

297 - 5 Steps for More Ease at Work

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 297 - 5 Steps for More Ease at Work. That sounds pretty good, right? I'll sign up for more ease at work! Most every person listening has at least one job, and by job, I mean something you do almost every day that you're probably paid for. The exception here is caregivers of family members, whether kids or sick or aging parents or siblings. Y'all probably don't get paid, but the repetitive nature of your daily existence that is postured toward another person that includes tasks and responsibilities is a job. It has more layers and fulfillment probably than many paying jobs, but you're also not paid for it. Still, I believe that people can feel more at ease at work no matter what work it is you do.

In part one, we're going to walk through how to do that, and in part two, we'll apply those principles to a real life example to show you how the steps can work. So let's jump in!

This episode is called 5 steps for more ease at work, but let's begin by tackling what this episode isn't. It's not about making your actual work easier. Now, is that possible? Maybe. But that's not what we're talking about today. Today, I want you to learn how to experience more ease. You can feel at ease when work is difficult, but easy work doesn't always put you at ease. We're better off spending energy being at ease within ourselves than trying to hack our way to easier jobs. Ease more than easy. I almost said over easy, but that's eggs.

So what is this thing, what is this magical application that will make us more at ease at our jobs and in our work? I don't have the only answer, but I think one significant answer is rhythm. Every job benefits from some kind of rhythm, whether you have a boss or are the boss, whether you work from home or at the office, whether you work part time or full time, whether you have a creative job or a linear job, a service job or a management job, or you have a job that you don't get paid for. Every job benefits from some kind of rhythm.

Let's talk briefly about what a rhythm is. A rhythm is a regular repeated process or even group of processes. It's easy to confuse a rhythm with a routine and even a routine with a habit. We talked about habits last week. If you have a nesting doll of repeated choices, the innermost doll is the habit, next is a routine, and finally a rhythm. And then really if you want to get really woo woo, the outside doll really is your life. Your life is made up of rhythms - repeated groups of processes or routines, and your routines are usually made up of habits or actions that eventually could become habits. So a rhythm is more expansive than a routine. A routine is generally this thing then that thing. A rhythm is this group of things then that group of things.

I also think a rhythm is more soulful than a routine. Not that a routine can't have soul. That's not what I mean. But when you think about a rhythm versus a routine, a rhythm has more breath in it. It's more grounded, more fluid, it just feels really human. A routine can skew robot real fast, right? I love routines. I love habits. But just like your habits are well served by examining the broader routine, your routines are well served by examining your life's broader rhythms. Are you

regularly experiencing processes day to day, week to week, month to month, that support what matters to you? And my guess is if you do, if that's true, you feel at ease more often than you don't. We'll all feel ill at ease plenty of times, but if your rhythms are in line with what matters to you, and you slowly develop these regular processes that include meaningful routines and habits, you will feel more at ease within yourself. I don't think rhythms are *the* answer to ease, but I do think they are a significant one. So let's talk about how to create a rhythm in your work specifically so that you can feel more at ease.

We are going to do that with a process we haven't used in a hot minute. We're going to apply the Five Lazy Genius Steps to creating rhythms and therefore experiencing more ease at work. If you are new here or just need a refresher, the Five Lazy Genius Steps were first shared in my second book, *The Lazy Genius Kitchen*. One of the most overlooked but important Lazy Genius principles - and there are 13 of those, and they are described in my first book, *The Lazy Genius Way* - but one of the thirteen that is more important than we often realize is the principle Go in the Right Order. Chances are, many things in your life could have more ease in them if you didn't change what you were doing but simply changed the order in which you do it. I give a ton of examples for that in *The Lazy Genius Way*, but the ultimate Lazy Genius order to do anything is to follow these five steps. I essentially put some of the principles in the right order so that you can solve just about any problem that you need solving.

And that is where you begin. In order to apply the five steps to a problem, you need to name the problem. When you think about your work, your job, and the energy around it, what is the problem? What is your challenge? The temptation is to be general with that answer, to say "I have too much to do" or "I'm just so tired" or "I'm not appreciated" or "I just hate going to work." Those statements could very well be true, but those statements are not solvable, not really. They're too big. If your problem is you're tired, you might think a nap would solve it, but only for now, right? That's not a long-term solution. Nor is a vacation or a new mattress or a new job. When we have big problems, we're stuck with big solutions, and big solutions don't work. They're too expensive or ineffective or they take too much time or energy.

This has become a fairly regular Lazy Genius statement around here, but the smaller the problem, the easier the solution. It's just the way it goes. We think that we need to solve big problems, but you've been trying to do that your whole life and my guess is it still hasn't worked. So let's start small. That is the most annoying and also most transformative of the 13 Lazy Genius principles. So start small. In other words, make the problem smaller. So as we go through the five steps to help Lazy Genius that small problem and add more ease into your life, you do need to know what your problem is, and the smaller you can make it, the better.

Now, let's briefly walk through the five Lazy Genius steps if you've never heard them or if you just need a refresher. The five steps are prioritize, essentialize, organize, personalize, and systemize. Once your small problem has been identified, the first thing you do is prioritize. The problem will inform the priority. The problem itself will help you name what matters most. If the problem is that you never have time to stop and eat lunch at work, the priority is that you take a lunch break. If the problem is that you have a coworker you just can't stand, the priority is that

you somehow get along better with that person. If the problem is that you are always late for work and therefore just feel rushed and behind all day, the priority is that you get to work on time. See what I mean? The problem informs the priority.

Once you've named what matters most about that particular problem, you move on step two: essentialize. Essentialize is to get rid of whatever is in the way of what matters. And occasionally, it also involves adding something that you need but don't have. You want only the essential things around you that support your priority. I won't give examples of all these like I just did with prioritize, but remember in part two, we'll apply all of these in order to a problem. But step two is essentialize, to get rid of what's in the way.

Step three is to organize, to put everything in its place. Everything can be items on your desk to emails in the right folders to the thoughts in your head. You must always essentialize before you organize, otherwise you're putting things in place that you don't actually need.

Step four is to personalize. You want to feel like yourself in whatever it is you're doing. The more grounded you are, the more confident and alive and sparkly and comfortable you are, the more at ease you will be. So with whatever problem you're solving and whatever rhythm you're trying to create, it's vital that you don't lose yourself in that. Otherwise what's the point?

And finally, step five is to systemize. That's basically keeping something in a flow, keeping something going. So often we have solutions, but we don't have follow-through to maintain that solution. That's why systemize is part of the process. If you don't have a way to help the solution stick around, you're going to be back where you started pretty fast.

So those are the five steps to Lazy Geniusing any problem: prioritize, essentialize, organize, personalize, and systemize. Or name what matters, get rid of what's in the way, put everything in its place, feel like yourself, and stay in the flow.

Next, we're going to apply these five steps to a couple of problems at work that could be solved by adding a rhythm.

We'll be right back...

Okay, let's make some rhythm. Does anyone else when they hear the word rhythm start Gloria Estefan? The rhythm is gonna get you. I listened to that album - Let It Loose - of her and the Miami Sound Machine on aggressive repeat when I was eight and nine years old. Just constant plays. That album is shockingly good. You are fortunate I'm a professional and I won't keep singing the songs because I really want to.

Okay, so we have named why a rhythm is essential to creating ease at work. Having a rhythm each day that helps support what matters most to you grounds us in ourselves and in our work. A rhythm is grounding, and when we're grounded and secure in who we are and what we've chosen, we feel more at ease. When we don't feel like we're starting from scratch every day,

when we know kind of what might be coming, and we have general repeatable approaches to what is coming, we find more ease in our tasks and in ourselves. Now we need to name the smallest problem we can around our work rhythms. You don't have to create a rhythm for your whole week of work or for a whole day or even for starting or ending your day. Those might still be too big depending on what's going on with you and what keeps you from feeling at ease.

So what is that? What is it that keeps you from feeling at ease at work? Is it a person? Is it the confidence you have or don't have in a certain part of your job? Is it that you go from a busy home to a busy office and back to a busy home, but now everybody's hungry? We want our problem to be smaller, so try and dig one layer deeper at a time to figure out what currently has you uneasy. Now we'll use an example to work this out.

I'll use one from my own life. Now I realize I've mentioned this before several times, one of which was last week, but I am doing that on purpose because we think that we have to solve everything at once, that the bigger the problem, the better it'll be once it's solved. We almost don't believe that one simple solution to a singular small problem could have the kind of impact I'm currently claiming it can have. I didn't say *will* have, I said *can* have. Give it a shot, and I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. Small solutions pretty much work most of the time. If they didn't, this podcast wouldn't have almost 300 episodes. Y'all would've stopped listening a long time ago. But I do want to leave room for those of you might have a problem that's rooted in a season of life and doesn't feel very solvable. Or maybe you named one problem, created a small solution, and then it didn't work. There could be any number of reasons, but you've given up because of that one - in your eyes - failure. I'm just offering that this isn't a perfect system with faultless solutions or that you'll always even be in the state of mind to accurately name what's going on in your insides. You can still apply these five steps, and then try again if it doesn't seem to stick. Keep making the problem smaller. But I see you. I see you skeptics, and you are very welcome here.

Alright, back to the repeated small solution. I keep talking to you guys about my lunch. It is my best example for how a work rhythm has helped me feel more at ease in my comprehensive life. So I'm a fairly intense person. I often say I have caffeinated squirrel energy. I'm an Enneagram One, and so my gift and my curse depending on the day is making things better than they were before. But I've got a lot rolling around in my head and in my body all the time. Some other context: I work from home, usually in my garage office slash podcast recording space that we invested in in 2021. I also really love my job. I have a wonderful team that does their greatest contribution so that I can do mine, so my work is mostly creative in nature. I would say 90% of my working hours are spent making this podcast, writing the newsletter, writing books when I'm writing books, writing on Instagram when I'm writing on Instagram... most everything is creative. And creativity for me by nature has a lot of momentum. Once I get going, it's hard to stop. Or if I can't get going, I persevere on the fact that I can't get going. I'm either obsessed or obsessing over the fact that I'm not obsessed. It's super fun.

After many weeks of sharing various stressful situations and concerns and whatever with my therapist, she said, "Do you eat lunch?" This was quite a few months ago, but I was like "I mean

yeah I eat lunch.” She said, “Do you work through it?” I saw where this was going. “Sometimes.” Then she said something like “Do you enjoy your lunch when you have it?” And the answer at the time was no. I didn’t want to spend longer than I had to on my lunch because even though my kids are all in full-time school, I’m still the primary kid parent. My husband leaves for work before my kids leave for school, and we’re all home for at least a couple of hours before he gets home. So I’m the school drop-off / pick-up parent, the afternoon homework parent, the snack parent, the make dinner parent. My husband does a lot around the house. We have a really good division of labor, but that role falls to me. So for the longest time, I felt so protective of my work hours because they were limited. They were going to be over. I have a full-time job but not full-time hours available for that job. So we gotta cram everything in, man! Including lunch.

But my work days were always so stressful. And my therapist was the one who suggested that maybe a small solution to my problem of feeling stressed without a break is to take a break. To take a lunch. That’s the priority. To eat lunch every day. There weren’t any words about what I would eat or when I would eat or what I would do while I ate, but the priority was simply to take the time to enjoy a meal and enjoy myself while not working.

So step two is essentialize. What was in the way? I would bring my computer in the house during lunch instead of leaving it in my office, and that was very distracting, right? So I got rid of the computer during my lunch. For a short time, I watched a show on my computer in my office thinking it would be enough of a solution, but I could still see my email tabs and was still in my office surrounded by my work stuff, and I couldn’t really rest during that time. So I essentialized and got rid of having my computer nearby and of eating lunch in my office. After a little while of that, I also got rid of just figuring out what to eat on the fly. Now I prep lunches or plan dinners that have leftovers because the energy I was bringing to figuring out a lunch on the fly is also caffeinated squirrel energy. I don’t need more of that. We need something prepared and quietly ready for Kendra so Kendra can quiet down.

Step three is organize. I was going inside to eat lunch at random times, nothing consistent, which means that sometimes I would wait really late, like close enough to bump right up against getting the kids from school, and that didn’t create any sense of ease. It was still stressful. So I put my lunch hour in its place, not just in my head but on my calendar and in my planner. I have meeting blocks blocked off on my Google calendar so Leslie, Team LG’s Director of Operations, doesn’t unknowingly schedule a meeting when I’m having lunch. And I put a 12:30pm flag - if y’all remember bunting and flags and chairs from the various time management episodes in the past - I put a 12:30pm flag in my daily plan for lunch. That is when I stop.

Step four is personalize. I want to feel like myself when I’m taking a break and eating my lunch, and one of the things that fills me up big time is stories, either on TV or in books. Usually books. So I either read or watch something that I really love during lunch. That helps me feel like myself. If the weather is warmer, I might eat outside on my porch because that’s another way I start to come back to myself, but ultimately it’s what I do while I eat.

And finally step five is systemize, to stay in a flow. Now I kind of already did that back in step three where I organized my lunch by putting the time in my calendar, right? But a way to for sure stall out in this is to not have food I look forward to eating ready to eat. If I have to settle for a ham sandwich which I don't love but like it's there or I have to cook something that takes twenty minutes but I'm hungry and so I snack on whatever I can find until I can eat and then that kind of defeats the purpose of eating on purpose, you know? Basically if I don't have food ready to eat up or just straight up, that is a quick recipe - ha, no pun intended - for getting out of the flow. So I need a regular rhythm of prepping a yummy lunch once a week so that I can enjoy the regular rhythm of eating it every day.

That lunch time rhythm that I've been doing for maybe almost a year at this point has transformed the ease of my days. It has single-handedly given me space to breathe and be a person and do something fun and give my brain a break and give my body tasty fuel. That alone mattered. And then as time went on, that rhythm gave way to others. It started giving me margin energetically and logistically to see my work days in a way that I could batch stuff, I could take a day off sometimes, I could do any number of things to slowly at ease into my work by beginning other rhythms.

And now I have tremendous ease in my work. Is my work hard? It is. Do I get stressed? I do. Do things sometimes not go according to plan? Of course. Am I always motivated? No. But do I feel at ease more often than I don't? Yes. Absolutely. And that growing ease as I've added to existing rhythms and started paying attention to new ones couldn't have happened all at once. It had to start in one place with one thing to solve one small problem. So please hear me. Naming and solving a small problem using these five steps is so much better than trying to solve everything at once. It won't work. And those small solutions don't seem significant, but they are. They very very much are.

We'll be right back...

A couple of final thoughts as we close. First, your rhythm to create more ease at work could be a rhythm that doesn't actually happen *at* work. It could be before work or after. It could be a rhythm of rest on the weekend or at night before bed. It could be a relational rhythm because your job is lonely and you need to touch base with someone you love at least once during your workday. Basically, your rhythm doesn't have to be a rhythm of how to approach your inbox, although that could very well be a helpful rhythm for you. Just keep an open mind as you name your problem and let it inform your priority. Your lack of ease at work could begin at home, on the drive, in your body because of something you ate or didn't eat, or because of a human interaction that always saps you dry. Keep an open mind. Make this rhythm be what you need it to be, not what you think it should be or so obviously connected to your job if that's not what you actually need.

Second, sometimes the thing we want to take away from our job to feel more at ease can't be taken away. If you are a nurse or a doctor or in any sort of medical service industry, you are interacting with people who are hurting all the time. That is your actual job. A lot of people don't

do that job because they cannot feel at ease in any way fulfilling its requirements. But somehow you do. You can sit with hurting people and carry all the things that you carry, and while you might find that a lot of that job comes naturally, it's still draining. Being at ease at work doesn't mean that your job is easy which we already said, but it also doesn't mean that the solution is to try and lessen or eliminate the hard part. Some jobs are just hard. So instead, think about how you can bring more ease into your body and mind and soul as you work. The answer is different for everybody, but if you have a hard job by nature, don't dismiss this practice of creating a rhythm because you make your hard job easier. Remember, that isn't the point. What instead can you do to feel more at ease within yourself, before, during, or after work?

And third, you can be busy without feeling stressed. It sounds like a paradox, but it's true. The goal isn't necessarily to be less busy and it's certainly not to eliminate stress. It's to have an internal practice of managing your expectations around your time and rhythms at work. If you keep telling yourself you're so busy and overwhelmed and you keep that caffeinated squirrel going full throttle, you're going to have a hard time seeing clear solutions or showing kindness to yourself, and you will just stay stressed. And stress does us zero favors. It messes up our hormones and our skin and our digestive systems and our calendars, but it can also be managed. Not eliminated... managed. Stress is going to be part of your life and likely your job, so instead of spinning your wheels to either get rid of it or lament that you have it, create rhythms in your days and weeks that create space for your stress to relax and turn into something else.

So to recap. We want to create more ease in our days and in ourselves, especially when we go about our daily responsibilities at work or working at home. The point isn't to make things easier but to feel more at ease. One way we can do that is by creating rhythms in our lives that support what matters to us. We can do that by naming the problem, making it smaller, and then applying the Five Lazy Genius Steps to help uncover a potential solution: prioritize or name what matters, essentialize or get rid of what's in the way, organize or put everything in its place, personalize or feel like yourself, and systemize or stay in a flow. One small rhythm will create space for another and then another, and over time, you will begin to feel more at ease in general, no matter what is happening around you. And those are 5 steps for more ease at work.

Okay, before we go, we're going to do two things. In a second, we'll celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week, but before we do that, I want to tell you something new and free by the way that we're doing. We have created something called Latest Lazy Listens. Latest Lazy Listens - say it three times fast - is our newest member of our email family, the cousin of the monthly newsletter the Latest Lazy Letter. Latest Lazy Listens will come to your inbox every other week, and it is essentially a podcast digest. It takes the previous two weeks' episodes, and there's a summary of the episode and any steps written out, there are companion links, some of which are not in the actual show notes, there is a note from me with some thoughts after the episodes have been released and things I've learned from having those topics out in the world, and we'll have each week's Lazy Genius of the Week written up in there, too. It's basically a written compact beefy summary of each the most recent two (or three if there's a bonus) podcast episodes. If you listen and wish you had some things written down, this is for you because it's written down

for you! If you listen but you don't always get to every episode because of your schedule and not having the time, this is also for you because you can get a pretty significant amount of information from the Latest Lazy Listens without having to actually listen when you don't have the time. And finally, if you love sharing the podcast with your friends and family which I'm so appreciative of but sometimes it's hard to get someone to commit to listen to a 20 or 30 minute episode, you can forward this email to them with enough info to help them that they can consume super quickly. Plus, you guys, Leah, the Director of Content on Team LG, designed this and made it super clean and pretty but also it's the opposite of overwhelming. I almost said it was underwhelming, but that is incorrect. The way that info is presented allows you to see only what you want to see. It's not an email long enough to really scroll. It's just compact and practical and helpful and cute, and it's coming to an inbox near you starting Friday, January 27th. After that, it'll show up every other week, so if you're interested in getting the Latest Lazy Listens, there's a link in the show notes or you can go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens.

Okay, now let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Jill Copenhaver. Earlier in December, I shared a story on Instagram about a local business owner whose house caught fire the week before Christmas. She and her husband have two little boys, and they lost so much of their stuff and had to leave the rest behind and really had nothing but the clothes on their backs. I shared a link to her Venmo for anyone who wanted to help out a little - which so many of you did and it was such a blessing to Rikki and her family - but this message came in from Jill that day, and it's a really lovely perspective on giving. Jill writes this: "Your story got me thinking about a lazy genius thing I do. Whenever people pay me through venmo, I always let it sit in the account. If I need to make a payment that's smaller than the balance I use it, but otherwise I let it sit. Then when something like this opportunity to share comes along, I donate whatever the balance is. It's usually somewhere between \$20-\$70 and because it was never in my bank account, it doesn't affect my budget. It's nice to give brainlessly because you know it's already set aside!" Jill, this is a lovely and very pragmatic way to be generous. A lot of folks want to give generously, but budgets are usually pretty steady while giving opportunities, especially ones like this, are not. This is such a great way to be postured toward generosity while still feeling responsible with your other financial commitments. I think this idea will encourage a lot of people, so thank you for sharing it, Jill, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today! Remember to sign up to get the Latest Lazy Listens at the link in the show notes, and I hope this episode was encouraging to you today. Thank you for listening and sharing it with your people, 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!