

## 342 - How to Uncomplicate Your Holiday To-Do List

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 342 - How to Uncomplicate Your Holiday To-Do List.

Now, here's what I need from you for this episode to be helpful. If you are under water and don't really know all that you need to get done, you haven't named what matters during the month of December, and you're a little bit like a chicken with your head cut off, listen to episode 339: How to Make the Rest of 2023 Easier. That is an episode that helps you clarify what you actually need to get done and what you can release. It's very practical, but uncomplicating your to-do list honestly starts there. If you haven't done that process of naming what matters, this episode right now will not be as helpful as it could. It's a Band-Aid when you need PT. So if that's you, listen to episode 339 first.

If you did listen to episode 339 and you actually have a pretty good handle on what you want to do and need to do but you're struggling to actually do it, where you just keep moving undone tasks to the next to-do list or they just sit there unchecked and you're almost confused by why this is so hard, I'm guessing you missed last week's episode. Episode 341. It's called The Real Reason It's Hard to Get Stuff Done. I think you need to listen to that before you listen to this. You likely need a renewed perspective on seasons like this one where there are ordinary things that still need to get done alongside many out of the ordinary things. Our brains are pinballing from regular dinner plans to large projects like decorating for the holidays, from school winter concerts to remembering to play holiday music in your house, from experiencing the magic of December to trying to coordinate holiday plans with complicated family members. There are so many different kinds of things happening, and your brain is beat. Without a kind reality check, you will become an unkind robot. You might already feel like one right now. You're already annoyed with December even though it hasn't technically started yet, and you'd just like it all to be over. I don't want you to listen to this episode in that headspace. It will not be helpful. This episode is very practical. It has steps and strategies to help you with your to-do list, and I want you to hear them as a human person, not as an overstimulated robot. So if you need that perspective shift and a little injection of kindness before you uncomplicate your holiday to-do list, listen to episode 341.

Alright, now I am assuming that I am speaking only to beautiful human beings with beautiful, sometimes complicated lives during a full season, and you understand where you are. You have a lot to do, you have a lot you want to enjoy, you've named those things, you've let go of some things, you understand that you have to approach these next few weeks a little differently than you might approach March or June or September. December is a unique month, and therefore, you need to approach that month and your long to-do list in a way that feels kind and human and grounded and like yourself. But also where you get it all done, at least all the things that matter.

I have an approach that I often use during months like this, and it works like a dream for me. As always though, I share this idea with Kind Big Sister Energy, meaning I think this works, and I think it could work for you, but as with anything I ever say, do what works for you. If this doesn't, don't do it. If part of it seems like it might work, do part. But as we keep going in this episode, I am going to speak to you as though you're doing the steps. I've got my big sister hat on now, so this is your one and only disclaimer that you can take what you want, leave what you don't.

Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to share an analog process that helps me uncomplicate my holiday to-do list. It's a process that helps me see what's happening and where I need to put the items on my to-do list. You probably have one long to-do list for December, and it's making you sad because of how big and complicated it feels. This process uncomplicates it by turning that long December list into multiple weekly lists. That way, you're only doing what's yours to do that week and nothing else. You don't even see anything else. It helps you know where you are without being overwhelmed by it.

The first thing you're going to do is get either index cards or old scrap paper cut into a general index card shape. You'll need probably 20. I find that this process needs to be analog for me, but if you want to do this digitally, Trello is an excellent tool. It actually has cards built into it, so it's the best tool I've found to mimic this process.

The reason that we are using index cards rather than just making lists on paper is because I want to be able to move tasks around in order to find their best place. That's the whole point of this process. Our objective is to uncomplicate our complicated holiday to-do list by putting categories of tasks in place in their correct week. Usually once you see it all laid out, you might move a task or two to a different week, and the index cards help you tangibly do that and visualize the whole thing so much better. For the record, I also use a different color marker or pen for each step I'm going to share so I can distinguish the cards from each other. Just telling you that at the top in case you want to do the same.

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Alright, let's get a handle on where we are in the calendar. This episode was released on Monday, November 27th, which for you could be today. December 31st is a Sunday, so if we're looking at a week as Monday to Sunday which for some of you is sacrilege, we have exactly five weeks of December remaining. For the purposes of this process, I do include Sunday as the last day of the week since weekend plans often extend into Sunday. For me, Monday is a cleaner start than a Sunday is. Sunday might have prep in it, but it's not the beginning. You do you.

Again, the reason December feels like a lot is because we're looking at the entire month at once. It's just December. It's one bucket of time. I'd like you to instead think about the next five weeks as five buckets of time. By distributing the things you have left to do amongst the remaining December weeks, you're assigning urgency, you're putting your tasks in their right order, and you're putting them in place, in a particular week where they're best suited. Essentially, this process makes December smaller.

So take five of your index cards or whatever you have and write week 1, 2, 3, etc. on each one. I also put the date range on the card, so one card will read week one, 11/27 through 12/3, the next card reads week two 12/4 through 12/10, week three etc. So one card is one week.

Once you fill out those weekly bucket cards, put them across the top of your table or the floor or across the top of wherever you are.

Next, you're going to take five more index cards, one for each week, and on each card in a different color from the dates if you want, write down the unusual things that are happening for that week. Not what you have to get done. Just things that are happening that are out of the ordinary. I don't make an individual card for each individual thing that's happening because those things aren't moving. If something is moveable, put it on its own card. But for the most part, what is happening on your calendar will happen the week it's scheduled, so you can put everything that's happening that week on one card since they all essentially live together in that same week. They happen together, so they're written together.

As an example, here's what's on my what's happening cards. On my first card for week one, I would write Ben's birthday, band booster meeting, Sam's all-county performance, Lessons and Carols rehearsal, Annie's choir performance, and our Christmas opening ceremony weekend that literally spans two entire days. Those are the unusual things that are happening that first week that are not normal rhythmic things like school and work and meals and laundry and whatnot. Week two is Lessons and Carols, the kids' band concerts, and my father-in-law's birthday. Still a lot but also less. Week three is much shorter. The only thing happening that's out of the ordinary is that it's my last week of work before our winter break, so I'll work a lot more than usual trying to get ahead so that myself and the team can take a full two weeks off. The work rhythm of that week will be unusual. Week four is just Christmas fun! Literally nothing crazy is happening outside of just enjoying the holiday. Same goes for week five except that it also includes my birthday and maybe some kind of New Years Eve thing.

So I place each card under its week so that I can see what's happening. Those first two weeks are a beast, and seeing that will help with this next part.

Next, we're going to look at what you have to do, but this part is a teeny bit different. We're going to start with those general holiday to-do list categories that you might still need to do. Categories you likely still have to do are choosing holiday gifts, buying holiday gifts, wrapping holiday gifts, decorating for the holidays, planning food for a holiday gathering, holiday baking... stuff like that. Those are literally mine categories. So write one category per index card.

Now, I know I have talked a lot about making tasks smaller, and that's important. If you don't acknowledge that "buy holiday gifts" is not a proper to-do list item because of how big it is, you'll stay overwhelmed by it, and your entire to-do list will remain complicated. Breaking big things down into smaller pieces is so important. However, at this point in December, you likely need some un complication. Which isn't a real word, but we're making it one. I think the best way to do

that is to see the category first before you see all the many tasks involved with it. So put one holiday to-do list category on each index card. Again, the things on my cards are choose gifts, shop for gifts, wrap gifts, holiday baking, decorating, and holiday magic.

Obviously, you have more to do than just what's in those categories. You have regular things like grocery shopping and work projects and stuff, and we'll get to those in a minute. But first, let's put these categories in their place.

Look at the next five weeks and what you have going on within them, and place each category card where you think they make the most sense. You're not going to put wrap gifts before buy gifts. You're probably not going to put wrap gifts in week five when Christmas is over. Put the cards where they make sense based on when they need to happen and based on what's already happening in your life.

Let's get back to that holiday magic category as an example of this. For me, our holiday magic starts this weekend with our opening ceremony we do every year. There's a downtown festival on Friday and then parade on Saturday. Then we put up the tree and decorate Saturday and Sunday. It's the literal best. We do every single year as our opening ceremony weekend. Now I might feel pressure to keep making holiday magic all month long and feel bad that oh man we haven't gone to see Christmas lights or whatever. But really when I look at the weeks left in December, I don't need to force holiday magic in week two or three. Week one is covered, and weeks two and three or a bit busy. But four especially? That's where I'll put the holiday magic category and let it live there. It releases me from trying to create all these new things in the other fairly busy weeks. Not only that, those weeks likely contain the categories of shopping for gifts which can take some time. So seeing your categories and restricting them so to speak to a particular week releases you from the expectation and pressure to make everything happen at once. I don't need to worry about wrapping gifts now. I haven't even bought any yet. I'm going to wrap week four, and it's going to be great. But if I'm going to wrap week four, I need week three to be for possible shopping, so I need to shop in week two. Which means I need to choose in week one. That's where those cards go. And now I can see it, right? I can see when things are happening. Everything is in its place. I don't have a to-do list yet, but I can see where things go.

This visualization of the cards, even though it's so simple, works wonders for me. It's like it unlocks something in my brain that makes me go, oh I got it. That's when I do that thing. Instead of seeing one giant list across one giant month, I see five small lists across five weeks. I see where things need to go.

Also before we go to the final step, back to the holiday magic thing. You can create holiday, seasonal magic every single day. Listen to episode 135: Nailing Your Holiday Vibe. Making some small sensory choices now, like playing the fireplace show on Netflix or lighting candles or having cozy blankets around or making soup at least twice a week or whatever the thing is can create a holiday vibe that impacts every day. That's its own kind of holiday magic where you're just amplifying things you already do and rhythms you already have. So when I say I can wait on holiday magic until the week of Christmas, I mean things like going to see lights or watching

Home Alone or whatever we love doing that feels specifically magical to our Christmas experience. But vibes? Vibes can happen all the time.

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Now, you can take the next part one of a couple of ways. You can take those category cards and on the back write some specifics, write the smaller tasks that fit in that category if that helps and if they fit. It might not help, and they might not fit, especially when it comes to buying gifts or something. But if that sounds like something that might work for you, try it.

For me, what I tend to do now is generate five different to-do lists, one for each week. Then I can more easily see what is mine to do one week at a time. It sounds very simple, and it is. But it's wildly helpful to settle my brain during busy seasons like this.

So for each week, what might go on your to-do list? Well, there are small tasks attached to what's happening that week, to the things you wrote down on the cards. For me in my week one, as a reminder, the things that are happening are Ben's birthday, a band booster meeting, Sam's all-county performance, Lessons and Carols rehearsal, Annie's choir performance, and our Christmas opening ceremony weekend. The natural tasks that come out of that that I will now write in my planner for that week's to-do list are wrap Ben's birthday gift, make Ben's birthday dessert, type up agenda for booster meeting, schedule a ride for Sam to the performance early, practice my updated vocal part a couple of times before Lessons and Carols rehearsal, and text the grandparents about Annie's choir performance. The opening ceremony weekend is already planned, and doesn't require anything to remember, so that's fine as a thing that's just happening. So I'll write those things on my weekly to-do list for that week. Then I'll add any regular things like meal plan or grocery shop or whatever. I also can add to that list throughout the week obviously. You're not creating a static list that never pivots. You'll have to add and take away and move stuff sometimes, but I'm creating a list of things that are unusual that I know need to get done that particular week.

I'll also add either in capital letters or in a different color either the single category of holiday task that I put that week, like FINISH CHOOSING ALL GIFTS, and I'll block off a couple of lunch hours or an evening to get that done. I don't need to necessarily write down every single person I'm choosing gifts for on my to-do list because that's been worked out in my gift notebook. I use that as an example of using your common sense as you do this. Don't be a robot about it. You don't have to write down every piece and part to a bigger project unless you'll forget those pieces and parts. If you know you've got a category reserved for this week, put it in its place that week on your calendar, and get it done. Get it done kindly and with something joyful happening, too, like music or people or whatever, but now you can get it done. You know where it goes.

Then I do that for every single week. I make five different lists, adding to them as I need to. If I finish a week and there are undone tasks from that week's list, I move them to the next week, but I also pay attention to why it got moved. Is it something that is going to cause me to have to move it yet again in another week? If I'm having trouble getting it done, I ask myself why. Maybe

it doesn't matter, maybe it's too big, maybe there are pieces of information I'm missing that have to come from somewhere else, maybe I'm making it complicated when it needs to be simple. If you have undone tasks when you move to a new week, ask yourself why. Be kind, have common sense, and figure out how to get that thing done in a way that aligns with what matters to you.

And that's how I un-complicate my holiday to-do list. I hope it helps you un-complicate yours. If you are a caffeinated squirrel brain person, sometimes you need to organize the craziness in your head on moveable index cards. Make your giant December list smaller by breaking it into weeks, and simplify the number of things on your list by actually relying on those categories rather than all the small tasks within them. You likely already have the perspective of recognizing all the small tasks within them, but you no longer have to see those tasks in order to get the general category done. In fact, seeing them is more overwhelming than just seeing the category itself.

You're playing Tetris with your schedule but in a very kind, compassionate, human way. That's why it's so important for you to listen to episode 339 and 341 before listening to this one, especially 339. If you haven't yet gone through some kind of process to help you name what particular things matter this holiday season and what you can let go, you'll be stressed out. Let's not do that. Only do what matters as much as you're able, and let the rest go.

I hope this episode has helped you, and I hope you grab a handful of index cards and un-complicate your holiday to-do list. We just essentially applied Now Soon Later Never Mind to the month of December, and I love that for us.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Sara Carncross. Sara writes this, "So, here's what I have done every year to help make life and packing the car easier.

I buy 3 separate Christmas wrapping paper designs. One for my extended family, one for the in laws, and one for our immediate family. Since my husband packs the car for Christmas Day, it's easy for me to shout "grab the snowman presents for the first party!" This way, no presents are left behind and we don't have to rifle through an entire car in the freezing Michigan air to read and find every present labeled for Grandma. Plus, everything matches so in my head I feel like I put in extra effort when really it's just limiting myself to 3 separate paper designs." What a brilliant idea! I've heard similar ideas for kids' gifts where different kids have different paper and whatnot, but I love this application particularly when it comes to holiday travel and packing the car. So so smart. Thanks for sharing this idea, Sara, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

One quick reminder before we go. Next Wednesday, December 6, the next issue of The Latest Lazy Letter will hit inboxes! I think a lot of you listening already get that email and love it based on the messages we get, but if you don't get it, give it a try! I write one email a month that's packed with book reviews, things I'm learning, tips I'm trying at home, and a lot more. I'm pretty

sure this month will contain an update on my list of celebrity crushes, so there's that. You can sign up at [thelazygeniuscollective.com/join](http://thelazygeniuscollective.com/join).

Okay, 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!