

## 337 - How to Lazy Genius Division of Labor

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 337 - How to Lazy Genius Division of Labor. I get asked about this topic fairly often, especially in Instagram AMAs, and I'm glad we get the chance to dive deep into it today.

First, let me share who this episode is for. We are going to talk about division of labor in a home, and that mostly involves some kind of adult partner, whether it's a spouse, committed partner, or even a roommate. Most of what I'm going to have you think about will involve another adult. If you live alone or you're a single parent or you live with an aging parent who is no longer capable of contributing to the running of a home or any other scenario where you live with someone but it's not a partnership of some kind, I don't want to say this episode is not for you because I think it can be to a point, but you definitely need a different set of approaches when you're the only person. There's a good chance that some of the things I share in this episode might be helpful to you, but I'm not going to gloss over the fact that this challenge looks very different for single adults. If that's you, this topic might be frustrating because there is no division of labor. You are all the labor! So as I begin this episode, I just want you to know upfront that I see you in that, and if you'd rather spend your time doing something else than listen to this episode, I am so here for that choice. Regardless, I'm glad you're here.

Now, some of you listening might not be single but feel a little bit like you are because your partner does not participate in *any* of the physical and emotional labor of the family and household, let alone a fair amount. I've had friends go through divorces, and when I've asked the women how it's going being the only adult to take care of things, it's always sad when she says, "That part isn't much different. I pretty much did it all anyway." That's a lot to hold, and you might be holding something similar. This topic has emotional, relational, seasonal, cultural, and practical layers to it, and some of those layers will be way more tender for some of you than for others. If this is a really tender topic for you, one that needs a lot more help than a 25-minute episode can give, I'm going to recommend the book *Fair Play* by Eve Rodsky. If you feel like you are at a standstill or at the very beginning of this journey of even talking about what it means to have an even division of labor, listen to this episode but also read that book. It's far more thorough and researched than I could ever be. I've only read the first quarter of it and found the content and writing style to be engaging and helpful, and it has a ton of really great reviews. I did stop reading it though and won't start back up again until after I am done with this episode because I don't want to unknowingly co-opt any of Rodsky's ideas as my own and I want to look at this with fresh Lazy Genius eyes. Without any other ideas or strategies, how would we Lazy Genius this challenge? Let's talk about it.

Whenever we talk about Lazy Genius something, we have to start with the problem. What problem or challenge are we actually trying to solve when it comes to division of household labor? Well, when I listed the possible problems, there were quite a few and all quite heavy. The seven main problems that I think we're dealing with are 1) uneven labor, 2) un- or underappreciated labor, 3) unnamed labor, 4) uneven value, 5) uneven rest, 6) uneven

expectations, and 7) an unending cycle. I'm going to explain those a little bit, and I want you to pay attention to which one resonates with you the most. It doesn't mean that none of the others matter, but notice if there's one that hits the hardest or feels the most true of you and your situation.

One, uneven labor. You feel like what you do and what your partner does are out of balance, unfair, and uneven. In short, you do way more than your fair share. Two, un- or underappreciated labor. This is when you do what you do and maybe don't mind it so much, but the lack of acknowledgement and appreciation of that labor makes it hard to keep it up. Three, unnamed labor. This is when you're in a bit of a fog and don't even realize how much you're actually doing. You don't sense any disparity in what you do and what your partner does because you're so neck-deep in what you're doing that you couldn't even articulate what it is anymore. It's just how you live. Four, uneven value. Let's say your partner does paid labor, and you're at home doing the unpaid: caring for kids, tending to the home, keeping the house from running out of important stuff, figuring out and making and cleaning up after what everyone is going to eat. If you or your partner see your work and your time spent as any less valuable than his, that is a problem of uneven value. What you're doing is just as important as what he's doing.

In fact, let's stop here for a quick second. There's an attitude that in a household with a male-female partnership that the man provides the life the woman has. She's able to stay home and not have to work because of him, because of what he provides. Therefore, a generally accepted idea is that a woman doesn't have as much of a right to complain about her day and definitely shouldn't require as much from him because he's working hard to provide the life that she has. While that might be somewhat true on paper, so is the opposite. A woman provides the lifestyle, comfort, readiness, and rhythms of a man's life and home that would absolutely fall apart without her. She provides the life he has just as much as he provides for hers, and that value should not be uneven just because one is financially tangible and one is not. And the reality for some of you is that you not only provide that home but also work your own paid job on top of that. The uneven labor isn't just true of people who stay at home.

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Five, uneven rest. I heard about this concept for the first time from KC Davis who wrote *How to Keep House While Drowning* and who hosts the *Struggle Care* podcast. She talks about the importance of not so much equal housework or equal responsibility or equal labor but equal rest. For some of you, this concept changes everything. Davis writes in her book, "The goal should not be to make the work equal but to ensure the rest is fair." She then compares the work of a coal miner and a stay at home parent. You might say that an hour of coal mining is harder than an hour of taking care of tiny humans, but if you get into an argument of who works harder, that's a really hard conversation to quantify. That's why she pursues equal rest instead of equal labor. I'll keep reading what she wrote: "The coal miner and the stay at home parent can argue until they are blue in the face about who works harder. The truth is that both are tired. Both want their labor appreciated. And both deserve rest." So maybe you don't resent or get

frustrated by what you're doing or even if you're appreciated for it. Maybe the rubber meets the road when your partner gets home and chills out while you're still going at it, and you're just as tired. That feels like a sign of uneven rest.

Six, uneven expectations. You might get riled up because of what you feel like is expected of you, despite how willing or skilled you are at doing it. Maybe you do make all the meals and fill out all the school paperwork and clean most of the things and it's not that big of a deal, but what really gets up in your craw is the idea that you're expected to do all of that without having any agency in that decision. Maybe your frustration is aimed at society, maybe a parent or in-law, or maybe your partner. I remember an episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond* where Ray and Debra, the main married couple, were arguing over who was going to take a suitcase full of dirty clothes upstairs. The male argument in this episode was that because the suitcase had dirty laundry in it, it was - and I quote - all woman-y now. You might do the laundry and kind of like it as much as a person might enjoy laundry, but the idea that laundry is woman-y or that the expectations fall along gender lines in such a way that makes you want to burn everything down, that could be your specific challenge in the division of labor conversation.

And finally the seventh likely challenge you have around this topic is an unending cycle. We talked about this a couple of weeks ago in an episode about the cycles and rhythms of a home. Some of the work just never ends. It's never done. You can go and go and go, but unless you choose to be done, there is always something else to do. Maybe as you think about the division of labor in your home, you're mostly fine with the split or how you feel about it, but the hamster wheel of it all makes you extra tired or in need of longer breaks. And if you're not getting that rest or those breaks, you'll run out of steam pretty quickly.

So those are the seven challenges I see as the most common: uneven labor, un- or underappreciated labor, unnamed labor, uneven value, uneven rest, uneven expectations, and an unending cycle. Which of those resonates the most with you? What feels like it hits the closest to home? Narrowing in on something a little more specific is a great place to start.

No matter what your specific challenge is or even if what you struggle with changes from week to week, I'm going to name four ways those struggles come out. I call them the four Tired Tiers. All have the word tired in them because, frankly, we're always going to be a little tired. Unless you have just a mess of disposable income and are able to luxuriate in your own free time which I am grateful for on your behalf, you're going to be tired. It's part of things. When you live a full life of responsibilities and relationships and recreation and anything else that starts with the letter R, you're going to be tired at the end of the day. That's why we schedule rest. If that tiredness builds up, it turns into something nasty. So don't necessarily avoid being tired. You probably will be at least a little on a decent number of days. Tired isn't bad.

But let's talk about the four Tired Tiers.

The first is Tired and Resigned. Your situation is what it is. Yeah, you do most everything in your house, and the division of labor is very uneven or unappreciated or valued in a way that you

disagree with. But because of the nature of your marriage or partnership, because of the nature of your season of life, because of the nature of your own personality, you're just resigned to it. It is what it is, and trying to change something doesn't factor in. Maybe one day you'll be able to have some space for yourself, but today is not that day. This is a person who likely doesn't know how to feel like themselves. That question comes up a lot. When I talk about doing things that help you feel like yourself, inevitably someone asks me how to figure that out. What do you do when you don't know? That's an episode for a different day, but I'm pretty sure being Tired and Resigned is how you got here. You lost your fight for yourself a long time ago, and you're not sure how to get it back. And that's even if you had the energy for it at all.

If you are tired and resigned, I encourage you to apply a couple of Lazy Genius principles to your situation. First, be kind to yourself. If you're struggling with this and feel hit hard by what I'm saying, chances are decent that you feel ashamed. I don't want that to happen. Be kind and compassionate as you process your own relationship with your labor and your life. The other principle I'd encourage for you is start small. You don't have to change everything overnight or figure it all out right now. Start small. Read a book about this topic. Read a book or listen to a podcast episode about your Enneagram number to help you understand yourself better. Make an appointment with your therapist. Tell yourself every day that you're allowed to care. You don't have to be complacent and resigned to how things are. You're allowed to say what you need. Start small in even thinking about that every day or just today if that's all you have the margin for.

So that's the first Tired Tier: tired and resigned.

The second is tired and resentful. This one doesn't need a lot of explanation. You know that you do a lot, and you have resentment building and building because of how much you do or how little it's appreciated or valued. You resent your partner for not getting it, for not seeing it, for not caring even. And every single dish you wash or sock you pick up or fire you put out while he sits there on his phone or leaves to go for a run or gets ready in the morning without a single kid responsibility or interruption fuels your fire. You just get deeper into that resentment.

Now is a great time to introduce you to The Noticing Loop. The Noticing Loop is something I figured out after sitting with the word notice for awhile, and then someone sent me a reel which I cannot find now from an account I do not follow and therefore also cannot find of a mom who is teaching her kids not to pick up after themselves or tidy or whatever but to notice what needs doing. Because so much of what we do is notice. But it's not just noticing. It's a few things that come after.

So this is The Noticing Loop. First, you notice. Something needs doing. If that something is yours to do, you either do it or you set up some kind of reminder to help you remember to do it later. Now, if that thing you notice is not yours to do, you might remind someone else that they need to do it. Which takes energy. You might also have to remember to follow up with them to see if they did it. Which takes energy. You then have to wait for it to get done and possibly not even get done in the way you would like. Which takes energy. The final step is that the thing

gets done. But here's what happens. If you notice something that is someone else's to do, you might realize that if you don't remind that person to do it, it's not going to get done. So you might as well do it. Or maybe you know that the thing will take forever or not be done in the way you'd like or asked for, so you have to help out with it anyway which means you might as well do it. Basically in The Noticing Loop, if you are involved in those middle steps of either reminding, remembering, or waiting for something to get done involving a task that's technically not yours to do, you'll often skip the middle steps, you'll just notice and then do, and that's where you keep score. You're doing the things that other people say they're going to do because the energy required to remember and remind them is almost more trouble than actually doing the thing. And that is why The Noticing Loop exists in the Tired and Resentful tier. Every time you skip those middle steps and just go from noticing to doing, you're likely adding to your resentment. People aren't doing their fair share. You have to do everything. And you're getting madder and madder about it.

So what do you do? You also start small. Maybe you let one thing go. Maybe you practice breathing when you walk past a task that belongs to someone else. Maybe you accept that you're going to have to remind people of things and be patient as you get used to that expectation. Maybe you have a conversation with your partner where you say "it matters to me that I don't resent you all the time, and right now I do. I want us to work together and be partners in this, and I need your help in us figuring out how to do that where we both feel seen and we both get to rest and we both care about this."

That's Tired and Resentful.

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The third Tired Tier is Tired and Trying. This is where you're having those conversations with your partner, you're learning how to move past those small frustrations without them building on each other, you're learning to let go of the dishwasher being loaded a certain way so that someone else will actually do it. I also think an important principle to remember here is to live in the season. Tired and Trying is often dependent on the season you're in. What are you trying at? What is reasonable in your current situation? What practices are best suited for where you are? Live in the season. When you're Tired and Trying, I think a big priority is to practice letting go. Let go of expectations of another person that you know are unreasonable. Let go of your way to do things if you're expecting someone else to take ownership of that thing. Let go of your need to have things done on the exact rhythm you'd personally choose if you were doing it on your own. When we involve other people and have division of labor, we can't just bring our own priorities to the table. Everyone gets a say. If you don't want to give someone a say, I don't think you can expect an equal partnership. Tired and Trying is a hard but worthwhile place to be. It won't always work, it won't always be clear, it won't always be easy, but I do think it's always beneficial because you're talking about it. You're trying. You're both trying to make this work because you care about each other more than you care about your own comfort.

And finally, the fourth Tired Tier is Tired and Content. You've found a groove. You're talking about when you're out of your groove. You learn to enjoy your rest and the rest of your partner. You find that things don't always have to be just so in order to work. You're content with how you've established a division of labor, but you're not complacent. Contentment isn't the same thing as complacency. Continue to notice what's working and what's not. Talk to your partner when you feel one of those seven challenges creeping up and invite your partner to do the same to you. I believe it is possible to reach Tired and Content, but you start with Tired and Trying. It takes time to find your way in this equal division of labor and rest, and it takes time to trust that you and your partner can talk about this regularly without it becoming a burden. You learn to trust each other, appreciate each other, and value each other's time just as much as you value your own.

As we close, I'm not going to share a system of dividing up the labor (you can try the Fair Play cards for that or just make your own list), but here are a couple of rapid fire ideas that might get you thinking. First, you could literally write down all the tasks, mark who currently does what, and talk about a plan forward. Small steps. Second, you could choose categories that are yours, ones that are your partners, and ones you share. Not everything has to be split exactly. Three, for some of the daily tasks that can wear a person down, you can swap, like alternating who's in charge of kid lunches every week or every month. Four, you can make a rest plan where you take turns being on weekend morning duty with kids or responsibilities so the other person can do whatever they want until lunch or something. Or five, you can simply tell your partner like I realized I want to do with mine that you don't mind having this one task but that you'd appreciate being acknowledged for it. For example, we have two weddings we're going to in the next couple of weeks, and I have been the one to RSVP, get childcare, get and wrap the gifts, and even remind Kaz to make sure his suit fits. I will also plan dinner for the kids while we're gone and get together the info for the babysitter. Basically, I'll do everything required to get us out of the house. Do I mind? I actually don't. But that's an area where Kaz doesn't really notice what I do, especially since it's a one-off sort of thing. Still, any time there is a one-off social event, I take care of the details. All of them. I can ask him for help with things and he will happily do them, but if I don't ask, he doesn't even really know they're happening. And it would make me feel better towards him if he knew. So I'm going to ask him to appreciate me for doing those things. That might sound silly, but sometimes those are the things that keep us on the Tired and Trying and Tired and Content paths. I'm actually pretty content taking care of those things as long as I'm also getting what I need, which is appreciation and acknowledgement for doing those kinds of tasks. So I'll tell him. Your next step from this episode might just be that, might just be a single exchange about a single thing. You don't have to blow up your life to make this work. In fact, please don't. As is the case with pretty much everything, start small, and you're doing that today by naming where you are. That alone is hugely helpful and hopeful as you move in a direction of having more fairness in your home.

As I was thinking through this episode with Leah, the Director of Content on my team, she said something that feels like a great way to close this episode. She said, "You're on the same team. Why keep score?" So I leave you with that. We're not here to keep score. We're here to both

feel like we're on the same team. Maybe you need some perspective shifts and tangible ideas to help you get there, but ultimately that is an idea you can hold on to.

And that is how to Lazy Genius division of labor.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Michelle Miller, and y'all are not ready for how magical this is. Michelle writes: "Each Halloween, I LOVE trick or treating with my kids, and every year I freak out about the amount of candy they get. On my Target run to grab the candy we hand out I also grab a piñata. After trick or treat wraps up the kids each get a ziplock bag to fill up with their favorites. The rest of the candy goes into the piñata for a random winter day when we need some excitement and some goes into a bag and then to the freezer to decorate gingerbread houses. This has been a wonderful compromise and a gift that keeps on giving!" You guys. Is that not the greatest thing you've ever heard? I am undone by the brilliance of this on multiple levels. This is peak Magic Question and just utter brilliance all around. There's going to be a run on pinatas and gingerbread house kits in Targets everywhere. I could not love this more. Thank you for sharing this incredible idea, Michelle, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

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!