


KENDRA ADACHI

Foreword by **Emily P. Freeman**

"I could not be more
excited about this book."
—**Jenna Fischer**, actor and
cohost of *Office Ladies*
podcast

The Lazy Genius Way



**SNEAK
PEEK**



**SAMPLE
ONLY**

**UNCORRECTED
PROOF**

**Embrace What Matters,
Ditch What Doesn't, and Get Stuff Done**

THE LAZY GENIUS WAY

EMBRACE WHAT MATTERS,
DITCH WHAT DOESN'T, AND
GET STUFF DONE

KENDRA ADACHI



WATERBROOK

THE LAZY GENIUS WAY

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INTRODUCTION

(Please Don't Skip It)

I'm not a mom who plays. I mean, I will, but I personally don't like knocking down a stack of blocks twenty thousand times in a row, no matter how much joy it brings my kids.*

Thankfully, my husband is a dad who plays. A few summers ago, he came up big while we were vacationing at the beach. He dug an impressive hole in the sand, a hole so deep you had to lean over the edge to see the bottom. Then, with the enthusiasm of a carnival showman, he got all three kids to race back and forth from the ocean, carrying buckets of water to fill the hole as quickly as they could.

Over and over again, they hauled and poured, hauled and poured.

But that hole would not fill up.

Every single drop soaked back into the sand, taunting them in their efforts. Because my kids are adorable little weirdos, they thought it was fun and played the game for a long while—that is, until a flock of aggressive seagulls became more interesting.

*I have three, by the way. Sam is in fourth grade and obsessed with *Minecraft*, Ben is in second grade and obsessed with painting the *Mona Lisa*, and Annie is in preschool and obsessed with me.

As they ran off to chase the birds, I saw the discarded buckets surrounding the empty hole and realized I was looking at a metaphor of my life. Maybe it's one for yours too.

Here's what we do as women.* We pick our spot in the sand to dig a hole, checking to see if the women around us are choosing similar (or, gulp, *better*) spots, trying not to be distracted by their motherly patience and bikini bodies. We start digging, hoping the hole is deep enough and headed in the right direction. Where is it going? No idea, but who cares. Everyone else is digging, so we dig too.

Eventually it's time to start hauling buckets to fill the hole. We carry load after load of "water"—color-coded calendars, room-mom responsibilities, meal plans, and work-life balance. We haul. We try. We sweat. And we watch that hole stay empty.

Now we're confused.

Does everyone else have this figured out? Is my hole too deep? And where is all the water going?

We pause to catch our breath, wondering if everyone else feels like an epic failure too. One person can't possibly keep up with a clean house, a fulfilling job, a well-adjusted family, an active social life, and a running regimen of fifteen miles a week, right?

With silence our only answer, we decide, *No, it's just me. I need to get it together.* What follows is a flurry of habit trackers, calendar overhauls, and internet rabbit holes to figure out how to be better, until we pass out from emotional exhaustion or

* If you're a dude, please let this inform your understanding of how women are often wired and the pressures we feel due to the culture we're a part of. Also, thank you for reading this book even though I will unashamedly always use female pronouns.

actual adrenal fatigue or we give up completely and head back to the beach house for a shame-filled margarita.

Cheers?

THE REAL REASON YOU'RE TIRED

You're not tired because laundry takes up more space on your couch than humans do, no one in your house seems to care about your work deadline, or your kid's school lunch rule is "grapes must be quartered." The tasks are plentiful, but you know your to-do list isn't solely to blame.

You're "on" all the time, trying to be present with your people, managing the emotions of everyone around you, carrying the invisible needs of strangers in line at the post office, and figuring out how to meet your own needs with whatever you have left over—assuming you know what your needs are in the first place.

It's too much. Or maybe it feels like too much because you haven't read the right book, listened to the right podcast, or found the right system.

I know that feeling. I've spent an embarrassing number of hours searching for the right tools to make my life feel under control, and I have the abandoned stack of planners and highlighted self-help books to prove it. Unnecessary spoiler alert: they didn't help.

On one side, I felt like I had to create a carbon copy of the author's life, even though I dislike going to bed early and don't travel to twenty cities a year speaking at events.

On the other side? Follow your dreams, girl. Apparently, my to-do list isn't the problem; my small-time thinking is.

Still, I highlighted dozens of passages, trying to MacGyver

together some kind of plan that made sense for me. Maybe the right combination of life hacks and inspirational quotes would keep me from lying awake in the middle of the night with worry. Yet despite book after book, quote after quote, and plan after plan, I stayed tired. Maybe you're reading this book because you feel it too.

I have good news. You don't need a new list of things to do; *you need a new way to see.*

WHY SIMPLIFYING DOESN'T WORK

It's the most common solution to feeling overwhelmed: simplify. Do less, have less, get on Instagram less. Cut down on commitments, outsource, and say no. But also give back to the community, join a book club, and grow heirloom tomatoes. Make your own baby food, run an impressive side hustle, and go on a regular date night with your spouse if you expect your marriage to survive. How is that simple? In my experience, marriage, entrepreneurship, and gardening are all super complicated.

For Christians, the concept of a simple life can feel even more muddled. Jesus was homeless, had twelve friends, and depended on the kindness of others for a meal and a bed. His life focused on a singular goal, and everything else was straightforward. But a little further back in the Bible, we find the (very misunderstood) Proverbs 31 woman who gets up before the sun, sews bed linens for her family, plants vineyards, and has strong arms.

Will someone please tell me what I'm supposed to care about so I can just live my life?

And that's why simplification is anything but simple. No sin-

gle voice can tell us how to live. Even within the biblical message of “love God and love people” lie a million possibilities of how that could look practically.

We need a filter that allows us to craft a life focusing only on what matters to us, not on what everyone else says *should* matter.

My friend, welcome to the Lazy Genius Way.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Here’s your new mantra: be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don’t . . . *to you.*

As life circumstances change, needs and priorities follow suit. This book is designed to be a helpful reference through all those transitions, giving you language and tools to make room for what matters.

Each chapter highlights a Lazy Genius principle, with ideas to implement it immediately. One principle on its own will

have a tangible impact, but as you apply each to your daily life, you’ll see how the thirteen principles can harmoniously create personalized solutions to your problems and illuminate the ones that don’t matter so much.

You can quickly scan these pages for concrete steps and helpful lists and, when you have time, read more deeply as you create space to become your truest self. I encourage you to grab this book whenever you hit a wall in your routine, when a transition is looming, or when you feel the weight of busyness.

You’ll learn better ways to do laundry, finish projects, and

**Here’s your new mantra:
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get dinner on the table. Praise! But beyond the practical, you'll learn to embrace a life that offers space for success and struggle, energy and exhaustion, clean houses and crappy meals. It all counts because it's all yours.

You'll learn better ways to do laundry, finish projects, and get dinner on the table. Praise! But beyond the practical, you'll learn to embrace a life that offers space for success and struggle, energy and exhaustion, clean houses and crappy meals. It all counts because it's all yours.

Whether you're home with tiny humans, pursuing the corner office, lonely, busy, or bored, this book will help you

name what matters, ditch what doesn't, and Lazy Genius a life full of both productivity and peace.

Let's get started.

HOW TO THINK LIKE A LAZY GENIUS

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 coworkers had known me since before I could drive a car, but 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 coworkers would take turns providing breakfast for everyone. Most 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 do this entire shindig on my own. I figured

* If I had been cool enough to go to parties as a teenager, I wouldn't have been fun at them anyway.

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 cookie, but my culinary skills weren't exactly versatile. Maybe if I had followed a recipe things would have 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 #1, 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 #2, 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 I did it 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.

TRYING TOO HARD

When you care about something, you try to do it well. When you care about everything, you do *nothing* well, which then compels you to try even harder. Welcome to being tired.

If you're in the second camp, it's likely your efforts to be an optimized human being have fallen embarrassingly short, as have mine. Intellectually, we know we can't do it all, but still we try. Over the last decade of my life, I've done a lot of self-reflection and therapy trying to figure out why being perfect at literally everything felt like the answer.

Everyone's story is different, and mine involves abuse. (Yes, that's abrupt, and now you know I go real deep real fast.) My father and my home life were unpredictable, and as a kid, I learned that my choices had the power to affect my safety. If I stayed quiet, got good grades, and kept my room clean, he wouldn't get mad. While my actions weren't always a direct correlation to his, I lived as if they were. I equated safety with value and love and consequently saw my choices as the only measure of my worth. I thought I needed to be the perfect daughter, student, and friend in order to matter.

I tried so hard to be enough, but my dad didn't stop telling me how to be better. I remember feeling so worthless as a kid, not understanding why he thought I should have blond hair in-

stead of brown, why my straight A's were expected and not celebrated, or why he and my mom were so unhappy. Naturally, I assumed that I was the problem, that I wasn't trying hard enough or being perfect enough to make our home a happy place. The feeling of inadequacy was overwhelming and seeped into my other relationships too.

I was every teacher's favorite student. I did my homework early and without a single mistake. I was the most dependable line leader and class monitor and scored in the ninety-ninth percentile on every standardized test I took. No student is perfect, but I got really close, assuming that was the only way to be loved.

I also tried to be the perfect friend. I didn't rock the boat, I kept my problems to myself, and I was a chameleon in each relationship. No one knew that I was ashamed of having divorced parents, that I desperately wanted to be pretty, or that I was one mistake from falling apart. I assumed letting people see the imperfect, broken parts of me would put the friendship in jeopardy, and that simply wasn't an option.

That's the irony of perfection: the walls that prevent your vulnerability from being seen also keep you from being known. I was always trying to hide behind perfection because I didn't think my full self was enough. Maybe you feel that way too.

I'm not trying to get into your business, but you likely have shame, fear, or insecurity about something and put forth a lot of effort trying to hide it. We all do because we're all human, and it doesn't have to come from something as dark as childhood abuse. Every story counts, but remember that those stories

That's the irony of perfection: the walls that prevent your vulnerability from being seen also keep you from being known.

often come with lies we believe about ourselves. You and I and the pretty stranger at Target all have stories that keep us trying hard at the wrong things, and the harder we try, the stronger the lie.

You're loud and take up too much space.

You're not enough like your sister.

You're too much like your dad.

You're not smart enough, pretty enough, athletic enough.

It's your fault she's gone.

As you get older, those shameful thoughts and feelings don't leave; they just change shape.

You're not a good enough cook.

How dare you not want kids.

You work too much.

You must be doing something wrong if you're still not married.

You're a bad mom for letting your kids watch television.

No one wants to be your friend.

Trying hard to impress others, to hide, or to fight the shame that's annoyingly poking your insides takes up more energy than you can bear. Add laundry and car pools on top of that? I mean, come on.

When trying hard fails you, you seem to be left with one choice: to give up.

NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH

Shortly after the church breakfast debacle, I threw in the towel. No more being impressive. No more caring. And I went too far. I

tricked myself into thinking I had only two options: try too hard or don't try at all. I forgot that trying itself isn't the problem. It's beautiful to try when it comes to things that actually matter, but I definitely embraced the baby-out-with-the-bathwater approach.

Even though one of my greatest joys is loving people by cooking for them, I ordered pizza when friends came over because I thought a homemade meal was trying too hard. Even though a calm and tidy home is good for my hamster wheel of a brain, I left my house in shambles because cleaning up was trying too hard.

**You don't have to be perfect,
and you don't have to give up.
You simply get to be *you*.**

I stopped caring and I stopped trying, and somehow I *still* felt tired.

Little did I know you can be just as exhausted from not trying as you can from trying too hard. Managing apathy and survival mode takes as much energy as managing rules and perfection. Still, I leaned into “messy hair, don't care” to hide the fact that I cared deeply. I needed something that stopped the crazy pendulum swing from caring too much about the wrong things to not caring at all.

Thankfully, that's the gift of the Lazy Genius Way. You're allowed to care. You're allowed to know yourself and be yourself—to be real. You don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to give up. You simply get to be *you*.

Stop trying at what doesn't matter, but don't be afraid to try at what does.

Because it *matters*.

THE STRUGGLE ISN'T THE ONLY THING THAT'S REAL

Our culture is obsessed with being real, but we've been using the wrong measuring stick.

As I type these words, my middle son is home with a stomach bug, and he and my daughter are watching television because I'm tired of talking to them. I haven't showered in a couple of days, and I'm in a fight with my husband. If I shared that on Instagram, you might think, *I love her for being so real.*

But what if I shared a day when my kids and I were playing soccer outside, dinner was prepped by four o'clock, and I was wearing makeup? Would I still be real?

Yes, I would, and so would you.

I'm all for letting go of perfection, but we've somehow conflated order with being fake. I do it too. I've seen the cute mom

I'm all for letting go of perfection, but we've somehow conflated order with being fake.

pushing a cart of docile children and full-priced Joanna Gaines items through Target and thought, *Sure, her stomach is flat, her kids are eating*

*cucumbers instead of Goldfish, and she's buying everything I want, but she probably has an eating disorder and credit card debt, so I'm doing okay.**

I want to stop judging women who have it together, assuming they have something to hide. I want to stop applauding chaos as the only indicator of vulnerability.

Your struggles and insecurities are not lined up next to mine, pageant-style. We need to stop trying to "out-real" each other. That life is why you and I are tired, and we can let it go.

*If this book had GIF capabilities, Jennifer Lawrence would be rolling her eyes so hard at me right now.

So the next time you find yourself looking for flaws in seemingly perfect people, hoping it'll make you feel better, don't. Telling yourself you're better than someone is just as harmful as telling yourself you're worse. We don't get to measure a person's authenticity based on how real her struggle is. That scale is broken.

Instead, invite people over when your house is dirty *and* when it's clean. Be an amazing mother who sometimes yells at her kids. Enjoy a green smoothie without feeling the need to swear off sweets forever.

You can be real when life is in order *and* when it's falling apart.

Life is beautifully both.

BE A GENIUS ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER

I might not know you personally, but I do know this: you care about a meaningful life. We all do. It's part of being human. And in this culture of quick fixes and shortcuts, it's natural to think that easy is the goal. But, friend, you can't shortcut a meaningful life.

You're not choosing all genius or all lazy; instead, you're a Lazy Genius.

A couple of years ago, I did an episode on *The Lazy Genius Podcast* about baking bread. I received dozens of comments along the lines of "this doesn't sound very lazy." Of course it isn't lazy. Homemade bread *matters* to me. Mixing and kneading the dough by hand, spending an afternoon watching it rise, and engaging in a practice that's been part of humanity for centuries . . . why would I want to shortcut that? But if homemade bread doesn't matter to you, the choice is easy. Shortcut bread and have a nice day.

The Lazy Genius principles will help you learn not only what needs a shortcut but also how to create one. They will teach you how to notice what matters and carve out important space in your day to nurture growth in those areas.

Remember, it's not all lazy or all genius. You get to choose. If you and I engage every priority without a filter of what stays and what needs to move along, eventually we'll be at a crossroads: run ourselves ragged caring about everything or give up and care about nothing.

The Lazy Genius Way offers a different path: be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't.

You have permission to let go, wonder, and go slow or to desire, hustle, and power through. Whatever you choose, make sure you're focused on what matters to you, not what matters to Instagram, your mother-in-law, or the voice in your head saying you're not enough.

Every choice matters because each one matters to someone, but hold only the ones that matter to you. As you live as a unique, stunning, powerful individual, embracing what matters and ditching what doesn't, you'll empower the women in your life to do the same.

I'm glad we're in this together.

TO RECAP

- Perfection keeps you safely hidden but also keeps you from being truly known.
- Order isn't always fake, and chaos isn't always vulnerable.
- Be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't.

- Use a recipe the first time you make stuffed french toast.

— **ONE SMALL STEP** —

Smile at the pretty stranger at Target without judging her or yourself. We both know you're going to Target today, so you'll get your shot.

Now let's look at our first principle.

DECIDE ONCE

Lazy Genius Principle #1

I'm not breaking any ground with this statement, but I used to hate Mondays.

Sometimes I would approach them with a lazy “whatever happens, happens” attitude and then cry into my cup of cold coffee as events took place around me.

Other Mondays got a dose of determined genius. I'd spend Sunday night maniacally scribbling in my newest planner, organizing every meal I'd make, glass of water I'd consume, errand I'd run, and hourly Scripture verse I'd recite, only to follow through on basically nothing.

Lazy Mondays didn't work because I didn't know what to do, and genius Mondays didn't work because I gave myself too much to do.*

Then I Lazy Geniused Mondays (and many other challenges) with our first principle: *Decide once*.

* Both kinds of Mondays often involved Oreos.

THE EASIEST WAY TO GIVE YOUR BRAIN A BREAK

The research on it is varied and probably hard to articulate anyway, but we make a lot of decisions. Like, *a lot*. Constant decision-making is one of the reasons you don't have energy for things that matter to you. By discovering a few opportunities to decide once and then never again, you give your brain more room to play.

You might think that making preemptive decisions is robotic, but automation makes you a robot only if you automate everything. Making one-time decisions about what doesn't matter so you have brain space for what does is the Lazy Genius Way, and you'll experience the benefits immediately.

HOW I LAZY GENIUSED MONDAYS BY DECIDING ONCE

I hated the pressure of Mondays because I felt like every decision reset to zero. Suddenly, nobody in my family knew up from down, breakfast from dinner, or what an appropriate school outfit looked like. Those uncertainties felt fine on a relaxed Saturday but not on a need-to-be-productive Monday.

Since the day itself wasn't going anywhere, I had to change how I approached it, and I started with my outfit. Choosing what to wear uses just a sliver of thinking but a sliver all the same, so I decided once on a Monday uniform and never looked back. Hand to heart, I've been wearing the same outfit every Monday for over three years.*

*It's all black and denim. Cold-weather uniform: black jeans and a chambray shirt. Mild-weather uniform: black T-shirt and jeans. Hot-weather uniform: black T-shirt and denim shorts.

I felt the immediate impact of that decision and wanted more. Over time, I kept deciding once—what time I would get up, what I'd do first thing in the morning, what we'd eat for dinner that night. I'll continue to add to the list based on my current stage of life.

Now I adore Mondays because all those fixed decisions give me a beautiful jump start on the day and therefore the week. Instead of being distracted by all the decisions that need making, deciding once consistently gives me time to engage in what matters. I have margin in which to do work I love, read, listen to music, and be patient with my kids as they adjust to a new week of school.

It sounds crazy that a single decision made once can have such an impact, but that's what makes it part of the Lazy Genius Way.

WHERE FIXED DECISIONS ALREADY EXIST

You might not have even realized that you're surrounded by fixed decisions:

- **Fast-food value menus.** The bigwigs decided once what constitutes a meal and put a number in front of it so all you have to do is say “a number two with a Diet Coke.”
- **Netflix DVDs in your mailbox.** In the original model, you'd put the movies you wanted to see in a queue, and Netflix would ship you the next DVD so you didn't have to decide what to watch next.
- **Church liturgy.** Responsive readings, communion, and the benediction are fixed decisions that help you en-

gauge in the story of Christ during your Sunday morning worship service.

Deciding once can be done *to* you, but the power comes when you decide once for yourself.

Here's a surprise: every item you own is a fixed decision. When you buy a shirt, a new set of pens, or a gallon of olive oil from Costco, your choice to buy it is also a choice to use, store, and take care of it.

However, when you don't follow through with that choice and leave the shirt in the bag, the pens in a desk drawer you never open, and the gallon of olive oil on the floor of your pantry because it's too big for the shelf, you're adding to the clutter and noise of your life, not the ease and margin that fixed decisions can offer.

**Every item you own
is a fixed decision.**

What's important, then, is to make *good* fixed decisions—ones that will add value to your life instead of taking value from it. Decide once, on purpose, about everything, from the items in your closet to what's on your calendar. A single, intentional decision relieves your brain of effort, freeing you to think about what matters to you instead of living in a cycle of choosing this and that over and over again.

The possibilities are endless, but you don't need endless. Loosen your grip on making thirty-seven decisions by the end of this chapter, thirty-six of which you'll forget by tomorrow. Simply look for one idea that works right now.

Let's run through some life application examples of how to decide once.