

#90 - Set the Right Goals Without Fizzling Out

Hi, everybody! Happy New Year, and welcome to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today's episode is number 90 - Set the Right Goals Without Fizzling Out.

I like new years. I like Januarys and new calendars and fresh starts. It feels so hopeful and exciting and like the whole world is in front of me. Everything is saturated with possibility. But we know the story; we set a lot of goals, and then we fail at pretty much all of them. Things don't go the way we want. We have bad days. We forget to track the right things and then get so behind in our daily gratitude journal that it just fizzles out, then when we find the mostly empty journal in July, we're reminded of our failure yet again. Enough Januarys like that will often lead us to finding a new way, trying to figure out how to improve as people without falling into a shame spiral every winter. That might have been you last year. In January of 2018, I released an episode called The Lazy Genius Sets Goals. It was episode 45, and I'll link to it in the show notes so you can listen if you haven't already or need a little refresher. In those same show notes, you'll find a link to a pretty long post I wrote called How to Set Goals Like a Normal Person. Both of these pieces speak into our desire to do more and improve and be better and how our usual way of getting there never seems to work. In fact, I basically say that the goal-setting gurus of the world might not have it right for all of us, that having what are called SMART goals - SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound - doesn't actually work. It might for some people, but for many of us, it just doesn't. There's advice to choose 2-5 goals in each area of life - relationships, health, career, stuff like that. Even if you choose one goal in three categories, it still feels like so much to keep up with and basically is disguised as another way to fail.

Let's talk about failure for a minute because the fear of failure is a big thing. It keeps us from trying new things. It keeps us from sharing our ideas with others. It keeps us from being our truest selves when we walk in a room because what if people don't like us? Failing for just being a person is basically the worst kind of failure, and we carry that, a lot of times having no idea the burden is there but tired from it all the same. I hear a lot in books and in blog posts about the tired modern woman trying to balance it all and that we need to say no more and settle our schedules and be better at time management, but I don't really think that's it. I don't think we're so much tired from our schedules and commitments; we're tired from trying to be a person. We're tired of walking into a room and managing all the junk in our heads and the perceived junk we assume is in other people's heads. And if that's the case, if we're tired of trying to be a person, maybe the person we are isn't enough. Maybe we're not being the best we can be. If that's the steady pulse in our minds, that who we are isn't enough or else we wouldn't be so tired, what do we do then? We set goals. We try and be better. We seek out our best selves and reverse engineer how to get there. I don't think there's anything wrong with reverse engineering anything; that's kind of my favorite. But our idea of the ideal is often really narrow and maybe not even super kind. And it's based on what? If you really ask yourself why the ideal version of yourself is the way she is, who decided that? Who decided that your ideal self is rested and clear-skinned and a size six and a great cook and successful at a side hustle and always present with her kids or has kids at all. Your ideal self is supposed to have a style, self-

awareness, a meal plan, a best friend, money for vacation, a house that can host game nights every month, and a journal to keep track of all the emotions that can't help spilling out at the end of another grateful day. When you think of your best self, of your ideal self, what kinds of goals flood your mind in order to make her a thing? Probably a lot, many of which you aren't currently doing. And that's why January is exciting and terrible. There's possibility and two seconds later paralysis from all there is to do, all there is to fail at.

I love how often I get to mention my favorite Emily P. Freeman and her podcast *The Next Right Thing* which is the serene, soulful sister of this podcast if you're interested in listening. Emily often uses the term "a hopeful vision." What does it mean to cast a hopeful vision for who we are? For our futures? For the people we long to be? The tension we feel every January 17th or however long it takes you to fail at whatever it is you set out to do comes when that hopeful vision is in the shape of a checkbox. When your hopeful vision is a destination rather than a path, things get wonky. We spend so much energy trying to become the person we think we should be rather than loving who we already are.

Now hear me, I'm not saying that you can't grow as a person, that you can't experience things that move you in a direction, that you can't learn and change and whatever else you might be hoping for. But as we close, I want to share three steps to help you move from goal-setting that doesn't work to a mindset that does, and the first step is know the difference between formation and transformation. When we set goals, we usually think about transformation. Smaller pants, bigger muscles, zero debt, vacations where there previously were none. We seek to transform ourselves into that ideal version, and the space between who we are now and who we'll be then only counts if we're moving. The minutes and people and choices right in front of us are gray and only serve the end result. They only serve the transformation. Which, if that's how we see goals, totally plays into the feeling of failure. Transformation takes so much longer if we keep failing in the day to day. If I want to transform into somebody that drops three sizes, every day I don't exercise or drink enough water or have a green smoothie is one day further from the transformation, and today? The day I failed? It feels like a waste. But what if we lived formationally? What if, instead of seeking to transform into this other person at the end of a line of steady choices, we saw each day as something that forms us into who we already are? I know this might feel a little tenuous, but let's just think together for a second. If you're tired of trying so hard to be a person, seeking after transformation will make you even more so. But if in that tiredness, you release your expectation to transform into an ideal version and instead see every day as a gentle forming, a shaping of who you already are, the road is so much more gracious. You'll start to see that it's not just that who you are is enough but that you can become an even truer version of that person by recognizing the small ways your choices can form that person even more deeply. This isn't some reverse psychology angle where if you just let it go it'll come to you anyway. No, I don't think that's true at all. This isn't a mind game. Knowing the difference between formation and transformation is the lens that puts goals into perspective. Rather than creating checkboxes around how much water you drank, how many times you said thank you to a stranger, and how often you clean out the refrigerator, you pay attention to the person you already are and the small, daily ways that person continues to form. So instead of setting transformational goals this year, maybe you could ask yourself formational questions. Questions like What filled me up this month? What can I celebrate? How can I give myself margin? How can I love my people well? You're not following those questions with huge action plans and checkboxes on how many days in a row you rubbed your son's back because he likes to be touched. Simply ask formational questions that help you see what goals can cloud over, and then just live your life. No checkboxes, no trackers, just life. Who you are matters, and I

encourage you to stop thinking about transforming into an ideal version of yourself but instead forming into a truer version of who you already are day by ordinary day.

So step one is know the difference in formation and transformation. Step two, see failures as arrows. Failure is hard to swallow, and often when we fail in one area of life, we let it bleed into the others. If we fail at our attempts to become a better cook, really we're just failures at being human. I mean, if I can't cook a piece of chicken, what good am I to anyone for anything? If you're here, forming into what it means to be a Lazy Genius, you might just struggle with that all or nothing mentality. Failing at something isn't just failing at something; it casts a pallor over everything and creates yet another layer of why it's hard to be a person. We don't see ourselves very kindly very often, especially when we fail at something. Now, it's not realistic to say well just don't set goals or try anything or seek to grow or do anything that you might fail at so you won't fail! No, friend. I'm not saying to create a life in which you can't fail; I'm just saying to see failure as an arrow. When you don't do something the way you wanted to, when you don't seem to have the initiative to follow through on a goal, let that failure help point you toward what you're a Lazy Genius about. What actually matters? And what doesn't so much? You might continue to fail because deep down the thing you're pursuing or the reason you're pursuing it just doesn't really matter to you. And if you feel as though it's something you can more or less let go, be lazy about that thing and stop trying to just be a genius about it. Seeing failures as arrows always means that the things you learn from failing continue to point you in the direction of what you need to learn. Last summer, I did something called the 100 Day Project where you choose one creative thing and do it every day for 100 straight days. I usually steer clear of projects and challenges because they feel like they're trying to hype up the ideal version of me rather than who I already am, but this particular structure felt right. So for 100 days, I painted a watercolor painting of some kind of baked good. I missed maybe four or five days, but I have just shy of 100 actual watercolor paintings of donuts and birthday cakes and croissants and everything. Now there were some day, some paintings that I did not like. At all. You might say that I failed at what I intended to do, but those failures acted as arrows. They showed me what to try the next time to get better as a painter and even to get better at being kind to myself when I fail. That's maybe the most important arrow. When we fail, it doesn't have to mean the end. Failure isn't a period or some depressing ending. It's simply an arrow that points to the things that matter, the thing that don't, to things we can try next time to grow in whatever area we're seeking to grow, and most importantly, failure is an arrow that points to a practice of being kindness when we fail at all. See failures as arrows.

So first, know the difference between formation and transformation, two, see failures as arrows, and three, set intentions, not plans.

This might feel like splitting hairs, but you know the difference if you give it a minute to settle in. Plans are actually an intention for something. Plans are concrete steps to achieve an intention we hope for. But we don't always see them that way. In our heads, plans are often more concrete and immovable than intentions are. So it's all a matter of verbiage and the connotations of the words we choose, but if your shoulders tense up when you think about failed plans versus how your shoulders feel when you think about unreached intentions, you might just see the value in changing your language. We need plans when it comes to traveling with kids and building a house and planting a garden. If you just roll with it and don't make plans, you won't have flights or a proper foundation for your house or the right soil for the things you want to grow. Plans are great, but we assign rigidity to plans that we might not need to. Let's actually steal that garden example to hammer this out. You want to plant a garden, so you make a plan.

You choose a little plot in your yard, you learn about the kind of soil you have and ask the expert at the garden store if plants will grow there. You might buy wooden stakes so the tomato vines have somewhere to go. You might get twine and create a little grid in your raised bed so you can see where to plant the seedlings so they're not crowded together. You're planning your garden, and that's a beautiful thing. But you can't plan the growth. You can water and weed and talk to the plants if that's your thing, but you can't plan the growth. You intend for plants to grow in your garden, clearly because you made a plan to create an environment where they could. But the growth has more soul than your plan can offer. So you daily tend and patiently wait and become a better gardener as you watch plants die and learn why. You recognize that you're not going to go from a brown flat rectangle to a magazine-worthy flower garden in weeks or even years. It's a process where planning definitely helps, but in so many ways, you relinquish control. You're simply existing with the day by day action and inaction of this garden, intending that something will grow but content with who you're becoming even if nothing does. Because there is growth. You grow as a gardener. You learn from the failures that point arrows in the right direction. You're seeing the forming, and you're not expecting the transforming. It's a tiny difference but also a really big one.

So as you start this new year and have hopes and dreams and goals, think about these three steps. Know the difference between formation and transformation. Are you seeking to transform into something completely different, or are you continue the process of forming the person you already are? See failures as arrows. You get learn from a failure, and you don't have to allow failure in a single area be an overall judgment on who you are as a person. And set intentions, not plans. Or at the very least, make plans and relinquish control over the results. I know that there are instances where we find holes and loopholes in these three ideas, that there are areas where maybe you need a concrete plan and checkboxes and all the things, but I want to encourage you that those are the exception, not the rule. So maybe, just maybe, this year you don't set goals. I know. What on earth am I saying. But perhaps you can ask questions. If you'd like a little direction on what questions to ask, I have good news. If you click the link in the info section on your podcast app or go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/goals, you'll see a place to drop in your email address, and I'll send you a free download of ten questions to ask yourself at the end of every month - five questions to look back and five questions to look ahead. You can print out twelve copies and put them in a little binder, you can just have the questions as a guide to what you might want to ask yourself in a journal you use, or maybe you just read and mull over them in your brain just this month. There are no rules here, but I'm curious how you differently you'll feel about asking yourself formational questions rather than creating systems and SMART goals.

If you're a SMART goal-setter, get it. I'm not saying goals on their own are bad, but if you're a Lazy Genius, you're probably at the mercy of goal-setting without even realizing how tired it's making you. Remember, that maybe you don't need a huge overhaul of your habits and schedule and dreams. Maybe you just need this little reminder that today is good, who you are already is a gift, and that you're being formed today. Maybe 2019 will be your best year ever, and there's not a single goal in sight. We might just break the Internet if that happened, you guys.

Alright, let's say goodbye for now. Remember to go download that sheet of questions at thelazygeniuscollective.com/goals, and I would love to talk with you this Thursday on instagram around 12:15pm EST. I'll be there live, so follow me @thelazygenius. Thanks for being with me today, and I hope that this new year leads you deeper into the delightful person you already are.

So until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't.
I'm Kendra, and I look forward to seeing you next time.