

#198 - How to Lazy Genius Your To-Do List

Hi, everyone! 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 198 - how to Lazy Genius your to-do list. We've all got 'em, so let's Lazy Genius them. Also weird beginning but what did people do before now, like a long time ago with to-do lists? Like on the Oregon Trail, how did they remember stuff? *Did* they try to remember stuff? How did they celebrate when they fixed a wagon wheel? We all know that half the fun is marking the thing off. Did they mark off fixed wagon wheels? I don't know what I'm saying. I just find it curious how understandably dependent we are on the to-do list, when I don't know that the concept of a to-do list has existed for that long. People have always had stuff to do, but let's think about it. Our culture and lives have evolved to such a point where if we don't write down what we have to do, we will in fact forget. It's not as simple as grow food to eat, make clothes to wear, wash things that get dirty, and then do it again. We have so much to keep track of and to do.

So today we will talk practically about how one can manage one's to-do list, but I have a couple of bigger picture thoughts too as we get started. First, what is the point? What is the actual point of a to-do list? I'm guessing it's so you'll actually get stuff done, right? The assumption is that if it's worth writing down, it's important enough to do. That feels basic, but it's also very telling. How many times have you written something down on a to-do list that you never did. You kept putting it off. You thought it was something you should do, but here you are months later and it's still there. The main thing to remember here with your to-do list is simply a directive on what matters and what you need to do to support what matters. It helps you to not forget of course and it's very fun to cross off the thing, to feel productive and that you accomplished something, but if we don't remember the main point here is to do what matters... I mean, if it says "to do" that means the doing is worth doing. So if you go into this topic forgetting that very important of the importance of the doing, I think you'll stay mildly frustrated with your to-do list situation. Because the problem isn't the system; the problem might be that you're writing down stuff that doesn't actually need doing. It doesn't matter enough. It's making you feel bad for all that you're leaving behind. It leaves you questioning your ability to be a responsible adult who can handle a to-do list. But those four letters "to do" means that you are choosing to make whatever you write down matter. If it doesn't matter, you're not gonna do it. You'll keep putting it off. So make sure you're writing down what actually matters, what you actually want and need to do. If you keep putting it off, there's a reason. Dip deeper into the reason, not into finding a new way to make your list.

So that's the first big thought.

The second one is a new one for me actually and comes from my own experience. I have realized recently how I have come to depend less and less on my to-do list. Well, that's not exactly right. It's more that my list is much shorter than it used to be and sometimes I don't make one at all. And as I've thought about that in recent weeks trying to figure out why, I realized that I am delegating way more than I used to *and* the things that remain on my list are

things that deeply matter so I don't need the reminder as much. The listing out is less about remembering important things because over time I've let a lot more go into the hands of other smarter people or just let it go entirely, and everything that's left *to do* matters. And if it matters, I'm less likely to forget it. Making my to-do list now is more about when things should happen, spacing out tasks throughout the week so I'm not going crazy with too much to do at once. Yeah, it's less about the what and more about the when. And I just want to encourage you to start moving in that direction too or at least consider if it's a helpful direction for you. It might not be. But if you are making a to-do list because you need to remember *what to do*, I think there's a decent chance you're doing too much. Moving into when you'll do it means that you're thinking more intentionally about doing what matters.

Now there are exceptions to this always. This perspective just might not matter on the whole and you don't have to listen to me. Also there are seasons of life where we forget more than we used to. Having tiny babies around and not getting a lot of sleep comes to mind. I used to write down "brush your teeth" because I would forget. I was so overwhelmed by being a mother to an infant that those basic things that didn't need a reminder before very much needed one all of the sudden. There's also something to be said for seasons of life, again like raising a baby, where you feel like you're not doing anything. There's very little that appears productive in your days, and so there's real gratification in marking off "brush your teeth" because you did something.

And this feels like a great place to transition into productivity talk. We think that an active to-do list means we're doing a good job as a human. We are productive and optimized and we even have proof by our words with lines through them. Now there is nothing wrong with words with lines through them. We don't need to go all or nothing on to-do lists. Just because you want to be free from the trappings of constant human optimization doesn't mean you can never make a list again. Just make a list your own way for your own purposes when you need it, and you have to remember that what is on your list and how much gets done or not done has nothing to do with your value as a person. That's where we get stuck. Productivity equals value, and it actually does not. So remember that when you're making your list. If you're writing down a ton of things, it could be because you think you need to accomplish more to count as person, you're writing down a lot of stuff that doesn't actually matter, and/or you're trying to do too much on your own and you need let people in, ask for help, delegate, all the things. Okay, so that's where we begin. Those are the three likely culprits to you feeling overwhelmed by your to-do list.

AD BREAK.

Now let's talk about the practical stuff.

Let's start with your list making personality. I did an episode about this - episode 173, and I shared three completely made-up but also kind of accurate list-making personalities. There's the tracker that writes down all the things, loves to cross it off, and depends on the list to move forward during the day. Then there's the unloader. An unloader is a person who reaches max brain capacity and is like I need to write this stuff down before I can think again. If a tracker's list is like a road, an unloader's list is like a rest stop. Just pull over, refuel, get it all out, and then

keep going. Then the final list-making personality is the developer. This is someone who uses lists as a way to map out steps, kind of like a travel itinerary. They know where they're going and have planned how to get there, but sometimes they need to look at the list for a check-in to see where are we supposed to stop next? What do we do next? So that episode will be linked in the show notes if you want to listen, but it's important to know that not everyone makes lists the same way. And obviously those list-making personalities are not exclusive to to-do lists; it's all kinds of lists. But when we're thinking to-do lists specifically, I think knowing how your brain works and wants to work when it comes to your tasks is very important.

So name your list-making personality, and then let's talk about when. When is the best time for you to make your to-do list and when do you go back and check it? You might make your list at the start of a day and then check off everything you might have done at the end, you could add and cross off throughout the day, you could go entire days without making a list at all as part of your regular rhythm. But think about what you need, how you think, and what matters to you, and then name huh okay this is the best time for me to make my list and this is the best time for me to go back and check in with it. We're all different.

I personally make a to-do list for the week on Sunday nights or Monday mornings if I didn't get to it Sunday night. I go through my calendar, I look back at the week before and anything that didn't get done, I ask myself "what do we need this week?" and write it down. So it's a weekly master list. Then I write certain things down on certain days if they're on a deadline. Otherwise, I just do the next thing that makes the most sense. I'm not beholden to getting these five things done on Monday and these five things done on Tuesday. I thrive with structure that contains great freedom and fluidity. It's like I give myself a container, like a task container, but how everything is packed in it can change from day to day. So I write my list at the start of the week, obviously I add to it when something comes up, and I check in with that day's list at the start of the day. Also when I'm working at my desk, it's open next to me. I have a loosely approximated Bullet Journal situation, so my lists are just in a blank journal, and that journal is always in my work bag or open next to me on my desk. That way I don't miss anything, I know what's coming next, I don't waste my very valuable work time... that rhythm works for me. But you can name your own rhythm and should. You can decide if you want to go digital or analog, if it's better to have one master list for everything - work, home, etc. - or break it into categories. You can use icons or colors or checkboxes or strike throughs. None of that really matters. We think it does because we think those details are why we're not getting as much done when we already covered. You're not getting as much done because either your expectations for your productivity are too high, you're doing stuff that doesn't actually matter, or you're simply doing too much. It's not about the system. Only build your system when you know why you're doing what you're doing.

Now a final word is to put fun things on there. Put fun things on your list. Lazy Geniuses schedule rest. We pay attention to what brings joy and makes us feel like a person. Don't lose sight of those amidst all the grown-up productive things on your list. Those things are beautifully offset and not as gross to do when they're next to tasks and next steps that make you happy and give you purpose. And that is how to lazy genius your to-do list.

I already mentioned the list making personality episode. There's also the lazy genius plans a day. That could give you some good structure around how you take your list and translate into how you live each day. There's also an oldie but a goodie deep in the archives about the lazy genius and time management. I think if you made it to the end of this episode, that one will be majorly helpful for you. I talk about the pillars of time which sounds like fantasy novel but that's fine. All of those episodes will be linked in the show notes if you would like some companion listens to this one.

Thanks so much for 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!