

307 - A More Helpful Way to Look at Spring Cleaning

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 307 - a more helpful way to look at spring cleaning. Why "more helpful"? Because I think that most spring cleaning information I run across is not helpful, at least not in the way I need it to be. So today, we're going to do what we often do: we're going to tackle both perspective and practicality. Seeing something in a new way matters, and also after that paradigm shift, we need small steps to move in a direction that is practically, tangibly helpful. That's our plan for today, so let's jump in.

First, spring cleaning words are everywhere right now. I just opened my promotions tab in my inbox, and I'm shocked at how many brands that have nothing to do with the cleaning industry are using spring cleaning language. Beauty, skincare, shoes, apparel, home decor... everyone is using this language right now. "Spring clean your makeup bag! Get your skin ready for spring! Spring clean your closet and get a refresh!" It's everywhere. It's a bit of a chicken and egg thing, isn't it. Are all the brands and all the content creators talking about it because it's in the air, or is it in the air because all the brands and content creators are talking about it? And let's be real - I am one of them! Literally right now! Spring cleaning is in the title of this episode! So I say that more with curiosity than with judgment. But it really is everywhere, and when something is everywhere, it presents to us a level of importance or urgency whether we chose that or not, simply because it's all around us.

So first, let's say words about what to do with the presence of spring cleaning language and the pressure that likely follows.

First, when you hear the phrase spring cleaning, what do you think about? I'm guessing there are two big themes here. One, it's huge. You're thinking about having to deep clean your entire house and everything in it, and that makes you want to cry. So there's some form of bigness to it which automatically makes the idea overwhelming. It's literally so big it casts a shadow. The second thing is that it feels like something you *should* do. Spring cleaning can definitely reek of responsibility. It feels like a representation of being a good adult, that this is what all the organized people do. Even though you are now less likely to stay in that judgmental *should* water for long because of being familiar with the Lazy Genius way, the should water still splashes on you a little bit. It's something to manage even though maybe it's not as big as it once was. Which is annoying but also isn't it great you don't drown in shame anymore?

So spring cleaning flips the switch on bigness and on should-ing, neither of which exist for us as Lazy Geniuses. That means we have to completely recalibrate our thinking to what spring cleaning really is.

For a lot of people, it is big and it is something you should do, but you do not have to subscribe to that way of thinking. You get to decide to let the widely accepted definition or perspective go

as something that is not for you because no thank you, *and* you get to decide what spring cleaning is for you. New paradigm. New definition. New permission based on what you need.

Last week, I finished reading the book *How to Keep House While Drowning* by KC Price which is for sure the Lazy Genius book on cleaning. Holy moly it's so good. But she talks a lot about how cleaning and care tasks are morally neutral. We talk about that a lot here, how so many things are not right or wrong, they just are. That phrase morally neutral is a good one to latch on to. But she also says that from moral neutrality comes permission. From moral neutrality comes permission. I mean, is that not our whole vibe around here? When something becomes morally neutral, we can receive permission from others or ourselves to let something go, to do it the way we need to, to release it for a season, to care deeply when it doesn't make sense to someone else... when something is morally neutral, permission springs up.

And spring cleaning in its general definition is for sure morally neutral. You're not a terrible person for not cleaning your air filter or not even knowing where the thing is. Listen. I was about to say I was going to confess something, but a confession means I did something wrong and I have not. But my kids have never been to the dentist. Never once. I have lots of reasons why - we couldn't afford dental insurance for a number of years, I have one kid with major sensory issues where teeth cleaning would break his bones, a pandemic. And we still haven't gone. Now, would it be a lovely thing for my kids to go to the dentist regularly to get their teeth cleaned? Would it be lovely for me too? Because I haven't been in over a decade myself. Yeah sure it would. But it's morally neutral. I'm not a bad person or a bad mother because my kids have never been to the dentist. Some people might feel that way, but that means that people all over the world are bad people because they don't have access to or even use dental care. Which we all know is untrue. So it's morally neutral. Now if one of my kids told me his tooth hurt and it seemed like something was probably wrong and I ignored it? That would leave the sphere of moral neutrality because it's now not about regularly going to the dentist but about caring for my kid who is in pain. Ignoring and dismissing his pain, whether in his tooth or in his soul, is neglect. Which is wrong. But just the act of taking them? *Morally* neutral.

That's true of spring cleaning or cleaning of any kind. It's morally neutral. You're not a good person if you do it, and you're not a bad person if you don't. Like KC Price says, if you're struggling to clean and are drowning in laundry and dirty dishes and hair that hasn't been washed in days, you're not bad. You're just having a difficult time, and there's kindness for you in that. So. *Morally* neutral.

And from that comes permission. You have permission to hear other people talk about spring cleaning and release it as something not for you. You have permission to redefine what spring cleaning is. You have permission to take the "spring" off the name completely and just see cleaning for what it is when it is. You get to decide what matters to you.

So if we're seeing this episode is a series of doors that you can walk through, you might decide that this is as far as your journey will take you. Walking through this door of permission is all you

need. That's great. I hope you have a lovely day. For those who want to keep walking, let's now talk about the different kinds of cleaning.

We'll be right back...

So just a few weeks ago, you might have heard episode 298 How to Keep Up with Household Habits. One important distinction from that episode that we'll name again here is the difference between daily tasks and irregular maintenance tasks. There is a different process and energy for doing something like cleaning off the kitchen counter at the end of the day and washing a bulky bedspread. And despite that huge difference, we tend to mentally treat them the same. Anything that has to do with cleaning is in one bucket, and we have a hard time recognizing that a daily rhythm for caring for our homes and making it feel a certain way is so different from figuring out if and when de-lime the showerhead or something. Honestly, I don't even know if that's a thing, but we'll pretend it is.

But see? Isn't that even part of the point? There are so many things we think we probably should be doing, but we don't even know what some of them are, let alone when we're going to do them.

Now there's another distinction in cleaning that we're going to bring into the conversation to help us figure out how many doors we want to walk through during the traditional spring cleaning season, and that is, in fact, the season. There are seasons where our homes need different care than others. There are seasons when our own bodies and rhythms need different care than others, and how much time and energy we spend on home things contributes to that. Seasons matter. Like, big time. That's why there's a whole chapter on living in the season my first book, *The Lazy Genius Way*. If you make decisions without first considering your season, you will likely be right back where you started or even further behind than you were before because you're going in the wrong order. Your season really matters.

Now, let's talk about how seasons could impact your approach to cleaning now and any other time, too.

I do a weekly live video for our paid community called The Neighborhood, and just last week, we were talking about this, and one of the women said that she doesn't see as much need for spring cleaning as the season shifts, but she does for the fall. So she pays attention to what her home needs to transition into fall before it's closed up for the colder weather coming. So spring is not the only time to consider a larger cleaning project or approach.

Another person on that video said that she's moving into a new house, and that feels like a different approach to cleaning, too. She's spring cleaning but in a season of getting her new home ready to move into. That requires a different approach.

Yet another woman said that she chooses one category to focus on when spring comes around. For example, this year it's the air. So she's paying attention to changing air filters and cleaning dehumidifiers so they're ready for this next season. And that's it. She's just focused on air.

I share those three examples as permission to see your season the way you need to, not just through the lens of spring. You're not walking through the door of "should I do spring cleaning or not?" You're deciding what season you are in on the calendar and/or in your life, and you're asking yourself "Is there something outside of my normal cleaning rhythm that I'd like to pay attention to in this season? Is there something that feels like a kindness to myself and the people who live here to tend to this either myself or by hiring it out to someone else?" That's the question we can ask.

KC Price doesn't use the word "chore." She calls these kinds of things "care tasks." We're caring for ourselves, our families, and our homes by the choices we make when we have the ability to make them. In some seasons, we don't have the ability to do very many care tasks. We're happy if everyone has clean underwear every day, and that is a beautiful thing. Again, morally neutral. And then there are other seasons where we can invite more care tasks into the fold than in the previous season or in the next one.

So you've walked through the door of considering cleaning in the season you're in, and now we're all standing here together wondering what our next steps will be. The first thing to do is name the season you're in or all the seasons you're in. For me, I'm in the spring in the south, I'm in a season of active weeks and weekends where rest and play have to be prioritized, I'm in a season where we have a toilet that's been running for about a month now and I think the sound might drive me crazy before the actual toilet starts to function less, and we're in a season where we're about to go into a bathroom remodel of the main bathroom our entire family uses. You can do that, too. Name all your seasons, and then see what rises to the surface. Is there anything right now in this season that you'd like to pay attention to? Are there any care tasks that aren't part of your regular rhythm that you'd like to tend to?

For me in making that list, it's bathrooms. Just like the woman in our community said she's focusing on the air in her house, I think this spring, not because it's spring but because of everything happening coincidentally in spring, that we need to focus on our bathrooms. We need to make sure the toilet that's running is functioning properly since we're about to lose access to another one. We also will be cleaning out and closing shop on our most used bathroom in the next few weeks, so really cleaning and caring for the tiny kid bath our whole family will be using for two months is a kind choice for this upcoming season.

And even though I hate cleaning bathrooms - you know this is you've been around for awhile - making this choice of focusing on deep care of our bathrooms outside of the normal rhythm matters right now. This is a season where tending to our bathrooms is a kindness and a wise thing to do.

So name your seasons, see what rises to the surface, and name if there's something you'd like to focus on that's outside of your regular home care rhythm. If there isn't, thanks for listening, and I hope you have a beautiful day. If there is, let's walk through that door.

We'll be right back...

Okay, you have put spring cleaning into its proper context, you have now named what specific care tasks (to use KC Price's term) you'd like to pursue in the next few weeks, and now let's talk about how to make it happen.

When we add something to our lives that does not already have a natural place, we have to give it one. We have to give it a place. Just like "live in your season" is a Lazy Genius principle, so it "put everything in its place." If I say, "I want to prioritize preparing our bathrooms for this upcoming renovation" without figuring out those tasks are and putting them in their place, they will not get done. They'll just be an intention floating around. Actually, there's a quote from the novel *Two Nights in Lisbon* by Chris Pavone which is a murder spy thriller situation and not the place you'd expect to find great quotes on time management, but it does have this really relevant excerpt to all that we're talking about. For reference, Elaine and Ariel or mother and daughter.

" 'I don't see how you can live like this.' Elaine said this within five minutes of arriving at Ariel's house on Friday afternoon, barely a half-hour before Ariel needed to leave for the airport. 'I really don't.' Ariel's mom expresses some variation of this sentiment every time she visits, looking around the yard, the house, there's always something being torn up, something replaced or rebuilt - the downstairs washroom with an open patch of floor to access a burst pipe, the side porch with a half-built banister, the old maple pulled down next to the driveway and chain-sawed into large chunks but not yet into manageable firewood. There's always a large category of noncritical projects that can persist for long periods in the nonspecific future, awaiting attention. Ariel accepts this permanent state of demi-disrepair, but her mother adheres to the opposite operating principle: everything must be perfect, all the time. Or at least appear that way. Which is really the only sort of perfection: the apparent sort."

Again, that's a murder domestic thriller, but that picture is such a good one to help us frame almost everything we've talked about today. Other people see our choices differently than we do, and we can choose to let that significantly impact us and change our minds about what matters, or we can do the emotional labor of releasing it, letting it go, and living with our morally neutral choices that are best for the season we're in. And also that line about the noncritical projects that persist in the nonspecific future... there is nothing wrong with that, with living in a constant state of, as Pavone says, "demi-disrepair." But without those projects broken into smaller pieces, kind of like the big maple tree that has gone somewhat down its path to firewood but not completely, and then those smaller piece put in a place, they'll just wait for us. We won't get to them until either the situation becomes desperate or we do. And I'll say that most of the time when we live in some kind of disrepair, it becomes normalized and we don't see it anymore. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm not saying you should see it. I'm just saying that

you'll grow to not seeing it which means you won't get desperate for it. The situation might become desperate, like our running toilet that if not tended to could start leaking and cause more problems, but I wouldn't become desperate. In fact, if not for the sound of the toilet running and humming at me every 17 minutes, I wouldn't even notice. I wouldn't feel desperate about it all. Which is okay. But desperate things force their way in. It's not that they have a place; they displace other things. When something become urgent, it displaces what was already there. Which also throws things into a bit of a tizzy.

That's why one of my essential mindsets for Lazy Genius time management is to tend to the necessary before it comes urgent. You give the necessary a place before it displaces everything else.

So that's what we do here in this part of our room, having walked through this door. You break down your tasks for whatever type of care you're wanting to do in this season, and then you put it in its place. You put on the calendar, you put it in a routine, you put it on a to-do list to call a person and hire them to take care of it... whatever it is, you put it in its place. And remember that breaking that thing down into smaller tasks, again like the maple tree in that quote, is pretty essential. Because if I block out a Saturday morning to take care of the bathroom, I haven't called a plumber. I don't have containers that are necessary for our bathroom stuff to move into another bathroom that doesn't have the same storage. I don't have things in place to even put the thing in place. So don't just stick your big project on a random Saturday. Notice what the smaller pieces are.

For that maple tree, Ariel had to call a tree guy or procure a chainsaw herself. It had to be assessed in how it was going to be cut down. It was cut into larger pieces. And still remaining are cutting it into manageable pieces, knowing where those pieces will go, and actually transporting them there. You can't just say write on your Google calendar "cut down the tree," right? So live in the season, name what matters, make it smaller, and put it in its place.

And as you continue to hear rumblings of spring cleaning in your inbox and on social media and on commercials and all over, just remember that spring cleaning is morally neutral, it is not one size fits all, it is actually quite enormous and understandable overwhelming, and therefore it is not something you can do to completion without a massive influx of time and resources. So relax your shoulders, take a deep breath, you're doing great.

And that's a more helpful and maybe even hopeful way to look at spring cleaning.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Katie Haynes who has a great tip that could be great for those of you who are about to some spring break traveling. Katie writes this: "I keep a note on my phone of essentials I take anytime I go anywhere, but I always make it a checklist. I check things off as I pack them, but then I use that list when I'm packing to come home and uncheck each item so I make sure I don't leave anything behind. I'd be embarrassed if you knew how many chargers I forgot to bring home. No more!"

This is such a great tip, Katie! I know I've said before that I make the list each time because listing out what I need helps me think about the trip more broadly than just what I'm packing. However, I have started putting anything I've ever packed on a note in my phone as a checklist like this. I don't use it to physically pack but more to help remind me of what should go on my written list. So the entire list is always unchecked, but when it's time to go on another trip, I'll check off the things I need for that particular trip. Then I uncheck those things when I grab them for my trip, along with anything else I wrote down on my piece of paper. Both of these are ways to use the check and uncheck feature in a Note to work for you! Katie, this is so smart to not forget chargers. I mean seriously. So for everyone listening, notice that there are things you can do to utilize the function of something in a different way and for a different purpose than what other people do or even what the original purpose of that thing was for. You get to decide! Katie, I love what you decided, thanks for sharing it, and congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Okay, y'all, that's it for today! Remember to sign up for the Latest Lazy Listens email that goes out every other Friday. It has a robust summary of the last two weeks' worth of episodes and other resources, too. So I'll list out these three doors and the questions you need to ask to walk through them as well as links to some specific cleaning related podcast episodes and favorite non-LG resources, too. You can sign up for that in the link in the show notes or go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens. Thank you for being here with me today, 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!