

366 - Twenty Helpful Decisions I Keep Repeating

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 366 - Twenty Helpful Decisions I Keep Repeating.

You are likely quite familiar with my first book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, which teaches 13 Lazy Genius principles that help you name what matters, ditch what doesn't, and get stuff done. The first and possibly most popular of those 13 Lazy Genius principles is Decide Once. Decide Once means you make one decision about one thing and you keep making that decision over and over until it doesn't work for you anymore. Today, I'm sharing 20 of my Decide Onces. Have we made that a phrase now? Decide Onces? These are twenty decisions I keep repeating.

I've broken them down into four sections: food, kids, money, and personal. There are coincidentally five decisions in each category that I've been making for quite awhile, some for literal years. That makes twenty! So let's walk through them!

The point of this isn't for you to copy what I do. I mean, you certainly can if it makes sense for your life, but this episode is more about showing you the value of deciding once, of having things you no longer have to think about or spend energy on because you've already decided them. Hopefully this episode will give you some specific ideas but also encouragement to think about where you might need another helpful decision.

We'll go through the categories in the order I listed them, so let's start with food.

Helpful food decision number one: We eat from a dinner queue only. What is a dinner queue? It's a way to make the choice of what you eat for dinner easier. You could have a breakfast queue or a lunch queue, but it's essentially a curated list of meals that work for you in your current season of life and maybe even season of the year. We have had the same general dinner queue for years. I occasionally get inspired by a new cookbook or a recipe I found online to try a new meal, and if it works, it gets added to the dinner queue. But when I meal plan every week, that queue is written on the dry erase calendar where I put the meals, so I do not have to decide where I'm deciding meals from. The queue is there waiting for me, and I love it.

Helpful food decision number two: I plan food for the week on Sundays. Does this have to shift occasionally? Of course. But the default decision is that on Sundays when I'm planning out my week in general, I also plan meals. I look at the weather, the calendar, and the dinner queue I already mentioned, and I write down dinners. The way I do this and the details I consider might change season to season or even week to week, but Sunday is the day for me. Now, if I miss Sunday for some energetic or logistical reason, I have a bonus Decide Once that covers the miss, and that bonus Decide Once is Pasta Mondays. We have pasta every Monday and have for so many years it's nuts. I need Mondays to be easy, and pasta is easy. But if I also don't get around to the weekly meal plan on Sunday, I don't have to stress about Monday because I

already know we're having either spaghetti, stroganoff, frozen tortellini, or bolognese. Every time. I can quickly know which of those to choose based on my energy, time, and the ingredients we have. So even when I don't meal plan on Sunday, I can do it on Monday without too much hassle because of Pasta Mondays.

Helpful food decision number three: one of the easiest ways I weekly meal plan is that I let each kid choose a meal. Do they often pick the same thing? Yes. Am I okay with that? Also yes. My middle kid often chooses any number of meals. I'm surprised by his answers actually. The oldest and youngest are pretty straight-forward: spaghetti for Sam, and nachos for Annie. But Ben dislikes both of those, so on certain weeks like this one for example, I'll let the kids pick but ask that they choose something we haven't had in awhile or that they haven't chosen in awhile. If they get weird about it, I'm just like, "That's fine you don't have to choose anything! I'll happily fill in the week myself. Just wanted to give you an option if you wanted it." No drama. And usually they'd rather pick something they kind of like over not picking anything at all. But y'all that's three dinners a week. Are you kidding? Easiest Decide Once ever, and I'm not even making the actual choices! Again, this has been something I've done for years.

Helpful food decision number four: frozen breakfast. I don't make breakfast during actual breakfast time. The only time I cook breakfast for real is when it's for dinner. Otherwise, the kids get whatever they want out of the pantry or, most commonly, the freezer. I make chocolate pumpkin bread - like the biggest pan you've ever seen - every couple of weeks, freeze the pieces, and all three kids eat it regularly. When I make breakfast for dinner, it's usually pancakes and bacon, and I make a million so that I can freeze those too. Plus, there's instant oatmeal, cereal, and Ben will sometimes fry himself an egg. I like calm mornings as much as I'm able to have them, as do my kids. If there is a lot of cooking of the breakfast every day, calm will not be our friend, not in our house at least. So frozen breakfast forever and ever amen.

Helpful food decision number five: our lunch formula. I've shared this before, probably a long time ago in the lunch episode, but we have a kid lunch formula I've been using since my oldest was in preschool, and he's about to finish 8th grade. We have used PlanetBox stainless steel lunchboxes for over a decade, and we still love them. In fact, the lunchboxes themselves are the same over those years. We haven't had to replace the actual box. We've replaced the kids' cloth covers maybe once or twice for each kid, just because their tastes change, but these lunchboxes have been the workhorses of our kitchen forever. The ones we have are broken into five bento style compartments, so our lunch formula is the same even when the kids eat lunch on a regular plate at home. There's a main protein like a sandwich or salami and a cheese stick or whatever. Then there are two fruits. I decided awhile ago to not push vegetables in lunches but in dinners instead. My kids have never been snacking on raw veggie people. Frankly neither am I. So with the exception of the occasional baby carrot stick, two fruits. Then the fourth main compartment gets a crunchy thing. That's what we call it. Crunchy things are crackers, pretzels, chex mix, and chips. My oldest would eat a bag of chips a day, so we do limit those since his own eating brakes are broken in that department. "Is it a chip day?" is a common question in our house. Then there's this tiny compartment in the middle of the lunchbox where I'll put chocolate chips or sour patch kids or the perfectly sized chocolate covered marshmallow from Trader

Joe's, and my kids call that "a middle thing." Even when we're not using those boxes, a lunch time dessert is called "a middle thing." It's hilarious. But that formula has worked for us for literal years, and I won't stop until it stops working.

Okay, that's food! Planning from a dinner queue, Sunday weekly meal planning, each kid get to choose one meal a week, frozen breakfast, and a kid lunch formula. Boom.

Next category is kids! These are more home rhythms, but since more than half of the humans in my home are kids, it makes sense that a lot of our rhythms are about them. But whether you have kids or not, finding rhythms for how you live and deciding how you can make that easier might be helpful.

Helpful kid decision number one: tidy before screens. We've been doing this forever. Before my kids get screen time in the afternoons, they have to tidy what we call the L which is the rough L shape of our living room and kitchen. It's where 90% of our family life and therefore family mess happens, and I don't want to spend the time I have where they don't need me cleaning it up. No thank you. We are a family, and we share the load. A tidy is so ingrained in them that they often do it without being asked. Crazy.

Helpful kid decision number two: homework before screens. That's easy enough, but as a default it's the decision. Now, that doesn't mean that as soon as the kids get home, they start homework. I'm pretty sure I talk about this in the after school routine episode, but like any routine, you're looking at it like a container, not a list. Homework is one of the things that happens in the afternoons, but it doesn't have to be the first. However, it does need to happen before screen time.

Helpful kid decision number three: books and reading are always a yes. If a kid wants to read past his bed time, the answer is yes. If a kid is in a store and wants to buy a book, the answer is yes. If a kid asks to go to the library, the answer is yes. Books and reading are a high priority in our house, and since two out of three of my kids aren't big readers, when they ask, I will say yes as fast as possible.

Helpful kid decision number four: each kid has a meal they clean up. This is a newer addition to our family rhythm, but it has worked so great. I got the idea from a friend of mine who was sharing how she was approaching meal time clean up where each kid gets a meal since she also has three kids, and we've been using it ever since. Ben is breakfast, Annie is dinner, and Sam is the weekend since they're at school during lunch. Once we hit the summer, we'll likely adjust a bit where each kid can for real take care of a meal, but it's been so easy and requires no decision making from me. The decision is already made.

And helpful kid decision number five: they get clean at night. We have five people in our house and two showers. One of the showers is about to be under renovation because it doesn't function very well to be a shower anyone prefers. That means everyone uses our primary shower. Everyone. Since that is case and since our evening rhythms currently lend themselves

to this, our kids always get clean at night, not the morning. We also don't have to constantly ask or decide who's showering when because they even go in the same order. Annie goes first since she goes to bed first, Ben is next, and Sam is last. Every night. And it's great. No decisions to be made. Praise be.

So that's tidy before screens, homework before screens, reading is always a yes, each kid cleans up after a certain meal, and the kids get clean at night. Done.

Next up, let's look at five helpful money decisions and five helpful personal decisions.

These money decisions are not exactly money, but I couldn't think of a good word. It's kind of money, giving, contributions, that kind of thing. Maybe it's generosity? But that feels kind of, I don't know, I don't know if I like that description. It sounds like I'm saying I'm so deeply generous. And also I care a lot about generosity. That's a personal value, so maybe that is the right word. Either way, I have five helpful decisions in this category I keep repeating.

First helpful generosity decision: meal trains get chicken shawarma. Any time I know I'm going to take a meal to someone for any reason, it's always chicken shawarma. If I don't have time to cook, I'll get their favorite takeout, but if I'm cooking, that's what it is. It's a little bit of extra time because of the components I like to include, but they're all brainless for me. Plus, I like the built-in incentive to make that meal for others so I can also make some for us. The chicken shawarma recipe is on my website, but I always serve it with yellow coconut rice, pickled onions and sometimes jalapeno, maybe lettuce and tomato for a greek thing, maybe grilled or sauteed vegetables if I have them, homemade naan if I have time or storebought pita pockets if I don't. The things I sent all change, but the chicken itself is always the centerpiece. I like sending it because it's freaking delicious and because it's usually surprising for folks since it's really fresh and a lot of meals we tend to send to people are in the casserole category. Nothing wrong with that! I love a casserole. I just like to send something that's maybe a different speed than the usual.

A bonus Decide Once I have when taking a meal to someone is I never send it in any containers that need to be returned. I get those takeout containers that restaurants use for ingredient prep and just replace them when I run out. I also get little foil drip trays for grills that are perfectly sized to send hot food in, and most stores have little disposable sauce cups that are so great, too. I use those for our own lunches, but they're great for sending food to people and I get them in my Walmart grocery delivery! Love doing that.

Okay, second helpful generosity decision: when a school needs money, I give it. I tend to not volunteer to chaperone field trips or do things in the classroom much, at least up until this year, but when a teacher needs something in her classroom, I get it. I donate money, I order supplies, I replace the pencil sharpener that broke. That's a way we love to use the money we have. My husband works in the public school system, and all of our kids go to public schools. I know that

public schools aren't for everybody, nor are they always equipped to help with specific educational and emotional needs for every kid. But as a default, we want to stay in the public school system and make it work for as many kids as possible from the inside out. Giving money whenever a school needs it is one of those ways.

Helpful generosity decision number three: As a default, we don't sell our stuff. We give it away. This is an excellent place to remind everyone that these are not decisions that work for everyone, but here's why this one works for us. Like I already said, generosity is something we care a lot about as a family, partly because we were the beneficiaries of other people's generosity for years and years, but also our needs are met and we'd like to help meet other people's needs wherever we can. Making a choice different from this is neutral. Absolutely. Our choice is that we would rather be generous than make money on something. I'm a big believer in sunk costs, that once you spend the money on something, it's spent. I don't like spending my energy trying to figure out how to get that money back if I can. So we just give things to people, to friends and family and neighbors. Even when we lend someone money, whether a little or a lot, we always have the posture of not getting the money back. Not because we don't think the person will pay us back, but if someone forgets or whatever, we're not going to hold that over. Once something is given, it's truly given. No returns needed. I feel weird sharing this one to be honest because I don't want it to sound like I'm trying to toot our own generosity horn. We just care about this a lot, so we prioritize it in our life. We make concessions in other places, we don't live extravagantly except when it comes to my shoe collection, and we like being able to give people things without expecting anything in return.

Helpful generosity decision number four: if I invite you to something, I pay. Sure, there are situations where if you're going to lunch with a friend and you both talked about it, you just pay for your own food or whatever. Cool. But if I'm going to do something that costs money and want to invite someone along or if we're doing something as a family that costs money and want to invite friends of our kids along, we pay. If we invite you, we pay. Easy peasy.

Helpful generosity decision number five: when it's time to get a kid a gift, we get them either Genius Square or a slime making kit. You might have just gasped. A slime making kit?! Listen, we found the kit unicorn. This thing is so well done, the recipe is great, and if you mix the slime in a cheap plastic measuring cup pouring thing, it's really easy to keep it out of everything. Annie and I look forward to making slime because of how good this kit is, and for an artistic tactile kid, the slime kit is the gift. If not, Genius Square or Genius Star is they're a little older since Star is a bit more challenging. They're always winners. We'll put links in the show notes, and as always this entire list plus links will be in the next edition of Latest Lazy Listens, are biweekly email that summarizes the last two podcast episodes. You can sign up at thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens.

So that's meal trains get shawarma, when a school needs money we give it, we don't sell our stuff but give it away instead, if we invite you we're paying, and kids get either Genius Square or a slime making kit for a gift.

One final category: personal.

Helpful personal decision number one: I don't feel guilty for having fun. That might sound weird, but also if you're a woman who is over the age of 30 or so, you might feel guilty for having fun, mostly because there are so many responsible things you should be doing. And honestly, I think this is sometimes a choice. It's a choice to ignore the cultural messages we've been getting for years that our productivity is king, that as women our care for the other people in our lives is our main purpose. Do I love caring for my family and friends and community and even y'all? I genuinely do. But I can care about that and also do things for myself without guilt. I can read in the middle of the day. I can draw while my husband cleans the kitchen or just leave the kitchen for now if I want. I can take trips with girlfriends. I can do things that are fun just because they are fun and not feel guilty for making that choice. It's honestly been one of the most transformative decisions I've made as an adult. I choose to not feel guilty for having fun.

Helpful personal decision number two that's a current decision and I'll stop when it no longer works for me, but right now when I draw or paint, I draw or paint a face. I'm not doing landscapes or trees or flowers or anything except faces. Sometimes we get stuck in a hobby because of all the options we have. This simple decision that I'm just drawing faces right now has been so fulfilling and freeing.

Helpful personal decision number three: I wash my face when Annie gets ready for bed. I've been doing this for a couple of years now, but rather than washing my face and doing my night time skincare right before I go to bed, I do it while Annie is taking a shower or bath in my bathroom. When I waited, I'd get too tired and annoyed and then not do all the things I wanted to do. Now, I do hours before I actually go to bed which even gives the serums and stuff more time to do stuff! But more than that, I do what matters to me which is my skincare but at a time when I'm not rushing or forcing myself through.

Helpful personal decision number four: I eat a real lunch during a real lunch break. This was harder to do with tiny kids, so please hear me that this is not always a simple or even necessary decision for everyone, especially those of you home in the trenches with tiny humans. Lunch is often the crusts of a PBJ. That's just the nature of that season. But even when I got out of that season, I was still metaphorically eating the crusts of a PBJ. I wasn't really eating a meal, I was doing work while I ate, or I was eating super fast so I could do the next thing on my list. Then a few years ago, my therapist was like, "Maybe you need to eat a real lunch and have a real lunch break." It took me a little bit of time to recognize the value of that, but now that I've been doing it for years, I never want to change. My real lunch during a real lunch break where I seriously do not do anything productive unless productive means making my way through another season of Sherlock. It's glorious. Is it something everyone has access to? No. I didn't always either. But sometimes it's good to remember that something we had to do before might not be what we have to do anymore.

And finally, helpful personal decision number five: Fridays are sacred. Friday is my day off, and it's like a long lunch break. I have fun, I rest, I watch something, I read, I go to Goodwill and

piddle. It's truly a day off. And by day, I mean until about 2pm when I need to get ready to get Annie from school. But those days are truly sacred.

Now, this is a great segue into teasing next week's episode. Next week is our quarterly what's saving my life episode which we love. But I'm also recognizing that some of the things that regularly save my life or are consistently helpful decisions like taking Fridays off will go out the window once summer starts. Everyone will be in the house in a few weeks. I won't get my lunch breaks or Fridays in the same way, and that's tough. Sometimes our helpful decisions go through mini seasons of adjustment, and next week, I'll talk about that a little bit, along with this quarter's actual list of what's saving my life.

So to recap my helpful personal decisions: I don't feel guilty for having fun, I draw faces when I want to draw, I wash my face when Annie gets ready for bed, I eat a real lunch during a real lunch break, and Fridays are sacred.

Those twenty helpful decisions I keep repeating might not seem like much on their own. One decision is helpful and nice, but sometimes we don't always see the benefit of a small choice like a middle thing in a lunchbox. But when you start to decide once about things that matter in your life, you move from a single star to a constellation of decisions, and that constellation really creates a beautiful picture of a life that matters to you. Your decisions altogether can offer tremendous clarity and contentment in your life, so I hope this episode encourages you to think about the decisions you've already made and maybe one or two you think would be helpful to add.

And that's twenty helpful decisions I keep repeating.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Lois, no last name. Hi, Lois! Lois has a decide once for summer with little kids. Lois writes, "I realized we were turning down spontaneous invites to go swimming because it was just too hard to get everyone ready and out the door in the morning with snacks, sunscreen, etc. The two most important things to me were saying yes to time with friends and avoiding sunburns. I decided that from now on (or at least until my kids could reliably help with applying sunscreen) we would all wear long sleeve swim suits/rash guards. I got distinctive, bright colors/patterns for the extra bonus of making it easy to spot my kids in a crowd. This simple switch doesn't sound like much but if you've ever tried to supervise and sunscreen two little ones you know it can really be a hurdle. We started this when my kids were 3 and 1, and now they are 9 and 7 and we've added a baby to the mix. Our rule still holds and continues to be my golden example of how the Lazy Genius steps really can make things easier." This is such a great idea, one I know some of you listening have as well. I love how thoughtful Lois was in why she chose to do this and how this one decision, now running on six years, has helped prioritize what matters most. This is so great, Lois! Thanks for sharing, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

This episode is hosted by me, Kendra Adachi, and executive produced by Kendra Adachi, Jenna Fischer, and Angela Kinsey. The Lazy Genius Podcast is enthusiastically part of the Office Ladies Network. Special thanks to Leah Jarvis for weekly production.

Thanks, y'all, 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!