

## 372 - 10 Things I Wish I'd Known In My 20s

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 372 - 10 Things I Wish I'd Known In My 20s.

I'm currently 42 and a half ish so I'm a decent distance from my 20s, and as often happens when we go through life, we learn things along the way. And sometimes we learn things that we so desperately wish we had learned earlier. Does that negate their value now? No. Is learning part of the process? Of course. But this is a kind of reflection I find interesting. I think we can learn a lot about ourselves by acknowledging what we have already learned. Since it's middle of summer energy, this felt like a great time to share ten things I wish I'd known in my 20s. Let's jump right in.

Number one, when it comes to adulting, there is rarely a right way. The list of adulting tasks is impossibly long, and when I was in my 20s, I honestly thought my job was to find the right way to do all of them. I read all the magazines so I could copy all the systems. I tried to follow the right cleaning schedule, give the right types of gifts and tips to various service professionals, I thought we should have a certain amount of money in savings and invest in this particular way and prepare for the future the way that one book said to. The list of how to adult is enormously long, and the answers are beyond plentiful. But I really thought being an adult was trying to solve a puzzle or crack a code. This is the way this is done, and once you discover it, you're good. That's just not how it is. I honestly did not know that in my 20s. And while I know it now and you might too, the idea of "the right way" still trips us up sometimes. We're looking for the right way for everything, and really and truly, when it comes to adulting, there is rarely a right way. Praise be that is true.

Number two, no one knows what they're doing. No one does. It's not that everyone is pretending all the time, but being an adult is really about making decisions we think are best for us right now even though we don't always know if that decision is indeed best for us or not. Therefore, we don't really know what we're doing. Maybe over time after a series of decisions and a growing confidence in our ability to make them, we can feel stronger about how we're living and what we're doing. We grow to know a little bit more than we used to. But ultimately, anyone who is supremely confident in the way they do things and tries to get you to do that same thing is likely not a voice you want to give much credence to. Anyone who doesn't leave room for multiple ways of doing life and has humility in what they have chosen is likely not going to show you a lot of kindness or compassion when your life doesn't go according to plan. Even though you'll likely grow more confident over time as I have in my early 40s, it's still a beautiful thing to admit that you don't know what you're doing but that you're being as wise as you can in the season you're in.

Number three, sunscreen is your most important skincare product. Put on sunscreen, pals. Because I have middle school boys and am sometimes around their peers, I'm aware of the

current middle school skincare trend. Young kids are spending money on pretty expensive skincare products on skin that doesn't really have any issues yet. But hey, People magazine and Doc Martins were all the rage when I was in middle school, and I wanted both desperately. I'm not knocking the desire to hang with the trends or with loving skincare. I love skincare products! But whether you're in sixth grade or sixty years old and you wear skincare products that either cost a lot of money or take any time to put on and you're not always wearing sunscreen, you might as well not buy or use anything at all. The sun is the biggest culprit in all of your skin concerns, so sunscreen is your best defense against those issues. I wore sunscreen all the time in the summer because I burn like butter in a hot skillet. But I never wore sunscreen on my face in other seasons of the year because I was embarrassed about being pale, and I totally wish I had. Regardless, I know it now and wear it now, multiple times a day, and I'm so glad.

Number four, dopamine hits from laughing and playing with friends are better than ones from shopping and the Internet. When I was in my 20s, the Internet was starting to make its magic. What do you mean you can buy a shirt on your computer? What do you mean I can see what all of these people are doing today? What do you mean people will comment on what I'm doing and say nice things about the color I'm wearing? What do you mean I can go to this store called Target and get all of these cute clothes at once? And that was in my very very late 20s! We haven't had a Target in Greensboro for more than 12 years or so.

There is nothing wrong with shopping and the Internet. Both are necessary, and both are fun. But I think for a time when I was younger, I found myself escaping into other forms of fulfillment, forms that were not connected to other people as much. I was also a person who didn't have a lot of fun. I was so tightly wound that laughing loud or playing games I was bad at or anything playful felt threatening or embarrassing or even dangerous because what if someone didn't want to be my friend anymore afterward? Poor young Kendra.

The struggle for me at least is real because the dopamine hits need dopamine hits now since the Internet is always there, but as I've gotten older, I see more and more how much I crave and love moments with people where we're playing, laughing, and just being together as humans face to face. Relationships become more and more valuable the older I get, and they fill a need I tried to fill other ways for a long, long time.

Number five, learning to pivot is better than learning to plan. We know this one, right? Now, I do, but holy moly in my 20s I never pivoted. Or if I was forced to, I resented it to my core. We all have multiple areas where we make plans, where we have expectations, where we assume something is going to happen this way because we organized it to do that. But plans work so rarely, and without kindly accepting the need to pivot, we just get wonky and mean and in our own heads.

I'm going to read you a story real quick, a story that's in my first book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, and even though I don't think I use the word pivot in this story, it's a story about 20-something Kendra planning something and pivoting zero percent.

“My first job out of college was at the church where I spent my high school years and where, a few months earlier, I had gotten married. Many of my co-workers had known me since before I could drive a car, and now I was a grown-up with a husband and a job description. I was eager to prove I belonged.

Once a month, we had a morning staff meeting, and co-workers would take turns providing breakfast for everyone. Many months had the usual fare of grocery store muffins and fruit salad, and I remember thinking, *I can do better than this*. I eventually signed up for breakfast duty not out of kindness but because I wanted *my* breakfast to be the gold standard. Yes, I cringe with humiliation as I publicly share such hubris, but as a self-righteous perfectionist, I was obsessed with keeping score, avoiding failure, and being impressive. Comparison and judgment were par for the course. Most folks paired up to provide the meal, but no, ma’am, not me. I was going to this entire shindig on my own. I figured weak, unimpressive people ask for help. Outwardly confident, inwardly crumbling people go solo.

Obviously, perfection was my standard - and not for the food alone. Despite the fact that my husband and I had zero dollars, I splurged on a couple of platters from Pottery Barn so that the food I served would look beautiful. I bought a linen tablecloth; the plastic ones at church would make my new platters look bad. I purchased one of those glass drink dispensers you see in *Southern Living* because perfection doesn’t serve beverages from plastic pitchers. Fresh flowers, fancy napkins - you get the idea. For the menu, I thought back to a few weeks earlier when we had breakfast at a friend’s house and the entire group was in a stupor over his stuffed French toast: gooey, golden, and a definite contender for best breakfast ever. It was the perfect choice.

But here’s the kicker: I didn’t know how to make stuffed french toast. I knew how to cook a decent spaghetti sauce and was in the early stages of a near-perfect chocolate chip cookies, but my culinary skills weren’t exactly versatile. Maybe if I had followed a recipe things would’ve worked out differently. Alas, at the time, I thought recipes were also for the weak. So I set out to make not one but two types of stuffed french toast for thirty people without a single instruction. In case you don’t know how stuffed french toast is made, let me quickly explain. You essentially make a sandwich, using a rich buttery bread like brioche and slather the middle with something yummy like cheese, jam, or Nutella. Then you dip that sandwich into a custard base made with egg, sugar, and whole milk and cook it in hot butter until the bread is crunchy and golden. Finally, you drizzle it with syrup or powdered sugar and cram it into your mouth with a fork or shovel. It’s heavenly.

Here’s what I did. For stuffed french toast number one, I put American cheese between slices of Wonder bread and stacked the sandwiches high on a baking sheet - as in, literally on top of one another. Recipe complete. For stuffed french toast number two, I made cream cheese and raspberry jelly sandwiches with that same magical Wonder bread and stacked those high as well. Then I put the pan in the oven. To bake. There was not an egg or stick of butter in sight. I essentially warmed up weird sandwiches and thought I was Martha Stewart. When I pulled them out, I noticed they looked a little different from my friend’s but maybe that was a good thing

because they were better, cut them into triangles, and put them on my fancy platters. Lipstick on an overly confident pig. An hour later (I die thinking back to how gross they must have gotten by then), the staff meeting started. I sat in the back of the room and drew zero attention to myself, not out of embarrassment but because I didn't want my fellow staff members to know that I wanted them to know I was responsible for this culinary masterpiece. I sat at a table, watching my friends and coworkers line up for breakfast, "humbly" waiting for the praise to pour in.

I don't need to tell you that it did *not*. Breakfast was disgusting. I mean, really and truly disgusting. I could sense not only the disappointment in the room but also the awkward game of social hot potato as people tried to thank the mystery cook for a breakfast they would later need to supplement with granola bars. Maybe I was dramatic to almost quit my job over this fiasco, but that response mostly checks out. I was humiliated. I had tried to be impressive, to show everyone I could do it all; set a perfect table, make a perfect meal, and receive compliments with perfect humility. Instead, I probably gave somebody food poisoning. I cared too much about the wrong things. In case you're wondering, this is definitely not how to think like a Lazy Genius."

End scene. Again, no mention of the word pivot in that story, but that is an encapsulation of how I was in my 20s, especially the first half. So obsessed with being impressive and getting it right. Not asking for help. And definitely not being flexible when things don't go according to plan. In my mind, plans were definitely pass/fail, and in this one I failed epically. Learning to pivot is so much more important than learning to plan. First, remember that plans are just intentions and not pass/fail, but when those plans don't work and you're bummed about it, practice pivoting. Be kind, ask for help, let people in, be cool about it. Stay calm and kind so you can actually come up with a helpful solution. It's a wonderful skill to have, one I decidedly did not have in my 20s. I'm so thankful I eventually found my way. Wait for it... the Lazy Genius way. I'm hilarious.

Number six, Stephen King isn't always scary. I definitely wish I had known this in my 20s because I could've been reading Stephen King for so many years! If you're new here, I recently became a Stephen King fan. Last summer, I decided to finally give one of his books a try and listened to *The Stand* on audio. It was amazing, and I immediately listened to both 11/22/63 and It in subsequent months. I say months because those three audiobooks combined equal over 120 hours. For three books. Anyway, I've since read several more Stephen King books and am currently listening to Duma Key now. Some of his books are scary, some are not, but even the scary ones are not what I expected. Stephen King is a masterful storyteller, and he is top three authors forever. It's him, Neil Gaiman, and Wendell Berry. I would really love to host that dinner party. But considering how much joy Stephen King novels have brought to my 40s, man I wish I had known he wasn't what I thought in my 20s.

Number seven, you're allowed to change your mind. See Stephen King. I always thought I hated scary things, and maybe I never really did, or more accurately, maybe I changed my mind. You're allowed to do that. You're allowed to like something, then not, or not like something and then not be able to stop talking about it. You're allowed to think that this particular choice will work for your home and when it doesn't, you pivot and try something else. You're allowed to say

that this thing matters this season but then as you get further into the season, you realize something else matters more. You're allowed to change your mind. In my 20s, I didn't think that was a thing. I thought I had to make a choice and then stick with it until I die. No, dear friends. No no no no no.

Number eight, relationships don't have to be deep to matter. I got lucky in my early 20s and made a couple of super close couple friends out the gate. Then I met Emily P. Freeman who has been one of my favorite and closest humans on the planet for almost 18 years. I've also made several other friends in the last eight years who I would do anything for. I've been really fortunate in how my life has crossed and aligned with the lives of some other super rad people. This is a weird take on this particular lesson, but because I had such close friendships in my 20s, I expected that every friendship needed to be that way, even into my 40s. I think intuitively I knew that it was okay to not be as close with everyone you know, but I still struggled to understand my friendships if they weren't best friends you'd do anything for. Wasn't everyone just on the path to being that kind of friend for me and if they weren't what was the point? No no no. That's why I loved Laura Tremaine's book, *The Life Council: 10 Friends Every Woman Needs*. It's not a prescriptive book in the sense that you need to check off all ten of these kinds of friendships in order for it to all count, but she talks about how different relationships fill different needs and now beautiful and necessary and meaningful that is. Relationships don't have to be deep to matter.

One particular friend type she describes in the book is the Daily Duty friend. This is the person you might see in the yard taking care of her tiny humans like you are yours, or maybe it's the parent you see at school pickup every day. Maybe it's someone you work with who is doing the same daily things you're doing. I have several friends who are Daily Duty friends, moms I see at pickup, where we take each other's kids to school or get a kid if the mom is running late or any number of things. I don't know a lot about the lives of those women, but we like each other and they're my friends. They don't have to be deep friends to matter in friendship. That lesson works both ways. If you're someone who loves a deep relationship and has some, not every friendship has to look like that in order to count. And if you're someone who doesn't have a deep friendship that you might long for, the friendships you do have that aren't as deep still count. They still serve a purpose. They still matter. If you want to read more about that, the book again is called *The Life Council* by Laura Tremaine.

Number nine, treat your body like she's a home you love. Good gravy, women and their bodies. It's a whole thing, right? When I was in my 20s, I had an eating disorder, and it wasn't great. I was praised for looking cute because I was super thin, and thin for the longest time was the only way to be. Thankfully we're moving away from that, but twenty years ago, that was the only path to being pretty. I treated my body so poorly in my 20s. I measured her and restricted her and judged her. It's kind of upsetting to think back on it. I've since grown a lot in this area and have a lot more kindness towards my body than I ever have. And I'm also in my 40s in perimenopause, where my body is starting to do things I don't love. She's so cranky all the time now! What is this madness!

I love a good metaphor. They give my brain something to hold on to and help me make sense of something complicated. My relationship with my body has historically been complicated, so the metaphor that I wish I had known in my 20s was that I need to treat my body like she's a home I love. We are comfortable in a home we love. We tend to a home we love. We might go through some hard seasons where we're renovating certain parts of a home we love and it feels weird and frustrating and we can't quite see the end. We typically don't tend to and definitely don't renovate an entire home we love all at once. That's a choice that makes us feel crazy. But when I think about my body as though it's a home I love which in many ways, it very much is, it allows me to be gentle and intentional with my care. I can care. I can tend. I can even seek to improve when a certain space isn't working for my season of life in the way I'd like. My joints are an excellent example. I have glass knees basically, and I've always avoided exercise that would help my joints improve because exercise is so tightly connected to diet culture and restriction and changing my body's shape. But if I see movement as a way to tend to this space in my home that's not working so well anymore, a space I want it to work better and exist more naturally in the overall home, it makes sense for me to do that. It's not strange to tend to and improve and be patient with a home you love. You kindly live there. I wish I had known that about my body in my 20s, but I'm glad I know it now.

And finally number ten. I wish I knew that Daniel Radcliffe gets super hot. All of the Harry Potter movies were out by 2011 when I was 30. I started reading Harry Potter in my late 20s and inhaled the movies right alongside. If you had told me that little Danny would turn into the hottie he is now, I would never have believed you. Daniel Radcliffe is currently on my Mount Crushmore, mostly because he's kind and interesting in addition to being hot, but good gracious he got super hot. Twenty-something year old Kendra had no idea what awaited her.

And those are 10 things I wish I'd known in my 20s.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Kristen Lunceford. Kristen writes, "My husband and I just completed the 8th house move of our 20-year marriage. While pulling the hanging stuff off the walls for the umpteenth time, I was reminded of something genius I've been doing since about move #3 that, coincidentally, aligns with my favorite LG principle #3: Ask the magic question.

What is something I can do now while packing to make rehangng artwork in the new house easier later? I tape whatever hardware the frame, mirror, or whatever was hanging on to the back of it. When we get to the new house and my brain and all our spaces look like the bottom of a toaster, I don't have to waste time and energy remembering what I used to hang something or searching for nails and hooks among the chaos. The moment I know where I want to hang something up, I find the hardware on the back and let out an audible "thank you" to my past self for being so smart. It brings me all the joy and makes the nesting phase of moving so much easier." Oh man do I love this. This is something we all wish we'd known in our 20s or are glad we know as we're in them! It's tiny things like this that make all the difference in staying integrated during hard circumstances. Moves are stressful, and being able to hang art you love without stress allows for calm to exist in other places, too. When we stay calm through one

stressor, it leaves us the margin and teaches us the practice of staying calm through the next one. I love this. Thanks for sharing, Kristen, 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!