

381 - The Real Reason Planning Is Hard

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 381 - the real reason planning is hard.

It's not what you think, and I'm excited to bring you into the light of the productivity industrial complex. I promise it's more exciting than it sounds.

The best way for me to explain this is using words that I already wrote, that were edited many times over, and are currently being printed into my new book, *The PLAN: Manage Your Time Like a Lazy Genius*. We're into compassionate time management around here, but it's not just pep talks and high fives. We're practical and kind, sure, but we're also educated. We are trying to understand why we struggle with time management, why we own so many planners, why we never feel like we're doing enough, and even if we finally have let that go, we still struggle against the tide of everyone else making us feel bad for our beliefs.

Basically, the problem is not you, and today I'm going to show you why by reading you the first chapter in my new book, out October 8, called *The PLAN*. Here it is.

I grew up going to the mall.

If you're of an age where you're not sure what a mall is, now is a good time to tell you that I'm in perimenopause, I've never downloaded TikTok, and I didn't have a cellphone until I was seventeen. Not because my parents were strict but because *people didn't have them yet*. Consider yourself generationally warned.

Back to the mall. I loved spending time there as a kid. The mall is where I got my ears pierced, where I awkwardly hung out with a boy I liked, where I ate a truckload of Cinnabons, and where I learned to confidently walk past Victoria's Secret without looking or breaking stride.*

*Say you grew up in purity culture without saying you grew up in purity culture.

But my favorite thing about the mall was the "You Are Here" map. Holy moly, I *still* love that thing. Not only do you have the stores organized by category on a giant screen, but you also have a beautiful red dot that tells you exactly where you are.**

**Say you're an Enneagram 1 without saying you're an Enneagram 1.

You can see everything, *and* you can see yourself.

Chances are you'd like that for your life, too. Wouldn't it be *amazing* to see everything at a glance so you can quickly chart a route to an imagined future where life is beautiful and under control?

That's probably why you keep buying planners.

A planner is the closest thing we have to a "You Are Here" map, to that bird's-eye view. You want your day, week, month, quarter, year, to-do lists, tracking bubbles, words of gratitude, meal plans, and five-year goals all available at a glance.

You get your next new planner and spend hours setting it up, answering questions about what you want to accomplish and what habits you want to begin, and maybe even trying your hand at a doodle or two. Once you're done, you let out a deep, gratified sigh. *There it is! There's everything at once! Life is going to be better now!*

But then, much to your chagrin, life happens again, and you can't keep up with your plan. You manage what you can for as long as you can, biding your time until the next opportunity to reset and see everything at once—the beginning of summer, the school year, January—and you repeat.

I bet you've been repeating for a long time, yet you're still drowning. Why?

"Everything at once" is the *problem, not the solution*.

"Everything at once" is why you push your palms against your eyeballs multiple times a day. "Everything at once" is why you doomscroll in the bathroom, hoping no one notices you're gone. (They will.) "Everything at once" is why you listen to an audiobook while cooking dinner while helping somebody with homework while wearing microfiber socks because somebody on the internet said it was like sweeping.

"Everything at once" is not how we're meant to live.

Before you lose hope, let me be the Robin Williams to your Matt Damon and tell you that it's not your fault. It's not your fault. *It's not your fault.*

You are not the reason you're drowning. *You* are not the reason "everything at once" doesn't work. *You* are not the reason time-management principles aren't sticking.

The reason is far beyond you.

Let's sit crisscross-applesauce and do a little History Corner.

Remember the Industrial Revolution? America quickly went from "Whoa, coal!" to "OMG, gas is amazing!" to "Have you heard about this electricity thing?" The West got bigger and better and, consequently, went cuckoo for productivity. This guy's factory had to beat that guy's factory, and he did that by making stuff faster than the other guy did.

When the *digital* revolution happened, it gave us more than computers and AOL Instant Messenger. We were given the promise of more *time*. Technology would create efficient production *for* us, freeing us to do other, presumably more enjoyable, things. Amazing!

However, that digital revolution happened so fast that we never disentangled ourselves from the Industrial Revolution's culture of productivity. Unfortunately for us, that same technology incidentally made the productivity obsession worse.

It makes me think of that scene in *Sabrina* when Harrison Ford (Linus) and Julia Ormond (Sabrina) take a helicopter to board a private jet to fly to Martha's Vineyard for the day. Once they're buckled into their plush seats, Linus immediately begins working, looking at nothing but the reports in front of him.

Sabrina, frustrated by his indifference to the present moment, asks, "Don't you ever look out the window?"

"I don't have time."

"What about all that time we saved taking the helicopter?"

He awkwardly pauses. "I'm storing it up."

"No, you're not," she replies.¹

And we're not either.

In fact, the obsession with productivity is so deeply woven into our culture that we live in a *productivity-industrial complex*. Even though I did not thrive in any form of social studies class, allow me to explain what that means.

An industrial complex is essentially when an industry is in a feedback loop with some element in society. The public and private sectors become so intertwined that separating them is almost impossible, and that connection is often at odds with what's best for society itself.

Let's take weddings as an example. The U.S. wedding industry was worth over \$70 billion in 2023, with the average wedding costing just shy of thirty grand.² I'm not knocking anyone's choices, and if you want an all-out wedding, enjoy it. But what if the wedding industry began pushing the idea that smaller, simpler, less expensive weddings were great, that you didn't need to follow the trends, think about Instagram-worthy elements, or be impressive in any way? If that idea took root, people would spend less, and the industry would suffer. So even though it might be collectively better for folks to have whatever wedding they like, *the wedding industry cannot encourage that*. Therefore, we will continue to have magazines, blogs, and social media telling us what kind of wedding we *should* want.

That's a wedding-industrial complex.

Another example is the prison-industrial complex. Many are championing reform in the judicial system, which would lead to fewer people in prisons. However, the U.S. prison industry makes over \$10 billion a year, and incarcerated individuals in the prison system generate revenue from goods and services on top of that.³ So even though justice reform and prison reform would be beneficial for society, the prison-industrial complex makes them extremely difficult because of how deeply entwined the justice system is with industry.

The same has happened with productivity.

The current productivity paradigm of optimization, efficiency, and success is so pervasive and so *expected* that it stands to reason we need resources and structures to uphold that paradigm. The global productivity industry is projected to generate \$79 *billion* in 2024.⁴ That's a lot of billions.

As long as productivity matters, the marketplace will thrive, and as long as the marketplace thrives, productivity will remain in the cultural conversation. The snake just eats its tail while also becoming very rich.

And that snake does not want you to be content with your life. That snake wants you to keep trying and striving and planning and dreaming and wondering if any of it is working. That snake wants you to, as the horrible saying goes, *rest when you're dead*, because when *you* keep going, you spend money and keep the industry going, too. As my friend and *New York Times* bestselling author Kelly Corrigan once said to me, "Contentment doesn't stimulate economic activity."

In short, your preoccupation with productivity, to whatever level, is not your fault. It was built into the system long before you were flipping through your first planner. And that's not the only thing that's built into the system.

Now it's time for *Women's History Corner* . . .

White women couldn't vote until 1920.

Black women couldn't vote until 1965.*

Women could legally be fired for being pregnant until 1978.

Women still get paid less than men for the same jobs.

Oh, fun! We can throw a little implicit patriarchy into the productivity-industrial complex!

Essentially, women are in a white-man-made world that's supported by white men's rules for the benefit of white men, and we haven't had a voice for long enough to see many tangible results of being heard.

Exceptions exist everywhere, but generally speaking, men aren't expected to make every meal, do all the laundry, remember every birthday, "get their body back," stay at home for the sake of the kids, or have kids at all. They're not shamed for being single. They don't worry about going for a run at night or automatically walk through a parking deck with their keys between their fingers. Men don't daily exist with the weariness and injustice of not being listened to in a male-dominated field. They aren't the ones to leave work to get a sick kid from school. Men typically do not take it upon themselves to remember every detail of a home's invisible ecosystem. Men aren't told to smile, calm down, clean up, or get in line. Men don't bleed every twenty-eight days.

Do you see the disparity here? The productivity industry makes a ton of money teaching us to produce, all within a culture that holds us to a startlingly high standard of what a woman's production should be. We have no choice but to live according to the rules and strategies written by and for men.

It's exhausting, and it's time for another way.

And that completes the first chapter of *The PLAN*. I didn't mean for this to be so much of a tease, but the rest of the book completely lays out that other way. It's full of helpful principles to change how you think, actionable strategies you can use in your planning right now, and a whole section of labeled pep talks for when you need a reminder about what matters.

The real reason planning is hard has nothing to do with you, y'all, so let's make it easier and make it about the right things: compassion, contentment, good practices we can use today, and kindness when our well-laid plans don't work out. Plus, again, lots of actionable real-life help. I can't wait for you to read it.

If you've already ordered the book, don't forget to register your preorder with Team LG at thelazygeniuscollective.com/theplan. When you do that, you get access to a weekly pep talk in both written and audio form delivered to you every single Monday for the rest of 2024. I'm writing them as life happens around us, so hopefully all of them will feel wildly seasonal and relevant to whatever you're dealing with. I can't wait for you to start experiencing them while you wait for the book to release, so register your preorder at thelazygeniuscollective.com/theplan.

Alright, there's no Lazy Genius of the Week today since all of you who preorder are Lazy Geniuses of the Week! Kidding. Kind of. However, if you'd like to be considered for the Lazy Genius of the Week, email us your idea at hello@thelazygeniuscollective.com.

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!