, I cannot do that. I can't have my Friday because everyone is here, but I also can't really Decide Once because of how different each week is. Some weeks, Kaz is working. Others I have a sitter for a few mornings. Others, 1-3 of my kids are in camps that need transportation. The weather might impact whether we go to the pool. We might take a day trip which impacts daily rhythms. There are so many things that change summer days and weeks, so I cannot Decide Once my free time. It's not the season for that kind of systemization. But I can Decide Once *when* I will look at the upcoming week and put my free time in its place. See what I mean? Lazy Genius principles, especially Decide Once, Batch It, Put Everything In Its Place, and Ask the Magic Question, are all really helpful in keeping things in a flow. But certain seasons impact that flow, so pay attention.

I don't think I realized this, but the principle Live in Your Season is literally in every single one of these five steps. Your season impacts your free time and how you feel about it in tremendous ways. Please pay attention to that as you prioritize, essentialize, organize, personalize, and systemize.

Applying these five steps to free time is kind of top heavy. The first two or three principles are the ones that will likely require the most brainpower and intention. After that, you have very little to personalize or systemize. You just make it happen in small ways. So spend your time really

naming what matters to you, be patient as you get rid of what's in the way, and put everything in its place, especially based on your season of life. It's not just trying to figure out how to spend your free time. The way to feel about free time is to go through these steps and create a strong foundation for what you need so you can make choices that make sense for you. And that is how to feel good about free time.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week, it's Katie Entrekin. She emailed me this super simple Lazy Genius decision that might seem like common sense but man is it something we often do not consider. Katie writes, "A while back my 4 year old became fully potty trained at night and started wearing underwear. All of a sudden he was running out of underwear before next week's laundry day (because he was changing underwear morning and night). Rather than policing his clothing rhythm, I just bought another pack of underwear. He keeps his independence and I get to keep laundry day. No more emergency loads."

Y'all. Just buy another pack of underwear. How often do we try and uproot a system because something suddenly isn't working when there is a simple solution right in front of us? There are plenty of versions of just buy another pack of underwear, and I love this example. Notice if you're complicating something that could be solved with a very simple decision. This is great, Katie. Thanks for sharing, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

If you'd like to get a summary of this episode and all the other episodes, along with some extra episodes to listen to or stuff to read, you should sign up for our biweekly Friday email, Latest Lazy Listens. It's a podcast digest so you can get the gist of the last two weeks' worth of episodes, we share the Lazy Geniuses of the Week which really comes in handy when somebody shares a magical mac and cheese recipe, and it's just a really helpful, well organized, short but robust email. If you like this podcast, I think you'll enjoy getting the email. You can click the link in the show notes to get it and just try it out. If you get it every other Friday and find that it's not something you need, you can just unsubscribe from that particular email. You'll still get the monthly Latest Lazy Letter! But give it a shot and see what you think! We have almost 10,000 people getting that email since we started it a few months ago, and as social proof, that number has only gone up. Plus almost everyone opens it to read it. It's not a get it and delete it sort of email. So, again, if you like this podcast, I think you'll like that email. Twice a month and super helpful. The link is in the show notes, or you can go to [thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens](https://thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens).

Okay, y'all, that's it for today. Thanks so much 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!