

#257 - The Lazy Genius Guide to Work-Life Balance

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 257 - The Lazy Genius Guide to Work-Life Balance. I don't remember the exact stat from our most recent listener survey, but right around half of you work full time doing something other than parenting because P.S. parenting is also a full time job. But so many of you have paid jobs and are trying to balance life and work, and as a fellow working parent, I stand in solidarity with you that it is super hard. And I personally have it easier because I'm the boss of my own work and can make adjustments that suit my needs more than a lot of people can, and it's still really hard. So if you have a 9-5 or a 7-4 if you're a teacher or you have an irregular week because you're a doctor or nurse or do something where you're on call for longer shifts, trying to be a person at work and at home is a tremendous challenge. There's so much to do, so much to manage, and you also want to rest and hang out with friends and do hobbies and have fun! So today I want to share some thoughts about how to live when you work all the time.

Let's start with a little perspective.

There is not a magical formula that achieves perfect balance between life and work. There's just not. You're not missing something. You're not the lone person trying to solve problems that everyone else has figured out. If there was a singular fix to having a well balanced life that incorporates both work and home responsibilities and relationships and all that you're wanting to experience and spend time on, we would all be using that fix. We would all use that solution. But there isn't one. There isn't a singular solution that you lock in and live off of forever. This is hard. This is challenging. I think when we talk about work-life balance, we expect the solution to be finite and locked until we don't work anymore, but that's not the reality. So release yourself from the expectation that you're hustling to find the key. It's not like Wordle where there is one solution that you find and then walk away. This a day in, day out lived experience, and we're going to talk about how to do that a little easier, but first, I want you to start with kindness towards yourself and perspective of the reality of what it means to have a job and a life.

So what's the point here? What are we after then? I think as Lazy Geniuses, our goal is to pay attention to how we can make certain parts of our days and our lives a little easier, just a little. We're not trying to build a big work-life balance machine and automate ourselves into oblivion. Those big machines don't take into account personality, people getting sick, your hormones, the weather, a kid who can't find her shoes, a phone call that you didn't expect to get that drains you of all your remaining energy for the day, interruptions at work that leave your to-do list undone. We can try to take small steps in specific directions to make certain parts of our work and our lives a little easier, but please hear me that you can't have the goal of fixing it all and life being super smooth and frictionless forever because you have this magical system. There isn't a magical system. The goal is to make things a little easier. You're not going to eliminate stress completely. You're still going to forget things sometimes. You will have things that lie undone, you will have things you need to do but really don't want to, you will still experience the stress of having a job and having a life. But you can experience less stress, and you can learn how to

cope better with the stress when it comes. The solution is not a big machine. The solution is being okay with small steps and being kind to yourself when things don't go the way you want.

Now you might be super bummed at this point, like thanks Kendra for the pep talk I feel great now. But as we continue this conversation, I hope that the permission to not expect the world of yourself every single day will help you relax more into what matters to you. If you release your own expectation that you have to find this magic key to doing it all and not experiencing stress again, you'll have an easier time. That expectation is a drain. And it's a drain because it's so big and broad and encompasses your whole life. I asked y'all on Instagram what your struggles with work-life balance are, and there were some specific answers like taxes and email and dealing with interruptions. But the overwhelming answer was some version of I spend my day working and then I have to spend the rest of the time taking care of my family and my home and my other responsibilities, and there's just not time for it all. The problem is trying to fit three suitcases worth of stuff into one. We're cramming and tired and things get left and we resent that they get left because we want to take them with us. And that struggle, while very very real, is too big of a problem to solve. Saying "I just don't have time for everything" while true is too big to help you see solutions.

So here's what I want us to do. We know there's not a magic formula. We know we will never fully eliminate stress. And we see that creating a big solution to this isn't realistic, sustainable, or even practical. So what is? What is practical?

Starting small.

The most likely way you will experience less stress in finding this elusive work-life balance is to make one thing a little bit easier at a time. You iterate. You find a small problem, you try a small solution, and you live with it and adjust to it as you see how it works, and then you do it again with something else.

I know that's the most annoying answer of all time. I know small steps make us mad. We want big change real fast, but it doesn't work. If it did, we'd all be doing it. And the problem that I have personally run into in trying to learn how to live well at home when I also work is that a lot of the advice that I personally have encountered is from the voices of people who are in charge of their own work, who don't have bosses, who can set work constraints and stop working at 3pm because they're only accountable to themselves in that. Think about it. Most time management books written about work are written by people who have more freedom in their work because they don't have a boss other than themselves, and therefore they have more freedom and options in their time management. Their solutions of only checking email once a day or constraining meetings to one day a week or ending every workday at 3pm or 4pm so they can get home are not solutions available to most people. And I will say the same for me. If I were to share with you how I personally manage my time for work, it wouldn't apply to you because I have many advantages to my own time management that other working people and working parents don't have. I have a home office in my garage, so I can close the door on my work. I have three amazing women who work for me and allow me to not deal with 70% of what

happens in this business. I have the ability to take Fridays off and rest. I work until 2pm every day because I'm the parent that gets kids from school, but I also have my mom like a mile away who watches my kids one afternoon a week and can step in when I need extra help. I have financial resources that allow me to pay a housecleaner every two weeks. No one in my family has dietary restrictions like a gluten or dairy intolerance or allergy which allows my meal planning and prepping to be simpler and less restrictive. I have a spouse. We have two cars. There are a lot of things that I personally am privileged to have that a lot of working people don't have, so I'm honestly not going to share what I do because that's not helpful.

What is helpful is that we all learn to do what I did and what many other working people do which is iterate. We create small solutions to small problems, we adjust, we assess, and we live one day at a time.

We'll be right back...

Now let's tackle this practically. What I want you to do is think about your next stretch of time. What current season are you in? When you think about the stress you're experiencing, the balance you're trying to achieve, what is the timeframe you're working in? For example, if you were to say "If I can just get past [blank], I'll feel a lot better." Because we all say that, don't we? If I can just get past these two weeks, if I can just get past this project deadline, if I can just get past my kid's baseball season, if I can just get past school and get to the summer, everything will feel better. Now often it doesn't, but what's helpful about that sentence is it's naming your season. Lazy Geniuses live in the season. That's one of our 13 principles. So answer that question to help you name your season. Now if your answer is if I can just get past this baby stage and your current kid is three months old and you have a solid year left before you hit your next season, try and make that smaller if you can. If your season is enormous, think about a way you make it smaller. And that might be an arbitrary length of time. The next week, the next two weeks, until June, whatever it is. But if your season is huge, try and make it smaller. In pretty much everything, always try and make it smaller. Small steps are easier to take, small solutions are easier to find, small timeframes are easier to manage. Try and make it smaller.

So that's step one: name your next stretch of time.

Step two is to two-pronged. You will do both of these elements of step two, but depending on your life and situation, you might do them in a different order. But the two-pronged approach to step two is you will either name a small problem that is impacting your current stretch of time that you named and then name what matters most about that problem and solve it, or you will name what matters most about your next stretch of time and then do one or two small things to support that, to support what matters. So you will name what matters most, and you will hopefully name a small problem you want to solve. The order might be personal preference though. One might come more easily than the other.

So let me give you a personal example. My stretch of time is the next month or so as I launch The Lazy Genius Kitchen book. May 3 is really my date. If I can get through May 3, I'll feel better. My stress and particular challenges to my work-life balance are centered around that book launch, so it makes sense that my stretch of time would end when the book releases. So for me, one of my problems or challenges is transitioning from work mode to parenting mode. I pick up my kids from school for sure at 2:30pm every day, and some days different kids get home at different times after, but I also begin being a mom at 2:30pm. And my challenge is extracting myself from the busyness of work mentally so that I can be present with my kids but also transition into getting dinner situated and making sure my kid has the black pants he needs for his violin concert and the other one gets the permission slip signed and the other one gets his homework done and there are dirty dishes in the sink and all the regular house - parenting things. It's a different mode, right? It's a different way of thinking, at least for me, and I need to be as intentional in that shift as I can. I also need as much space before that shift as I can. If I start working like I normally do at 8am and just bust it until 2pm, the comedown is harder. So my small solution that I have iterated over time is that I need to eat lunch. And I need to eat lunch and not work at the same time. My days are notably better and less stressful (not free of all stress but less stressful) when I eat lunch and read a book while I do. Days that I do not take an actual lunch break are harder days. They're more stressful. So instead of trying to figure out complicated ways to block my time or make my lists or be more efficient with what I'm doing, my small solution is to eat lunch and read a book while I do. That's it. But because I usually eat just a couple of hours before I have to stop working, I am already beginning the process of my offramp, of my transition into a new mode. I go hard from 8-12 and then have a restful lunch for 30-45 minutes. After that, I have maybe an hour or so to do work that doesn't require as much creative energy like return emails, complete one-off tasks, that kind of thing.

Now I'm still iterating how I close my work day. We talk about opening and closing ceremonies around here, which we haven't done in awhile actually, but the idea is that for seasons of life, we can open and/or close them with intention, even in a very small way, to mark a moment, to mark the movement, to celebrate or say goodbye. I think that my next small step in iterating a gradual solution to this transition from work to momming and doing home stuff is that I better mark the end of my work day. Maybe it's a prayer, a song, a walk to get the kids from school instead of driving, or just saying as I close my office door for the day, "Good work today, Kendra. Time to be done until tomorrow. You're doing great." You know? Like a little personal pep talk. But that's my next step in that transition. I also leave my computer in my office. The days that I do not do that are different days. I don't transition the same or at all. I'm distracted. I also try and turn my phone off from 2:30 or 4 or 4:30pm everyday while the kids are coming home from school. I don't always, but when I do, it's a different day. That small choice makes a big difference. And if you notice, all of those small choices are contributing to a single challenge, to the transition from work to home. And it's taken a long time to develop those, but I feel different. There are other reasons I feel different and handle my stress differently and better, like therapy and delegating more and sharing the load more equally with Kaz, because again I have the privilege of being in a two parent family with a super supportive spouse, so the lunch thing and the phone thing and the computer in the office thing aren't the only contributing factors, but they're pretty significant ones.

So back to your own process. Name your next stretch of time. Then what is a small challenge you can solve? Maybe you can think of a small challenge in your work, in your home life, and maybe in your own rest. You could be doing a decent job by your own estimation and based on what matters in getting everything done for work and home, but you're exhausted, right? Everything else is running fine enough, but you yourself are so tired, you haven't hung out with your friends in weeks or months or ever, you don't get to do things just for yourself. So think about those categories, too. Work, home, your own soul. What is a small problem you can solve with a small solution? Or what matters most in those areas for this next season? And from there, you use Lazy Genius principles like Decide Once and Ask the Magic Question and Essentialize and Schedule Rest to help you create small solutions around what matters most right now.

I know you wanted me to say get up at this time and do this thing and then drink this and then buy this, but that's never the solution. Instead, remember that you're not missing out on some magic formula, you will never relieve every bit of stress that comes from being a person with a job and also a life, and you can't build a big system to set it and forget it for this problem. You iterate. You solve one problem at a time with one small solution at a time based on what matters to you right now. And try and be okay with it. Try and not see that as a disappointment or a failure or a waste of time. Small steps, small timelines, small solutions to small problems really make cumulatively a much bigger impact than we give small steps credit for.

Now there are certainly specific work-life things we could do episodes on and might in the future like dealing with email, childcare, how to deal with being interrupted all the time, but for now, this is an overview, a perspective, and I hope it helps. There are also many specific episodes in the archives that can help you possibly solve that small problem you're struggling with. We'll put them in the show notes, but a few that come to mind are Episode 58: The Lazy Genius Morning Routine, Episode 59: The Lazy Genius Evening Routine, Episode 60: The Lazy Genius Cleaning Routine, Episode 61: The Lazy Genius Exercise Routine, Episode 80: The Lazy Genius Daily Act of Kindness, Episode 84: The Lazy Genius Guide to Lunch, Episode 91: The Lazy Genius Organizes Paper, Episode 123: The Lazy Genius After School Routine, Episode 124: The Lazy Genius Weekly Plan, Episode 177: The Lazy Genius Plans a Day, Episode 196: How to Lazy Genius Adult Screen Time, Episode 204: How to Rally on a Bad Day, Episode 209: How to Keep Your Surfaces Clear, Episode 226: How Batching and Bags Can Get You Out the Door, Episode 238: How to Get Stuff Done When You Don't Feel Like It, Episode 246: Five Essential Mindsets for Time Management, and Episode 254: Chores I Do Everyday. That's a lot of potential episodes, and we'll put them in a Spotify playlist so you can listen to the ones you want. But those are potentially some helpful specific episodes to help you with specific problems that contribute to a stressful working person lifestyle.

Do y'all hear the birds by the way? Can y'all hear them? They are very loud to me, and that's what happens when you work in a garage, but also I think it's really fitting that they feel loud this morning. I don't usually mention my faith outright on this episodes, but there is a short little parable in the book written by Matthew in the Bible in chapter 13 that says "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the

smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.” That feels really encouraging to me today, that even faith is a small step process but continues to grow and adjust to the weather and becomes a place where birds find home. That’s just really precious to me today, and I wanted to share that with you.

Okay, that is it for this episode, and I want to tell you that we are about to start some amazingly fun things to celebrate the release of The Lazy Genius Kitchen! I wrote a book about how to be a person in the kitchen, how to figure out what you need, how to use what you have, and how to enjoy your space like you never have before. This book is not a cookbook, and it is for every person in every stage of life with every cooking skill set available. And tomorrow launches a video series we made to celebrate and share the goodness of that book, and it’s basically a show you’d see on TV. It’s unreal. It’s so amazing, and tomorrow is the first episode. It’ll drop at thelazygeniuskitchen.com at 2pm ET, and I can’t wait for you to see it. You might have seen the trailer on Instagram on Sunday night so you know who the guests are, but tomorrow’s premiere episode is with Sharon McMahon of Sharonsaysso. I went to her home in Duluth, Minnesota, and we Lazy Geniused her utensils using the principles from the book, and y’all that episode is so fun. I hope you watch it and love it.

Okay, that’s it for today. Thank you so much for listening and being here, 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!