

#215 - Hospitality on the Fly

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 215 - hospitality on the fly. Summer is peak season for spontaneous hospitality, but this topic applies any time of the year.

I think we all desire to be the kinds of people who can welcome anyone into our home for a meal or a hang without plans, right? P.S. Saying that makes me think of that New Girl episode where Jess has lost her job and is working at the Casserole Shanty and makes friends with "the young people" in the apartment across the hall and one of them - Brory I think - says something about a party being downgraded to a chill hang. Remember that? Just me. It's fine. Anyway, we all want to be ready to host a chill hang at any given time without stress, but how do we do that?

Also we won't go deep into Covid related content in this episode, but there still are restrictions in different parts of the country and the world, and there are people who are assessing their risk differently because of at-risk family members or personal choices. Basically, there *are* still people who are living with the realities of Covid, and I want to acknowledge that before we jump in like everything is back to normal when it's not for everybody.

Also there's something to be said for the different reentry experiences we've all had. It's only June, you know? Our church started meeting again indoors just two weeks ago. It's not like we've been able to connect with people for months and months already. It's very very likely that you're still skittish about gathering and are thrown when people aren't wearing masks and you are out of practice and don't remember how to do hospitality things. We had friends over for Memorial Day - just two adults and a toddler, not a crowd by any stretch - and it felt a little like walking through mud. My brain forgot that we needed cups. I didn't offer people drinks until way late. The food was kind of ready but I didn't say anything to anyone and so we just kind of stood around for a few unnecessary minutes. It wasn't overly awkward or anything, but it did feel a bit like slow motion. I forgot how. Or I couldn't remember things fast enough.

So, as you move into this episode, you might resonate with something I've already said, or you don't and just want to Lazy Genius hospitality on the fly. Either way, this episode is going to help you.

First, let's start with what matters. As always, you get to answer that yourself, but for most of us, hospitality is for one primary purpose - connection. We want to connect with the people we are inviting into our homes and make them feel welcomed and at home and able to be themselves. Now, there are different offshoots of that in terms of the vibe you can set. People can be welcomed and feel themselves with different focuses, like celebration, relaxation, even ceremony. You can have fancy meals and still be hospitable with the purpose of connection. Connection doesn't exclude fancy dinner parties. That's an important distinction to make. But the likelihood is that the priority is to connect with someone else. That matters more than anything else.

So when we're talking about hospitality, especially hospitality on the fly, an important place to start is with this question: what would foster connection the most? What would foster connection the most? The answer to that depends on a few things: your personality, the other person's personality, what your relationship is like, who else is there, the weather, the food you have around... there are multiple things you could consider with that question, but don't hem yourself with a certain right or wrong answer. There isn't one. You decide. That's the whole point here. If you start with that question - what would foster connection the most? - and think through your particular situation in light of that question, a lot of things will make more sense. You'll see what to focus on and what to let go of. What would foster connection the most?

And honestly, that's the only thing to ask when you're trying to be hospitable on the fly. Episode over! Kidding. But almost. When you keep connection and your particular way of supporting it front and center, it puts everything else you might worry about in perspective.

Now listen, it's not that you don't care about how your home feels, what you'll eat, or what you'll talk about; remember, we don't swing to the far end of lazy and pretend like we don't care about things that actually do matter to us. But it's so important that you remember that hospitality is not a simple formula of "cook this" or "decorate this way" or "ignore this" to have a connective experience. You can connect with someone in so many ways using things like food and decor and mood *or not*, depending on what you have available to you, what your desires are, what kind of time you have. We complicate it by trying to get it right when there is no right. There just *is*. Hospitality really is simpler than we think, and that happens when you start with connection. That's your engine.

So why don't we do a couple of quick case studies to show what this could look like. Give you a taste of what I mean so you can think about this a little more easily in your own life.

It's a summer afternoon, maybe surprisingly cooler than usual, so you're outside with your kids while they play in the sprinkler. The retired couple that lives two doors down comes home from something, and y'all chat in the road. The chatting doesn't end as you catch up or get to know each other better because you don't get a chance to talk very often, you're enjoying the conversation, and before long, your neighbor says, "Well, I guess we'll head inside! I need to figure out what we're having for dinner." Now, you might have a tiny pull to invite them to eat with your family. That feels neighborly, it's a little scary but also something you've wanted to do - connect with these neighbors in a different life stage than you. But how? How can you be hospitable so quickly in that moment? I mean, your kids are in the yard still in swimsuits and covered in grass. That suddenly feels like a nightmare when before it just felt like summer. You did decide a little bit earlier to do a snack platter for dinner because it was getting late and it's summer and like we learned in last week's episode, there's a lot more freedom in the definition of what makes a meal in the summer. You already decided that. So you technically have food for your crew, but do your neighbors want a snack platter? Would that be weird to serve them from a big plate of crackers and pepperoni and apple slices and whatever else you have in your house? That's weird, right?

When you start talking yourself out of hospitality on the fly, I want you to come back to the question - what would foster connection? In some cases, simply asking fosters connection. So in that scenario, you could say something like, "Would y'all like to eat with us? I was about to make a quick snack platter (you can describe it as a kid-friendly charcuterie board if you want) and just round the kids up on the porch. We'd love to have you!"

Now, here's what might often happen. Flip the script. Imagine that you are the retired couple talking to the mom of wet grassy children on the cusp of dinnertime, and she invites you to come eat on her porch. What's our response to hospitality on the fly? "Oh, that's fine. We don't want to bother you." or "That's so nice of you, we don't want to impose." We turn down other people's hospitality often because we don't want to be a bother. Spontaneous hospitality is tough on both ends for a lot of people. I say that to encourage you that if your neighbors say no at first, it doesn't mean you did it wrong. You didn't ask wrong or come on too strong or they're repulsed by your lack of grandness in the invitation. It's just hard for a lot of folks.

Okay, so let's say they do say "oh we don't want to impose" or whatever. You could respond by saying "you're not imposing at all!" or you could say out loud what might be happening within everyone for the purpose of connection. For example, you could respond to "we don't want to impose" with "it's not an imposition at all, but I also just threw that on you. You're so welcome to eat with us, or if you already had food you were going to make, feel free to bring your dinner to our porch and eat along with us. I'd just love to hang out a little longer if it's a good time for y'all. And if not, we'll plan something more on purpose soon!" You see? You're connecting. It's not about the food, the timing, the kids, the asking... right now, the way to foster connection is to simply ask. To invite. To recognize that it might feel a little weird to have that first shared meal and give space for options within that. And if they say no, you've still connected. You still made them feel welcomed and wanted. You've opened the door for a planned something or other down the road. Connection still happened simply by offering hospitality on the fly. If the follow-through happens and they do come and eat crackers and pepperoni on your porch or bring their own dinner over, that's great too.

P.S. To this particular example, let's say you're worried that the offering of said crackers and pepperoni isn't enough. This isn't a dinner you say. This will not satisfy these people! But in this particular scenario, what's the most connective thing? It's the being together. It's the kids coming in from the sprinkler and giving one-word answers to the neighbors that might eventually morph into full sentences, who knows. It's getting in the reps of being with these people for a few minutes in a way you don't normally which opens the door for more of that next time, and next time will be even easier. If those neighbors walk back home having sat with you and your family and y'all have connected just a tiny bit more than you have before and they're still a little hungry, guess what? They can eat some food they have in their house. Will they be upset with you for not filling their bellies? One hundred percent no. They will likely feel full of connection and not care in the slightest that they're making a grilled cheese at 8pm because they're still a little hungry. Because the point for them too is likely connection. And they got it. The rest matters less.

Okay, let's do another scenario of hospitality on the fly. You're at church on a Sunday morning. Let's say you're in a couple but no kids for this one. Everyone is milling after the service is over and you and your husband are talking to a new person, let's say someone who just moved to the area for a new job. A way to connect with that person and make her feel welcome is to just ask her to connect. You can say "we were going to go to Chipotle up the street for lunch. Would you like to join us? Maybe we can see if anyone else would like to come too and you can meet another person or two?" Then let her answer. She might do what the retired neighbors did and say no at first. That's the default for a lot of people. "No, that's okay!" But maybe ask again. And invite some others to join. And make it clear to her if she stays with a no that you'll be at that chipotle for a little bit and if she changes her mind and wants to join, you'd love her to have lunch with you. You could even acknowledge the weirdness. I'm a big fan of acknowledging the weirdness. Just saying what it is. "Listen, i know we just met so it might feel forward. You weren't prepared to have lunch with strangers. But for real we'd love for you to come." The point is connection, not the food, not the place, and not even the answer to invitation. You can still be hospitable when the answer is no. Simply asking does a lot.

Now what about people actually coming and eating? Some of you would like to be more prepared which I get. Here's what I suggest. Use two Lazy Genius principles for this - House Rules and Decide Once. Decide once what your hospitality on the fly meal is. Maybe it's oven nachos because corn chips are usually gluten free which helps in being sensitive to at least one food group. Have some seasoned cooked ground beef already in the freezer for such a time as this. Cheese, salsa, maybe sour cream, maybe pickled jalapenos, maybe avocado, whatever you have. Maybe it's a snack platter or naan bread or French bread pizza. Maybe you always have a Stoffers lasagna in the freezer just for this kind of thing, although I get you might not want to eat lasagna in July i don't know. The point is to decide once what your hospitality on the fly meal is. Or have house rules about how you invite, that you eat on paper plates to make it feel easier to you, that you save your takeout money for the very purpose of spontaneous invitations. You decide. But both of those principles could help make the process easier.

This is a light episode because it's summer and you don't have a lot of time to process things, but more than that, you don't need me to say too much about this because ultimately the most pressing problem is that we put too much pressure on the idea of hospitality in the first place. I'm not saying it should be easy for you or that you should lighten up or chill out or whatever. Not in the slightest. We all bring different personalities and expectations and baggage to this idea, so I don't want to be dismissive and reductive and just be like "get over it!" I realize it's not that simple. But even as you sit with why it's hard or what your specific challenges are or why certain relationships are easy to be spontaneous with while others aren't, just remember what matters most. It's always connection. And if that runs the show and pulls the train or whatever, the other stuff has less importance. I think hospitality by nature is fluid and responsive. It's not rigid and planned and organized. You can have some things in place - like a decide once meal - but that's not the thing that's in charge. That's not what makes it work. What makes it work is your perspective and your heart towards the person. Simply connect. That's where it starts. Everything else is a personal choice.

Do you hate me? I feel like sometimes some of you must hate me after episodes like this where I don't have a formula for something you really want a formula for. But remember to start small. Use that Lazy Genius principle in all of this. You don't have to manufacture one experience of hospitality on the fly and then figure out how to replicate it. Fluid and responsive. Connect. Trust that your expectations of togetherness or planning or making an impression, even in the tiniest ways, are for you. They're not for the person you're trying to connect with. You are great. Your home is great. Your awkwardness or intensity or shyness or humor or lack of cooking skills or amazing cooking skills or whatever it is you're worried about, all of it is great. Just connect.

Okay, before we go, let's celebrate our Lazy Genius of the Week! It's Emily Lang who sent me this message after the episode two weeks about starting a summer reading club. She writes: "I love this episode topic so much! I was once a part of a book club with me, 8 retirees, and a librarian. It was bring your own tea and a baked good. Just talking about books and authors we love. I really missed it during the pandemic and it hasn't started up again. I learned so much from them. New genres and authors to be discovered, old men who love YA and children's books, a lady who read anything and everything about birds from poetry to short stories. It was so quirky. This concept works." I love this message so much. I also want to be friends with this woman who reads everything about birds. I love birds. Well correction. I like watching birds. From far away. Birds up close are terrifying. Anything up close is terrifying to be honest. Anyway, the point is I love that Emily shared this story, I love the confirmation that a reading club works, and I hope you all have maybe started one since that episode. If you're new and don't know what I'm talking about, go back two episodes to number 213. So low pressure. And don't forget that if you want to do a book club, not a reading club, with some friends and read *The Lazy Genius Way*, there's a great book club guide with downloadable invitations and questions and all the cute stuff at thelazygeniuscollective.com/lgbookclub. Thanks for sharing this story, Emily!

Okay, that's it for today! Thank you 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!