

338 - Lazy Genius Office Hours

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 338 - Lazy Genius Office Hours! We do these episodes about once a quarter where I answer your questions in more detail than I'm able to in an Instagram AMA and more public than I might be able to in a DM. The idea here is to practice Lazy Geniusing situations together so that you can feel more equipped to do it on your own. In our last Office Hours episode, I split the questions into kid-related and not kid-related so that those of you without kids could listen to the first half and then bounce. This episode has no specific kid-related questions, so everything is potentially for everybody! Let's jump in!

First up is a question from @hannahdhensley. Hannah says, "How to LG when life just feels like one season of survival mode after another? (I know therapy, ha) littles, military, grad school, homeschooling - it's all just a lot, I want to enjoy my life and constantly feel like I'm barely treading water!" This is a very relatable question from Hannah. It also borders on being too big to answer. That's a disclaimer I often give at the start of these Office Hours episode; big questions are hard to answer. The bigger the problem, the more complex the solution, and the more complex the solution, the harder it is to actually make happen. So when you're Lazy Geniusing your own challenges, always always always try and make your problem as small as possible.

That said, this question from Hannah does feel like something that a lot of us relate to. A Lazy Genius principle is to live in your season and that's a beautiful thing to pursue, but what if you have season after season and you can't catch your breath? That's honestly pretty common no matter what your circumstances are.

This is where I'll share a highly important mindset that's not something tangible to check off but something to embody during seasons like this: staying grounded is better than staying on task. Staying grounded is better than staying on task.

What does that mean? Recognizing that life is hard, that you are not a robot, that you have finite energy and abilities, that you need to rest, that you have to let things go, that you're going to be okay, that you can't be in this season without some kind of help, that you don't have to please everyone all the time, that you should not compromise who you are or what you need in order to check off boxes, that you can experience a wide variety of feelings during a hard season without apology, and that your rubric is *not* to make everything effortless and easy all the time... those things are what keep you grounded, and they are way more important than checking off your entire to-do list. So when you are in hard season after hard season or you have several hitting you all at once, remember that the goal isn't to get everything done or to make everything flow seamlessly or to have everything perfectly organized or to not be scattered or overwhelmed by what is happening. The goal is to stay grounded, to be integrated, to know that you are okay even if everything isn't okay.

Being overwhelmed and stressed out often make us catastrophize our life and our circumstances. We have thoughts like “it’s always going to be this way” and “I’ll never get all of those done” and “this is just too hard” and other sorts of always and never and forever statements. If you catch yourself saying things like that, it’s a good indication you are in a hard season and have forgotten that you don’t have to overcome it right now with one magical to-do list or approach. You simply have to rest in the truth that you are a person with finite abilities, and life feels like a lot. Don’t try and fix your life first. Life tends to not cooperate in that anyway. Instead, be kind to yourself. Release some expectations that are burdensome. Focus on right now, not the distant “will this ever end” future. Living your days with that kind of present mentality builds on itself. Life doesn’t necessarily stop feeling hard or overwhelming or like a season that will never end, but your posture toward that season will begin to shift slowly over time. I can say this from experience. I see my therapist every other week and have for years, and I say more and more often that I’m really proud of myself for how I’m handling the hard seasons I’m in. Life still gets complicated and there are a lot of aspects to navigate, but the thing I’ve grown in is not my navigation skills or how to manage all the pieces but in being okay with complications, with being patient in dealing with just one thing at a time, with trusting that even if something falls through the cracks or even falls apart that it will not ruin me. Managing our lives should not get top billing. Being a kind person to yourself and to others in that management, no matter the result, leads to growth that strangely enough helps you with the tangible management anyway. Focus on integration, and you get both things.

Alright, hard pivot to our next question. This is from @yobooksandthings which is a tremendous username. “How do I keep track of recipes I want to try in cookbooks or the recipes we love and I want to keep making? I have a binder of recipes that are printed off from websites or from magazines, but I struggle with keeping track of the cookbook recipes. I need more than the name - I need to know basic ingredients too.” This is such a great question. Very small and also very relatable. I have a couple of tips here.

It’s important to distinguish that this is not just about marking recipes you want to try or make again. You can do that by putting a little bit of washi tape over a page or writing a list of the recipes and their page numbers in the front cover of the book or something. You can achieve a simple marking multiple ways. This isn’t just that. Yo’s problem is also about being able to glance at the page of that recipe and know a little bit more about the recipe itself. Obviously, a person can look at the ingredient list and the instructions, but that’s not as helpful as it might seem. That’s a lot of words to sift through when really you just want to quickly grab something to make. Seeing those main points at a glance matters. Not only that, everyone listening might need different main points when you yourself glance at a recipe.

So I think this is a great time to embrace sticky notes or get a tiny little notebook for this specific purpose. Honestly I’ve used both ideas and have even connected them to each other which I will explain.

First, the sticky notes. When you’re flipping through a cookbook, read it with a pad of post-its. When you get to a recipe you want to try, write down what you need to see at a glance. For me, it’s any

ingredients I don't usually have around since we usually shop for the same things, how long it'll probably take, and the general order of what's happening. By that I mean, I might write down "mix and shape meatballs, can be done ahead of time, sear, pour in easy sauce, finish in the oven." That gives me the gist of what skills and time are required of me. That's what I want to see at a glance, so I'll write that on the sticky note and put it on that page.

I also have a little notebook that lives on the same shelf as my cookbooks. When I cook a recipe from a cookbook that I really love, I'll actually write down a short version in that notebook. It's the recipe at a glance. I personally feel confident enough in my cooking skills and intuition to read the cliffs notes and trust what to do. I do put the page number of the recipe on that notebook page so I can pull it out if I need to, but more or less I can glance at that page and know how to cook that recipe. It's my version of the basics.

When I'm meal planning, I'll sometimes flip through that notebook to find a recipe I've made from a cookbook that I'd like to make again. The basics are already there. Now, a way that I combine the sticky note and recipe notebook ideas is to put some sticky notes inside my recipe notebook that have the next handful of cookbook recipes I want to try with that "at a glance" information I need. That's helpful if you have a lot of cookbooks and feel overwhelmed by choice. You can just choose three or six cookbook recipes and put them inside your cookbook notebook instead of pulling down a bunch of actual cookbooks. This is also helpful if you like only a few options available to you when it's time to choose dinner over a stretch of days. You have recipes from cookbooks already listed that you've cooked and liked, and you have sticky notes of a few new options.

Essentially, we are using the Lazy Genius principle "put everything in its place." Recipes are in the cookbooks. That's a place. But that place is a bit big, right? Plus, you need specific information in order to choose if that recipe is going to work for you at this time, hence putting the at a glance information in its place, whether that's on a sticky note on the cookbook page or in a notebook or in some other format you choose. Again, the specific idea is less important than going through the process of naming what matters and then applying a Lazy Genius principle to see what might work.

Next up, we have @cjerickson812 who writes: "I love over preparing for things. Like my diaper bag is so heavy but I'm a prepared woman. Same with my work bag. How do I determine what is necessary and what is over preparing?" I find this question to be really interesting, and I want you to pay attention to how we think about this. First, I don't see a problem here. Being overly prepared isn't a bad thing, and it doesn't even sound like CJ is that plagued by it, maybe other than having a heavy bag. This is a great example, at least on the surface, of perhaps thinking or feeling like you should make one decision but you're okay making another. There's nothing wrong with having a Mary Poppins carpet bag where you literally have anything anyone needs. Just because that's not how everyone packs their bags doesn't mean you have to follow suit. The only reason I respond to this question that way is because there isn't really a problem presented here. I think what CJ needs is permission. Maybe you need that, too.

Now, if CJ really doesn't want to pack everything because she has to see a chiropractor because of her shoulder, let's quickly discuss how someone can be prepared without carrying everything with them. This does have its limitations if you use public transportation, walk to work or around with your kids, or the place where you're hanging out is a public place. However, if you are an overly prepared person, consider packing a prep bag. You can call it an emergency bag or a problem-solving bag or even your Mary Poppins bag. It's got all the things you usually don't need but might eventually need. Pack that bag, but leave it in your car. Leave it at work. Keep it separate from your daily bag. If you're at the park with your kids and the baby drops her juice cup in the mud, you can just run to the car to get a spare. You don't always have to carry a spare juice cup in your purse. You likely don't need to actually carry a sewing kit or a first aid kit in your work bag because there aren't too many sewing or medical emergencies, but in the event there is one, you have those items in a bag at your desk. The point is you can be prepared without having to cart that preparation around on your back like a pack mule. But also you can. There's nothing wrong with either.

These last few questions are geared towards the upcoming holidays. These next two are similar to each other, so I'll read them both together.

@emmieb78 writes this: "Any tips for scheduling the holiday you're hosting so you get a good balance of quiet family time and entertaining time? Also - this is our first time hosting: how do we make sure we have enough food for 12 people, 5 of which are hungry teens, one picky toddler, and 6 adults. I have the actual meal covered, but what about nibbles over the course of the day? (Guests are from out of town, so this is all me, which is fine but I'm stumped.)"

And then @sweetsparrowknits writes this: "I would love some help LG-ing gatherings during the holiday season as an introvert. I love to host, and I love spending time with my family when other people host, but long car-trips and parties where there's nowhere to get away from the constant noise and small talk can leave me totally exhausted for days afterward. How can I save some energy for my own time off while also connecting with my very loud and extroverted family?"

Okay, from both of these questions, we have two general ideas. First, how do you feed a crowd? Second, how do you manage the energy of either yourself or of the group when different people need different levels of social interaction? Emmie asked about a balance of quiet family time and entertaining time, and Sweet Sparrow needs options for herself. Let's start with the food.

I would recommend two episodes: episode 99: The Lazy Genius Feeds a Crowd and episode 130: The Lazy Genius Guide to Hosting Anything. Those are both essential listens to anyone who is hosting a holiday meal this year. I won't actually go into those details because there are enough to fill two episodes, and we don't have time for that today. So listen to those. I also have a crowd-feeding cheat sheet inside my book, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*, along with a lot of hosting tips, so if you've been on the fence about getting that book, it'll be a huge help for your holiday hosting.

I would also encourage anyone hosting and Emmie in particular to ask the families with the picky toddler and the hungry teens what some reliable foods are, even for snacks. If a toddler has one food they're into, that's usually enough. Also most parents with picky eaters either bring back-up snacks

or are prepared to deal with food rejection or will rummage in your pantry and fridge without a worry. You don't have to be primarily responsible for the picky eater or the hungry teens for that matter, but you can ask those families for some ideas. It's not lazy to ask. It's caring. Position the question as wanting to make sure the kids in your family feel seen and have some food that they really love.

And final food words: when it comes to a holiday meal and wondering if you'll have enough, I leave you with two thoughts. The first is leftovers are the best. If you have a lot of leftovers, you can not cook for a couple of meals after a busy time of hosting which is great. You can package up some of those meals in clamshell containers and share them with our unhoused neighbors. You can invite your teenager's friends over and know that they'll just eat up the leftovers without you having to lift a finger. Leftovers aren't a bad thing. And second, no matter how much or how little food you serve, most people serve themselves according to their own mental math. Not everyone mind you. Teenage boys are the worst at this. But most adults will look at a bowl of mashed potatoes, look at how many people are eating those potatoes, and make a portion decision that's for the group. If you look at your food and are worried that there isn't going to be enough, you can make it a joke and say "hey, teenagers, you go last. You'll eat anything and there's dessert after, so let anyone who gave birth to you or who gave birth to them go first." Make a joke. Teenagers love those, even bad ones because it gives them something to comically roll their eyes at.

And then the question about energy and time and finding space during family functions. This is definitely a challenge because everyone is so different, right? Also the circumstances are different! You might be away from home, so there really is nowhere to go. You might have everyone in your house, so it feels like there's nowhere to go. Or you might simply be anticipating what you need which is making you worried you'll have nowhere to go. All of that is legitimate.

Susan Cain is an expert on introversion and quiet, and she had a guest article on her website by Navdeep Dhillon. He talked about being part of a big immigrant family and how telling that family that he needed some alone time or that he would stay in a hotel instead of in the big family house was almost an insult to his family. They just did not understand. He also shared how he loved his family and even the energy they brought but couldn't sustain it himself the entire time. I'm going to read a practical excerpt from his article: "I case out the joint to find out where the quiet areas are. Sometimes—surprisingly—it's where the kids are. They get lost in play and ignore the adults, so even though it's not quiet, at least I'm not the center of attention. I will volunteer to drive and pick up groceries or people from the train station. Inside the house, I will make the drinks to escape the crowds." I really love those practical ideas from Navdeep, and I think that is a good solution for people who are introverts on the cusp of the most extroverted season, at least for a majority of folks. Start small. Think of small ways you can take breaths, step outside, be in more quiet or be around people who don't really talk to you for a bit, occupy yourself with a task so you can get a beat on your own, or even suggest things like walks after a meal where you hang behind or walk next to someone who understands you and will walk with you in silence for awhile. You could even have low energy hours in the house or have a room that's for people who need to get away from chaos. The overarching thought here is that you don't have to create a big system or big spaces to have quiet or solitude. Think of one simple thing that you can do or as the host that you can offer to folks who are

more introverted and need a beat. Keep it small, and I think it will all feel more accessible and possible for you.

These last two questions are about holiday gifts. The first is from @emilymzungu. "How do you decide who to buy Christmas presents for?" My answer is pretty simple. I make a list. I can't know who I'll give gifts to without considering the options first. So I write down all the people I could get presents for and then consider my season, my budget, my time, and the expectations that year. From there, I usually group people together - neighbors, friends, kids' teachers, and make one decision for that category. It might not be the exact same gift, but it's some kind of parameter that applies to the whole group. So maybe for teacher gifts, I decide on a book or a gift card or a box of homemade cookies. For friends, maybe I decide on a budget or a limitation of some sort like the gift has to be something found or having to do with plants or whatever. Basically, for the categories, I make a choice or two to help direct me in what to do next. And sometimes, I drop a category completely. Some years my neighbors get baked treats, and other years they get a cheery greeting when I see them outside. You don't have to do the same thing every year or give the same people gifts every year. Each season will likely create different needs, limitations, and desires, and I find the best place to honor those differences is beginning with the list of who I could give gifts to. It's kind of like how to decide what matters, right? You make a list of what could matter, then narrow it down to what really does matter, and then again down to what matters most. You can do that with gift giving. Put your genius energy in the places that matter the most this year. That doesn't mean you don't care about the other people; it just means you can't care about literally everyone the same way.

And finally from @abbue_ridley. "I need gift ideas for myself to share with others when they ask. I'd love to be surprised / get a gift that someone thought of FOR ME (that's what matters to me) but also know it'd be helpful for them (my husband in particular) if i gave some ideas. I can't seem to find the middle ground between saying nothing and sending links to specific things." First, I want to say how proud I am of Abbue. And also now I'm wondering if I mistyped this and it's really Abbie. We carry on! Abbue Abbie, this is a really great questions, and honestly asking it shows a lot of intention in wanting to honor yourself. I want everyone to do that! You're allowed to care about what you get! I bought myself a stocking stuffer just last week because no one in my family will get me any, but I want stuff in my stockings too!

There are two pieces to this question. First is the philosophical part - are you okay not being as surprised? Second is actually keeping track of things you like. I'll start with that one. I just have a note in my phone. It's labeled Gifts for Me, and I add to it whenever I see something I'd really like. Now, I just opened it up to see what's there, and honestly there isn't anything that is so deeply required that I'd be sad to not get it. Last year, that was not the case. I wanted this particular pair of shoes, so I asked my mom to get them for me. But keeping track of gifts that would be fun over time helps you see what you still really want and if it's worth it to not be surprised.

Having a list also gives you a sense of the types of gifts you like, like the categories. For example, I have three different things that are art supply related. None of them really stand out from each other,

but it shows me that I love art supplies and would be happy with just about anything. Which leads me to that second part. If you want a gift that is something that is for you and feels like you, you can offer categories instead of specific items. So I'd like some special art supplies or I'd like a new plant a cool planter for this part of my house or I'd really like to own something that's cashmere or I'd like anything related to reading. If there's nothing specific you want badly enough to lose the surprise, share categories with people who ask. That might be a nice middle ground.

Speaking of gifts, we have a really great gift resource coming out soon. On Friday, November 17th, we'll be sending out a really fantastic resource email that shares principles of giving gifts so you have some permission in places that matter, strategies of giving gifts like ways to Decide Once or keep track of how many stocking stuffers you have, and also specific gift ideas that I love to give. It's a Lazy Genius Gift-Giving Guide, and it's free to anyone who wants it! You can go ahead and put yourself on the list to get that email by going to thelazygeniuscollective.com/gifts and just putting in your email address. We'll have a link in the show notes too.

Thanks, everyone for your questions today! I love these Office Hours episodes. Okay before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Sabrina Neild, and it's also about gifts! I get that it's barely November, but a lot of you are already thinking about gifts. This is not a verbatim message, so I'll summarize. Sabrina's family wanted to do a gift exchange like a lot of families often do, but they wanted to alleviate the pressure of having to spend money. Depending on the size of your family, even one-to-one gift exchanges add up, especially if your family unit is multiple people which means multiple gifts. Sabrina's family started Bake, Make, or Re-Gift. They draw names or even do it White Elephant style where you do it by number and can take from other people, but the gifts are either baked, made, or regifted. I think this is a fantastic idea that could work really well in a lot of people's families. Even if you tried it just one year to see how it went, it might be a fun experiment. So as we're about to step into November, maybe that idea itself or something it sparks will create a little more margin around gifting in a way that matters to you. Thanks, Sabrina, for sharing your idea, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, that's it for today! Don't forget to sign up to get that gift-giving resource email in a couple of weeks! I am obsessed with giving gifts and have been told I'm very good at it. I say that not to brag but because I think the way I think about and see gifts makes me good at giving the thing, no matter what the thing is. I can teach you that in this email, so be sure you go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/gifts to sign up. Speaking of email, in another week, the next Latest Lazy Letter will land in your inboxes! Usually it goes out the first Wednesday of the month, but whenever that first Wednesday is the literal first day of the month, we usually shift it a bit. That's the case this month, so that next Latest Lazy Letter will go out on Wednesday, November 8th. I'll share book reviews of the dozen books I read in October and a story about our fall opening ceremony that involved my family accidentally letting baby goats into a corn maze. I'm also considering updating my Mount Crushmore standings - if you know, you know - so that'll be a really fun email to get. If you want it, head to thelazygeniuscollective.com/join to get it! Links to both emails will be in the show notes. 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!