

## #341 - The Real Reason It's Hard to Get Stuff Done

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 341 - the real reason it's hard to get stuff done.

We're in a season where there is a lot going on. A couple of weeks ago, we talked about how to make the rest of 2023 easier, and I hope you're feeling a little more settled ever since listening to that episode. If you missed it, give it a listen! Which actually reminds me - we have an email that goes out every other Friday called The Latest Lazy Listens, and it is a short but mighty recap of the episodes from the previous two weeks. It's fantastically designed thanks to our Director of Content, Leah Jarvis, and it includes the Lazy Genius of the Week, a summary of each episode including step by step lists if there are any, and extra links in case you need a little extra support. I also include a very short but personal essay at the start to help us walk through what we're all learning from those episodes. I learn from them too even though I write them! So if you'd like to get that email to help you catch up on episodes you missed or to have notes for episodes ready to go, you can sign up at [thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens](https://thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens).

So we've tried to make the rest of 2023 easier, but even when we have a better understanding of what is going on, it can still be hard to get stuff done. When the rubber meets the road, it's common to feel like we're stalling out. We do have an episode that could help with that - Episode 238: How to Get Stuff Done When You Don't Feel Like It - but today's episode is a slightly different take than that one. How to Get Stuff Done When You Don't Feel Like It is like memorizing a sentence. Today's episode is like learning a language. I want to share some broader perspectives on getting your stuff done so that you can orient yourself better in your daily life. And of course there are some practical tips in here, too, have no fear. Let's jump in.

You likely have a lot on your to-do list, right? Some things are normal, and some things are new. The normal things might fill most of your time, and the new things are fighting for your attention. Some to-do list items that are unusual or out of the ordinary are really important, and yet you can't seem to make time for them! Maybe you're applying to grad school, but you have like a million other regular life things going on. How do you add this new thing? Or maybe you're looking at all of the holiday related tasks, and you legit have no idea what to do. I will say that the two episodes I already mentioned - how to make the rest of 2023 easier and how to get stuff done when you don't feel like it are practical approaches to literally how to get the thing done. But today, let's get into the language of it, into why it's actually hard. I think this metaphor I'm about to share will be something you take with you for a long time. I hope it helps.

Imagine you're going grocery shopping. You do it all the time. You have your regular stores, you know where everything is, and while it might not be your favorite thing to do, you can mostly get it done without thinking too hard. In fact, if your list only contains items that you always get, you can almost shop on autopilot. You know where things are, you've done this before, it's a bit of a drag but here we are.

Now imagine you have a list full of items that are not usually on your list. This Thursday is Thanksgiving Day in the US, and maybe you're getting things you only buy once a year. What happens when you're shopping? You're a competent, capable person, but you're also moving a little more slowly, craning your neck to see the aisle descriptors, trying to figure out where to go to find what you need. You eventually find everything, but it's not on autopilot. Not at all. It takes some intention.

Okay, final thing to imagine. Imagine you are either on vacation or on the other side of town, and you go to a store you usually go to, but you walk into this particular location and everything is in reverse. Has that ever happened to you? In Greensboro, we have three Target locations, and I have my one I always go to. There's a second location that is sometimes easier to get to on a certain side of town, and it is the mirror version of my location. And it is the weirdest thing. I mean, I know where everything is, but suddenly I have no idea where everything is. Or maybe you go to your regular store, and they've changed the layout and shelves are in new places and suddenly the cereal is in a new cubby back by the refrigerated section and it throws off your whole game.

Those three grocery shopping scenarios happen in our to-do lists. Let's unpack them.

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The first scenario - we're shopping somewhere familiar, getting stuff we always get - that's living in your life's ordinary rhythms or cycles. We did an episode about that a few weeks ago, episode 334 - How to Create a Relaxing Home Routine. Much of our life - food, laundry, home stuff, work - is already in a cycle. It's not necessarily our favorite thing to keep those cycles going, but they don't take as much effort because we know where we are. We know where everything is. We know how to do this. And even if something is a little bit off, we see how to fix it, adjust a little, and keep the cycle going.

The second scenario - shopping for things you always need alongside things you don't usually need - is like having your regular cycles moving *and* there are some unusual, singular, out of the ordinary things you have to take care of. In fact, most of us live here. Maybe your list of unusual things is fairly short and therefore a little easier to integrate into your regular shopping list or rhythms of life, but sometimes your list is bloated with new stuff. This week, my shopping list is wackadoodle because I'm hosting Thanksgiving and have to get a ton of stuff I don't usually get. When life has regular items *and* singular items, it requires a different mental energy from you. Right? Doesn't that actually make a lot of sense?

And then the third scenario where you have your list and you show up to a new store or your old store that has gone under renovation and you're suddenly so confused? That's when your season of life is suddenly different and you haven't named that change yet. You keep looking for pancake syrup in the cereal aisle and the store has moved it to the baking aisle, and you get increasingly frustrated every time you go shopping because what you need isn't where it's always been. That's a very relatable situation.

So shopping for your regular stuff in your regular store is similar to the cycles in your routine and life. You probably don't love it all, but it's easy enough to manage because you know where you're going and what needs to be done. Shopping for new things alongside your old things is like adding new singular tasks to your existing rhythms, and while it's not super hard, it's harder than when you're on autopilot. And if you have way more unusual things on your list this time around, you'd better plan extra time at the store because it'll take you longer just to figure out where everything is. And then shopping for old things in a new place is like being in a new season. You know what you need, but everything feels different, disoriented. Somehow this experience doesn't make sense anymore.

Okay. I love these analogies because they can help you name where you are in your own life. We've all been grocery shopping. We all know these three feelings. I also love these analogies because they can help you understand the real reason it's hard to get stuff done. Metaphorically, we are rarely shopping for the basics only. Rarely does that happen. Most of the time we're living in scenario two where we have our regular rhythms, our regular list, but we also need to get these three other unusual things that we don't know where they are, or our store doesn't even have them and we have to go somewhere else. Again, all metaphorically. That scenario requires more time, energy, and intention than the first one, and that scenario is where most of us live.

However, we live there while expecting the feel of scenario one. We expect life to feel like shopping on autopilot, but the reality is that we almost always have something unusual and singular on our to-do list or more broadly in our lives. If you go into your day on autopilot, expecting that your regular rhythms will carry you, all while you have several singular, unusual, out of the ordinary things on your plate, you'll have a hard time getting anything done.

Why? Things that are out of the ordinary feel more difficult to manage, and that singular difficulty makes everything feel more difficult. Basically when one thing in life feels hard, everything in life feels hard. I think that's the human experience, especially if we're not naming that that's what's happening. We have to name where and how we're really shopping. Don't just assume everything has to feel like a run to our closest store for the basics. That's not most days. The problem is we often live with one rigid expectation of how our days should be, not offering ourselves any elasticity to those expectations, and then when a day doesn't happen the way we expected, we think something is wrong, often with us. No. You just need to name where you are. That's the primary takeaway today. Name where you are. Name how you're metaphorically shopping, and adjust your expectations.

Now, let's talk about a couple of particular paths forward to help you feel better in all three metaphorical shopping experiences.

First, let's look at scenario one. Maybe you heard me talk about the basics, and you're like, "Um, Kendra, even that feels stressful." That could be because you don't have a household rhythm

that fits what matters to you. If that's the case, try listening to episode 334: How to Create a Relaxing Home Routine.

Maybe you can't shop for the basics the same way all the time because you are a nurse or someone with an unusual schedule. You don't live the same series of days or weeks. You're beholden to your work schedule that changes a lot. If that's the case, finding that grounding rhythm is very disorienting. It's like you're always shopping in the store that's moving stuff around. That's very disorienting. If that's the case, naming that helps. Name your normal, even when your normal is abnormal. And I would offer that Decide Once is your best friend. That's a Lazy Genius principle that can help you set some things on autopilot for those days that are unusual. Maybe you have three sets of three meals that all use the same ingredients or something, and when you get your work schedule and it's nights, you grab one of those series of three meals, and that's what your family is going to have. You've planned some things that go with certain aspects of your life that often feel unplanned. But honestly, you have a hard go. Your store is always changing. It's like the stairs in Hogwarts. That's really tough. Don't expect your baseline to be predictable. Unpredictability is normal for you, and while that doesn't fix anything, I think naming that makes things feel a little more settled on the inside.

One final word about scenario one. Let's say you feel good about most of your regular rhythms, but maybe one is always tripping you up. It's kind of like always forgetting that the eggs are with the deli meat on one end of the store instead of with the cheese on the other end of the store. There could be one particular cycle or rhythm that you just can't seem to lock in. If that's the case, name it. Name that cycle. Name where you're getting tripped up, and think about one small thing you can adjust to make that cycle feel a little easier. No big swings. No changing stores completely because you can't remember where the eggs are. Make one small change to help all of your rhythms and cycles feel like they're in a flow.

Now to scenario two. That's where most of us live. That's this current season if you're listening to this episode right around when it releases. The holiday season metaphorically has a lot of new items on that shopping list. You've got to take more time at the store and go to a couple even. It's a transition. It's a different energy.

This is a tiny example and not grocery shopping related, but I think it could be helpful. I usually paint my nails every week or two, often during a therapy appointment or a staff meeting or just randomly on a weeknight. This is easy for me because I love using Olive and June's quick-dry polish formula that dries in literally two or three minutes and works so great. I also keep some mani tools at my desk in my office so I can mani any time. Basically, painting my nails is not hard to fit into my life because it already has a reasonable rhythm. It's shopping scenario one. However, last weekend, I bit or picked all of my nails off. I did this because I drove through the mountains to go on a girls trip, and y'all might not know this about me but I'm pretty sure I have vertigo and driving through mountains or being up high in any way takes me out of my own body. It's like all I have is my lizard brain, and she is terrified. I had to drive over 100 miles in the actual mountains. I did not expect it to take this long. I did not expect to have a panic attack on the road and pull over and call Kaz to help me calm down. It was a whole thing. I also did not

expect to revert back to my old nervous habit of biting my nails because of that experience, and now all my nails are gone. They are so gone that they are too short to paint. A couple of them are short enough to hurt. Well, I don't love how they look right now, and on most days it wouldn't matter that much. However, I'm going to a wedding this weekend and would enjoy having nice looking nails. My plan for several days now has been to apply some press-ons, and all will be well! I even have them! But applying press-ons takes a lot longer for me than painting a couple of coats of quick-dry. I have small nail beds and don't like long nails, so I have to shape and file down every single press-on nail before I apply it. It takes awhile. They look great and stay put forever once they're done, but getting them on takes awhile. Why am I telling you this? Because I wrote on my to-do list "apply press-ons" four days ago, and I still have not done it. I keep re-writing it on my daily list because I still haven't done it. Why? It's out of my rhythm. It's something I want to do, that I reasonably know how to do, that isn't even that hard to do, but because it's out of my rhythm and takes a little bit more time, it's tough to actually make happen. And if you have several of those on your list, on your plate, which you probably do, it starts to make everything feel hard. Again, that's why seasons like this one, like the holidays, feel like a lot. There is so much that's out of the ordinary, and trying to find time for those things alongside your regular rhythms is tough.

When we're feeling upside down or overwhelmed or too busy or like we can't get everything done, when we keep moving a task from day to day to day, the response is often aimed at ourselves. We can't get it together, we can't figure this out, what's wrong with me that I can't organize my life in a reasonable way. Why can't I just put on my dang press-ons?! We assume that we're missing something, some hack or system or product that will make it all easier, or that we're just not good at life. We're not good at adulting. We should not be trusted with investment accounts and home maintenance. So instead of being honest about where we are and what's really going on, we spend our time searching for a big solution to our problem. But actually, simply naming how common this is, naming that it happens to pretty much all of us, naming what kind of metaphorical grocery shopping you're done, can be comforting. You're not some outlier. Fitting everything in is a tough ask for everyone, and you're not doing anything wrong. So rather than blame yourself or try to find a big fix, just name where you are. I've got some practical thoughts for you right after this sentence, but really even if you stopped the episode here, you'd be better off than you were before. Just name where you are, and be kind to yourself there.

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Okay, a couple of practical thoughts.

Here is the first thing to remember about singular things. They will not just happen. If I don't put on my press-ons, they won't get put on. Without my attention, they will not happen. Cyclical things often do happen even if you drop the ball. If you don't make dinner, you and your family will forage in the fridge and figure something out. You'll eat cereal. A kid will grab a poptart and be fine. If you need to get dressed and all of your pants are dirty, you'll put on a pair of dirty pants. Eventually you'll run a load of laundry, but you'll get dressed and the laundry will

eventually happen. Cyclical things don't tend to sit for very long before the consequences become too dire for you to ignore them.

Singular things are different, and I think there are four types of singular things that make us feel overwhelmed and upside down. Knowing what your singular thing specifically is will help you get it done.

The first kind of singular thing is a one-off task. It's making sure your kid's dress shoes fit before the band concert because he hasn't worn those shoes since the last band concert. That's one of mine right now. That can't really be made smaller, right? It's just a singular task. I need Ben to try on his shoes. If his shoes don't fit, I have a new singular task. I have to get Ben new shoes that do fit. Chances are, that first task of trying on the shoes won't take too long, assuming Ben knows where those shoes are. And this is where I encourage you to imagine the most complicated scenario of your singular one-off task. Ben can't find the shoes so it takes awhile to even try them on. Then they don't fit him and we have to find new ones. Go ahead and think through those pieces a little bit and recognize how long this small task could potentially take. Just put it in context a little. But usually one-off tasks that don't require a ton of time can simply be put on your to-do list on the day you need to do them, and you'll get them done. Unless they're applying press-ons, and then you have to actually block off time on the calendar to do them literally this evening. Which I am going to do.

The next type of singular task is a task that's new but will actually become a cycle. Something like a new medical treatment. Let's say you've been diagnosed with something, and you need to take pills at a certain time every day. You haven't been doing that. That's not in your rhythm. You have to add something new to what already exists, but you're adding something that will become repetitive. Weirdly though, in our brains, we see those as singular. We see those as one single new thing because they're not rhythmic yet. So your task is to create reminders, like an alarm on your phone, or you do what James Clear calls habit stacking where you put those pills next to your coffee pot because you always drink coffee, and you can take your pills at the same time. Make sense?

The third type of singular thing is a project. A project is something that has an end (taking your pills doesn't have an end, so it's different). A project is also something that has multiple decisions and actions attached to it. Getting holiday gifts is a project. Cleaning out a closet is a project. Applying for grad school is a project. Renovating a room in your house is a project. They have an end, and they have lots of parts.

Do not - I repeat do not - write down a project on your to-do list as a singular task. It's not. It's many things. Sometimes I will write something like "plan the Thanksgiving meal" knowing that that task is really many tasks. It requires more time. It requires twenty intentional minutes to figure out all the actions and decisions I need to make and do. So if you're overwhelmed by something that is out of the ordinary and you can't seem to get it done, it might be a project with lots of pieces, and you will remain overwhelmed by it as long as you see it as one thing. It's not one thing. It's many things. So make it its many things, and put them in their place. It's strange,

but seeing a list of very doable small tasks is less overwhelming than seeing one giant one that has not yet been broken down. You can't check off "get holiday gifts" without checking off a lot of pieces and parts, right? So the third type of singular thing is a project. Name that it's a project, and then treat it like one.

And finally, the fourth type of singular thing actually speaks to that third scenario, to shopping in a new store or where everything has been moved around, and that is something circumstantial or seasonal that's kind of out of your control. I used this analogy in the most recent Latest Lazy Letter, and it's the idea of living in the shadow of a mountain.

There are some situations in your life - a stalled renovation which is where I am, waiting to hear about a job offer or a diagnosis, having a kid with a mental health crisis - these are things that you can't do a lot about, but they cast a shadow. You're living in their shadow. And that shadow affects the rest of your life. But I think that even naming that is helpful. Seeing your circumstances, not as something to change or manage but as a shadow you're simply living under, is weirdly calming and even encouraging. It doesn't change the presence of the mountain or the difficulty of it being there, but if you name that some of your overwhelm or your difficulty to get stuff done is because of the shadow, you might have a better understanding of what is in your power to do.

So let's recap. Name how your life is like grocery shopping. Which scenario are you in today? Be kind as you name it and compassionate as you move forward in it. Adjust your expectations to match where you are.

If you need a refresh on your regular rhythms, listen to episode 334. Otherwise, name the four types of singular tasks that might be causing some discomfort or stress in your schedule. It's a one-off thing you just have to do, it's a new cycle to add, it's a project, or it's a shadow. Naming where you are is wildly helpful even if you do nothing else after it. Live with the naming. Get used to that, and I believe that you will find it easier to get your stuff done.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Jen Banks! Jen shared this really simple tip for Thanksgiving cleanup, something we might all be experiencing in just a couple of days. Jen wrote, "When you set the table for Thanksgiving, if you use name place cards, put a responsibility on the back so each person knows how to help with cleanup! Take out the trash, bring any dishes to the sink, remove the tablecloth, etc. Boom, built in help! Also, no one is standing around awkwardly wanting to help but not knowing how." What a great idea this is, Jen! I might steal this for our own meal on Thursday. Regardless of how you might use this tip, I think it's important to remember that cleaning up after any meal but especially a huge one like Thanksgiving should be a group effort. Having everyone take part in a way that's kind and thoughtful and not falling on one or two sets of shoulders is always a lovely approach to the holidays. Thanks for sharing, Jen, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

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!