


KENDRA ADACHI

Foreword by **Emily P. Freeman**

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

The Lazy Genius Way



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

Praise for *The Lazy Genius Way*

“With wisdom, humor, and practicality, Kendra Adachi gives us a system to get stuff done without losing ourselves in the process. Not only will this book reengineer how you approach life, but you will come away feeling more yourself. And nothing is more powerful than living a life of purpose and accomplishment while at the same time feeling more yourself than ever before.”

—BRI MCKOY, author of *Come & Eat*

“In a world that is constantly screaming to do more and do it perfectly, *The Lazy Genius Way* rushes to the rescue. Kendra gently takes us by the hand and helps us know that we don’t have to be the best at everything. We can actually learn to enjoy the things we love and even happily thrive while doing the things we don’t love.”

—JESSICA THOMPSON, national speaker and coauthor of *Give Them Grace*

“Reading this approachable, practical book will feel like spending an afternoon with a wise and cool big sister who is helping you get your life together. Without an ounce of shame or guilt, Kendra gives you permission to care about the things that really matter to you and to be lazy about the things that don’t. I only wish I could have read this book twenty years ago.”

—SARAH BESSEY, author of *Miracles and Other Reasonable Things*

“Kendra has a heart for infusing the mundane and practical with a profound sacredness. Frankly, it’s infuriating how she manages to be effortlessly instructional, inspirational, and hilarious all at the same time, but the world is such a better place for it. I’ve never been more thankful for someone’s voice.”

—KNOX MCCOY, author of *All Things Reconsidered*

“If you’ve been taught that nothing good comes from being lazy, get ready to let Kendra change your mind and life forever. Spoiler: laziness is *the* powerful tool that frees you to be a genius where it really matters. I wish I had this eye-opening book twenty years ago.”

—MYQUILLYN SMITH, *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author of *Cozy Minimalist Home*

“*The Lazy Genius Way* is a recipe for creating a generous, less stressed domestic life. Kendra’s suggestions for thoughtful routines in place of rigid rules will leave the reader feeling settled and prepared for the changing rhythms of both family life and personal growth. Also, she is what experts refer to as a hoot.”

—GINA SMITH and S. D. SMITH, author of *The Green Ember* series

“*The Lazy Genius Way* is the guidebook for adulting that we’ve been waiting for, and Kendra Adachi—with the kind practicality of Leslie Knope, the fierceness of Beyoncé, and the charms of Hermione—is the leader we’ll love forever. Boiled down to what matters most, daily life suddenly seems more manageable. Delivered with Kendra’s classic blend of wit and wisdom, it even seems more fun.”

—SHANNAN MARTIN, author of *The Ministry of Ordinary Places* and *Falling Free*

“As a longtime fan of *The Lazy Genius Podcast*, I could not be more excited about this book. Kendra has a gift for asking questions that helps you prioritize the parts of your life that really matter and let go of the parts that don’t. She doesn’t preach or pressure; she inquires and encourages. As she admits, it’s not easy to manage the seemingly constant demands of running a house, planning meals, hosting relatives, and creating and maintaining holiday traditions, all while finding time for your own work and self-care. But Kendra makes it all a lot easier!”

—JENNA FISCHER, actor, author of *The Actor’s Life*, and cohost of the *Office Ladies* podcast

“Fun and funny, warm and wise: figuring out how to get your life together has never been so entertaining.”

—ANNE BOGEL, author of *Don't Overthink It* and creator of the *Modern Mrs. Darcy* blog

“*The Lazy Genius Way* has made me rethink all my current systems in the best way possible. I am more clearheaded while making decisions after reading this book.”

—LAURA TREMAINE, host of the *10 Things to Tell You* podcast

“I’ve known Kendra for several years now, and I don’t think I’ve met anyone else who embodies both a kindhearted, fun-to-be-around spirit and the practicality of a go-to friend who knows how to get things done. When you need a friend to boss you around in only the *best* way possible, pick up this book and let Kendra do it. Her wisdom about a range of topics, from making friends to cleaning the kitchen, will light a fire under you so you can do what matters and chill about the rest.”

—TSH OXENREIDER, author of *At Home in the World* and *Shadow & Light*

“I always followed the lazy path when it came to my home. The results of that approach were not surprising—trash bins stuffed with take-out boxes, moldy laundry in the washer, and so much chaos. But Kendra Adachi offers a better way. *The Lazy Genius Way* doesn’t mean you have to become a gourmet chef or start cleaning the baseboards with a toothbrush. Kendra will meet you in the middle. She offers easy steps that will have you marking off your list in record time without sacrificing every free moment you have. Kendra helps us make space for tasks and television. She finds time for us to solve problems and scroll Instagram. *The Lazy Genius Way* is the perfect way.”

—JAMIE GOLDEN, cohost of *The Popcast with Knox and Jamie*



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

KENDRA ADACHI



WATERBROOK

THE LAZY GENIUS WAY

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FOREWORD

Some moments—such as weddings, births, graduations, and proposals—carve a deep groove in our memories because they mark our lives in a significant way. Other moments remain embedded in time because they hold hands with deep emotions like joy, shock, passion, or grief. Still, life is mostly made up of the kinds of moments that may seem ordinary while you live them but are the ones you return to in gratitude. It's not because they were necessarily remarkable but because they shaped the contours of your life one small moment at a time.

In the spring of 2008, my husband, John, and I were in the middle of packing up all our worldly belongings to move to a house across town. In addition to the regular stress that accompanies moving, John was about a year into a new job at a local church, and we had three children ages four and under. It seemed every area of our life was touched by either chaos or transition, and I was weeks past ready for both to be over.

A few days before the closing, all our furniture was at the new house, but we still had some last-minute items we needed to pack up in the old one: condiments in the fridge, stacks of junk mail on the counter, plastic bins with no lids in the dining room, and a few final kitchen drawers filled with misfit office supplies, tangled wires, and unidentifiable gadget leftovers. As it turns out, you don't just get to move with the stuff you like. You have to move with *everything*. I was ready to set the remaining items on fire so we didn't have to pack or unpack them. But instead of lighting a match, I called a friend.

While John stayed with our kids at the new house, my friend came to help me empty the old house of those few straggling possessions and load my car one last time. If you've been alive for five minutes, maybe you already know this was a fairly vulnerable ask. I had known this friend for only about a year at this point, and I was shy about asking her over for dinner—much less inviting her to help me transport the dregs of our life from our old house to our new one. She would see my obvious disorganization and the unnecessary junk I held on to. Moreover, she would see me in all my frazzled, unshowered, end-of-my-rope glory.

Still, she came. We worked together in silence, carrying lidless plastic containers filled with random tools, freezer items, and lightbulbs out to the yard to load into our cars. I remember feeling relief that she didn't wait for my direction (which honestly at that point would have probably been to point to the yard and hand her a match). Instead, she saw what needed doing, and she worked quickly, without commentary, helping me finish up the last embarrassing loads and get the job done. What I remember most about that day was her kind silence and her present posture.

If you haven't figured it out yet, that friend was Kendra Adachi. And though that move was more than ten years ago, though that afternoon was not accompanied by a single meaningful conversation or a traditionally significant moment, the memory revisits me often, and I tear up thinking of it even now. Because instead of approaching that move like a Lazy Genius, I handled it more like an overworked fool. I did the wrong things in the wrong order, feeling shame for the state of my house and the chaos in my life.

Meanwhile, Kendra is an expert at creating systems to finish tasks. She is a master at doing the right things in the right order for the right reasons, from packing a box to hosting a party. While it was, of course, a gift to have a friend willing to help me move—and to be able to trust a friend to see me at my frantic worst—the reason this memory stands out for me goes even deeper than that. It stands out because the thing I felt I was failing so miserably at was the very

thing she was so *good* at, and still she showed up for me, filled with compassion, miles from judgment. She showed up for me in love.

The book you now hold is evidence of that love. You may have picked it up because you need help getting stuff done. She will certainly help you do that. But efficient systems fail to deliver if they're implemented without kindness. That's the unique gift of this book and why I'm so grateful to Kendra for finally writing it down.

The reason *The Lazy Genius Way* has the potential to change how you live your life is not simply because of its practical tips but because of the spirit in which they are offered. From the way you clean your kitchen to the way you start your day, being a Lazy Genius is not about doing things the *right* way but about finally finding *your own* way. You won't hear empty mantras shaming you into doing things better. Instead, you'll be encouraged to decide what matters for you, and you'll receive permission to gently leave the rest behind.

It's been ten years since my family moved. Since then, Kendra and I have shared countless moments together, and I no longer feel any shadow of embarrassment when she sees me at my rock-bottom worst. This transformation started the day she showed up ready to help me, even though she could have bossed me into ways of doing it better. But she didn't shame me then, and she won't shame you either. Kendra is teaching me to be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Before you give up on yourself and allow chaos to tempt you to burn the house down, back away from the matches and read this kind, life-giving, practical book.

—Emily P. Freeman
author of *The Next Right Thing*

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.*¹

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.

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.*² 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 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 single 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.

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

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 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.

*1 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.

*2 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.

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.^{*1}

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 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 instead 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

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

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.