

364 - When Life Feels Like a Fire Hose

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 364 - When Life Feels Like a Fire Hose.

We had a completely different episode planned for today, but my life turned into a fire hose life this week. My youngest got hit with pink eye and had to miss a couple of days of school, then shortly after my oldest got sick with both strep and Covid. He is in the house right now and will be for a few days still which means he has to miss his final middle school band concert. Some of you saw the video of him playing in his all-state band performance last week which is probably where he got strep and Covid, so you know that music is this kid's life blood. It's such a bummer for him.

With all of that upheaval and tending from me, this week has been the type where I do not thrive. Even though I talk a lot about pivoting around plans and being kind and flexible and compassionate, I love a good plan. I wrote a book called *The PLAN* (out October 8th). Creating order around chaos and knowing what's coming is my literal favorite. But one of the things that is almost more important than the plan itself is learning and practicing what to do when it doesn't work out. After many years of failed plans, I have seen the value of learning to pivot over learning to plan. Plans will always fall apart, and our ability to navigate that is crucial. That's why one of my favorite episodes of The Lazy Genius Podcast is Episode 310: How to Pivot Around Any Obstacle. It's so good for us to learn this.

But pivoting around a particular plan that goes awry is one thing. Feeling like life is a fire hose of chaos is another. This week has felt like a fire hose of chaos, of decisions and stimulation without letting up. With two kids home all week on the heels of a very busy weekend and on the cusp of another, my own plans have had to severely pivot. And we're doing it! We're doing okay, and we're doing it. But the barrage of decisions, of my kids needing something constantly, of feeling so incredibly overstimulated, of wearing the same clothes for literally three straight days, and feeling like the emotional exhaustion just will not let up... that energy is not my favorite. I mean, it's no one's favorite, but I do not do well there. Oh, and I'm PMSing. Didn't mention that. So that doesn't help at all.

All that to say, sometimes life feels like a fire hose, a constant stream of events or tasks or humans or needs or stimulation that wear you down, metaphorically soak you through, and create an environment where what you need keeps getting pushed to the back of the line. In those times, what do we do?

Today, I'm going to share four things to keep in mind when life feels like a fire hose. One is super duper practical, too, so don't think this is all pep talk energy even though I love pep talk energy.

Okay, let's jump in.

Number one, fire hose seasons are normal. Y'all, they are so normal. We hear a lot of messages about controlling our lives, about keeping things in check and in order, so when chaotic things happen, it's often leads up to feeling like we are responsible for the chaos, and while occasionally that might be true, like procrastinating on the laundry so long that no one has clean underwear which can be rectified and happens and you're not a bad person because of it, most of the time fire hose seasons just are. They're independent of us. For whatever reason, the combination of tasks, needs, and our own energetic and emotional bandwidth crash into each other in such a way that we feel like we're standing in front of a water hose. I think we need to normalize this feeling so that we don't sit in it alone, thinking we did something wrong. You didn't. Sometimes we have a day or a week or however long that feels like a fire hose. It just won't let up. It's like that children's book that I loved as a kid: Alexander's Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day. He got gum in his hair, his brothers got toys in their cereal boxes but he only found cereal, he had to sit in the middle of the car backseat instead of by the window, his teacher told him he left out 16 when he was counting, he didn't get dessert in his lunch like his friends did, he had to go to the dentist after school and get drilled for a cavity! I mean, that's a fire hose day if there ever was one. And the pile-on is part of the problem. The onslaught of stimulation and disappointment and needs and keeping things afloat can really wear you down. And it happens to all of us. So first, remember that you're not alone in the fire hose experience, that is perfectly normal. It's annoying, but it's normal. So what do you do about it?

That leads us to number two. It feels counterintuitive, but you need to slow down. Slow down. Now, yeah, that doesn't make a lot of sense because you're literally trying to stay sane in the wake of fast-moving everything, so going slower just seems stupid. It's not.

Yesterday, I had an intense fire hose moment where the following things all happened within five minutes: I got three different texts from three different people with benign, fairly easy to answer questions, but in my head, each one felt like asking me the meaning of life. The dryer beeped to tell me a cycle was done. One kid asked me for water, Goldfish, the remote, and her blankie. Not all at once, mind you. Four different requests sequentially. The other kid asked me what's for dinner for the fourth time that day, and that does something very particular to my attitude. The doorbell rang because groceries were delivered. The doorbell rang again because the mosquito guy needed to tell me he was going to spray the yard. I looked down at my to-do list and saw so many things not marked off. I noticed the container of chicken I had marinated and forgotten to put back in the fridge. Then because I was rushing around, I stubbed my toe on a pair of shoes left in the middle of the floor that were not mine, mind you.

And that was the last thing that happened. I literally stopped right where I was, sat on the floor next to the shoes, and tried not to cry. Not because crying is bad but because I was so exhausted and knew that if I released all the tears right then, I might not be able to stop. And I had two sick kids to still take care of and chicken to put away and clothes to get out of the dryer. Basically, the time for a half hour sob session was not now. But also I wasn't about to pick up my speed and just power through, ignoring how I was feeling. No. Instead of metabolizing the last few fire hose minutes with tears, I sat there, slowed down, and took several super deep, slow

breaths. I took a pause, and while it was a different kind of catharsis than crying is, it was what I needed right then. I needed to breathe, to slow down, and calm my body. Even when there is much to do and much to respond to, we need to slow down in these moments because otherwise we will spin out. Literally spin and spin until we can't even do the things we need to do anymore.

You know when you're in a rush and you can't get your shoes on or the key gets stuck in the door or you drop a glass and it breaks on the floor? When we're stressed out and go so fast, our brains somewhat go offline, and we make more mistakes. We're freaked out, we're not present, and we can sometimes cause more damage - metaphorical and literal - because of how quickly we're trying to get through all the things.

Instead, slow down. Breathe, slow your pace a little, even just for now while you recalibrate, and then do it again in an hour when you feel yourself spinning.

Now you might be saying, Kendra, okay fine I'll slow down a little, but what about when there are so many things to do? What about when I want a minute to be quiet and breathe, but this baby I'm holding won't stop crying? Or this stressful work meeting is happening in five minutes no matter what? Or I have to answer these texts actually right now?

That leads us to number three.

Number three is get better at urgency triage. Get better at urgency triage. Let me give some caveats here first.

I almost said "get good at urgency triage" instead of "get better," but good is relative and might make you feel like you aren't good at it at all, and then you'll get in your own head about not being good and then it becomes a whole self-esteem thing, and we're going to leave that one behind. It's also important to recognize that not every brain works the same. Some of you listening are neurodivergent, and your brains literally do not have the same executive function skills that others do. You might never be "good" at urgency triage in the normative way because your brain tells you that everything is urgent, or it doesn't naturally order your tasks without a lot of effort. So "get good at urgency triage" is not what we're after here.

Instead, let's think about it like this: get better at urgency triage. A little bit better a little bit at a time over a long period of time. Not right away and not to the same end for everyone listening. Instead, consider how you deal with the fire hose in front of you. How do you pluck out what you need to do first? However you do it, maybe you can do one small thing to help you do that a little better in a way that serves you specifically.

When you hear the doorbell ring and you see chicken on the counter and a kid asks you something and another kid asks you another something and you stub your toe and go into an

emotional tailspin, what on earth are you supposed to tend to first? Well first, slow down. Tell yourself it's normal, and slow down. That's already helpful. Now what? How do you decide what to do next?

I'm going to give you two ideas here. One is mine that I've shared before, and another is a bit more organized that came from a former President of the United States. Let's start with that one.

Have you heard of The Eisenhower Matrix? Apparently Dwight D. Eisenhower had to manage a lot of details when he was a five star general in World War II. Go figure. Then he became President and probably had a bit more on his to-do list than even being a general. He was excellent at urgency triage, at knowing what to do first, and there is a triage tool called The Eisenhower Matrix. It would be easier if you could see it, but it's also fairly simple to describe.

Imagine four blocks. Two rows, two columns, okay? Across the top of the top two blocks, you see the words "urgent" and "not urgent." Okay? Then down the side of the left two blocks, you see the words "important" and "not important." So the top left block is "urgent and important." Top right is "not urgent and important." Bottom left is "urgent and not important." Bottom right is "not urgent and not important." See it?

The Eisenhower Matrix gives you an action based on the block you're looking at. If it's urgent and important, you do it. Do it now. Prioritize that. If something is not urgent but still important, schedule it. Make sure it happens by carving out time for it, but that time doesn't have to be right now. If something is urgent but not important, delegate it. Give it to someone else to do. And if something is not urgent and not important, don't do it. Let it go. Delete it from your brain.

Okay, let's go back to my moment on the floor as I had all of these stimuli and needs hit me at once. In many ways, I think the most urgent and important thing in that moment was to slow down and breathe for a minute. I needed to calm my body. Awesome. Now I can do an urgency triage. So from that list of all the things that happened in five minutes, honestly one of the most urgent and important was the chicken on the counter. That puppy needs to be put in the fridge pronto. Awesome. I got off the floor and did it. One thing down.

Next came something that's important but not urgent, and that was Annie wanting Goldfish and the remote and water. They're important to her but not urgent which is why she delegated them to me. Hilarious she's already great at this. But guess what? I had other more urgent things in that moment than getting her a cup of Goldfish, like bringing the delivered groceries into the house. So instead of yelling "get your own stuff" or ignoring her or fragmenting myself yet again by stopping what I was doing to tend to her and then forgetting what I was doing in the first place, I said, "Annie, I can get those for you in a few minutes, but I can't right now. If you want them now, you can get them. If you're good waiting about five minutes, I'll bring them to you in a bit." She can delegate to me, but I can also delegate back to her depending on how urgent this need is. That's super in the weeds when I break it down like this and I wasn't necessarily thinking about it to this level of detail in my head. This is what happens in a split second, you know? And to be fair, I'm naturally gifted at urgency triage. We all have different giftings, and

that is one of mine. I am amazing in a crisis. I'm not necessarily the one to comfort you in a crisis (I'm working on it), but I can manage your fire hose for you. But even if you're not naturally inclined to think this way, maybe something like The Eisenhower Matrix can help you know how to see your things. And the better you get at urgency triage and the more you practice these types of things, the more easily they come to you. It's like any skill you develop. You can get better a little bit at a time at urgency triage.

Here's another option. You can do this reactively in your head or on a piece of paper if that helps, and that is my beloved list categorization of "now, soon, later, and never mind." This is a way I triage the urgency of my to-do list, and I love it so much. You write down all the things or just think about one thing you're about to do in the moment and ask "Does this have to happen now? Can it be soon? Or even way later? Or even forgotten about completely?" Just ask in the moment. It's so helpful to catch your brain in that tailspin, remind it that not everything is urgent, and simply name what is. Now, soon, later, and never mind.

If you have a lot of learning and growing to do in the area of urgency triage, honestly the most important thing that you can do to help yourself as you decide what is important right now is to slow down and breathe. Truly. You will not make the best decisions when you're scattered and frantic and thinking that everything matters right now. In fact, if you stay in that space, you'll probably start to get resentful and mean and also break a glass while you're rushing around. Chaos begets chaos, so see what you can do to calm it.

And that leads us to number four. Number four is that kindness is crucial. Kindness is crucial. Kindness to yourself and your people in fire hose times is maybe the most important, critical part of making it through, and in a weird way, it's one of the things that calms the chaos the most.

When you are kind to yourself when life feels like a fire hose, you don't get bent out of shape. Or at least it takes longer to bend you out of shape. When you're kind to yourself, you might say to yourself things like, "We're doing okay. We don't have to get all of this done right now, and we're doing okay." Or you might speak into the old ways you did something and name that you have grown so much and are handling this really well. I do that often. I have grown in pretty tremendous ways over the last decade or so, and I celebrate that as often as possible. When I don't yell at Sam for asking me what's for dinner again, that's a victory. I'm so grateful that I have learned to be softer and less reactive over time. When I leave the dishes on the counter for another few hours rather than taking care of them right away because I know that a nap will be better for me right now, that's growth, and I am kind to myself in celebrating that growth. Notice how you have changed even in the tiniest ways, and be kind as you navigate a difficult season, especially when how you navigate it has improved. I think that's so rad.

It's also crucial to be kind to our people. Last night after a long day of caring for Annie, dealing with her boredom and constant need of me even though I had work to do and another kid to take care of, of taking Sam to the doctor to find out he has Covid and seeing the whole week turn upside down, of writing the newsletter that went out last week (time is weird with podcast recordings), of making food for us to eat and for friends to eat the next day because they just

had a baby and I'm taking them food tonight - quite happily, mind you - and of tending to the groceries and the mosquito guy and the texts and the disappointment every time I passed a mirror and was still in the same clothes with the same dirty face and hair just trying to make it, last night I had a pivotal moment where I could choose kindness towards my husband or not. I had finished putting Annie to bed and was getting settled on the couch to draw a face. If you read my newsletter last week, I'm on a kick of learning to draw and paint faces. It's so fun, and I had been looking forward to finally getting that time all day. I sat down, put my sketchbook on my lap, picked up a pencil, and immediately heard a kid yell from the other room, "Hey, Mom? Can you come look at something?" Y'all, the whole neighborhood probably heard how deeply I sighed. But I put my book down and got right back up. Kaz was also on the couch, and when I passed him, he smiled a very "I'm so sorry you're always on call." He even thanked me multiple times over the last few days that I was holding everything. He offered to take a day off so we could switch out, but frankly it made more sense with our work and the kids' needs (people love their mamas when they're sick) for me to be the one who was the sick kid parent. And yet as I walked past him while he got to stay on the couch, I was so mad. How dare he just sit there? Why does this always have to be me?! And then right away - because I have learned the value of this practice over years and years - I accessed kindness. I felt kindness towards him in that moment and started to feel my anger seep away.

I don't talk about my faith much here, but I'm a Christian and believe that the Holy Spirit lives in me, and kindness is a fruit of that indwelling. If you've ever heard the phrase "the fruits of the Spirit," that's what that means. And y'all I'm so glad because I do not have access to kindness on my own. On my own, I am so mean. For real. You should be in the car with me sometime. That's where I'm meanest. On my own, I am mean and resentful and passive aggressive and then actually aggressive, so I'm personally so grateful for my faith and my belief that I have access to supernatural kindness. And in that moment as I passed Kaz on the couch, that's what I felt. I had access to kindness that didn't come from me but was still mine. I immediately recognized that Kaz had come home from a long day of working as a middle school guidance counselor (a tough job, y'all) and he went straight into dinner with us and then immediately into playing games with the younger kids and filling their buckets. And while I was putting Annie to bed, he had helped Ben with his math homework and started a load of laundry with the rest sorted and ready to go. Because I was resenting what I was doing, I lost sight of what he had already done! He had been on just as much as I had all day, had come home and been an active participant, and he was also taking a minute to rest on the couch. He just got there before I did, and also his name isn't Mom so he's not beckoned as much as I am. When I accessed kindness towards him, I felt so much better. My life didn't feel as much of a fire hose because I could see it a little more clearly for what it is.

The fire hose life happens. It's normal. When you have two kids suddenly home sick with antibiotic schedules and eye drops and canceled Covid plans and work that still has to happen and groceries that need to be put away and all of it, life is going to feel upside down. Of course it is. But by naming that it's normal, by slowing down, by getting better at urgency triage even in the moment, and by accessing kindness towards yourself and your people, the fire hose is still

the fire hose, but it's not knocking you over. And even if it does, you'll just sit there, maybe rotate a little so it hits your back instead of your face, and know that you're going to be okay.

This feels like a good place to remind all of us of the Lazy Genius mindset: good is here right now. Even when life feels like a fire hose, good is there. It's there in the form of kindness towards yourself, of your kid laughing at her fifth Spongebob episode of the day, of a friend who sends you a funny meme along with the question she needs an answer to, of the lone unsick middle kid who comes home happy instead of downtrodden and holy moly are you glad you can just celebrate him and not do any hard parenting, of the three day old clothes being the softest you own. Good is here right now even when life feels like a fire hose.

I hope this episode helps you see your own fire hose life with a little more kindness.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week! This week it's Elizabeth Hubler. Elizabeth writes, "It's gift giving season! We just got an invitation to a graduation party and knew we'd been invited to his older brother, so wanted to give equal gift. Wish I had done this before. I use my notes app for this, but could easily use google docs or whatever. I made a file called "Decide Once" and started a list for wedding gifts, graduation gifts, teacher appreciation, kid birthdays, adult birthdays...and the amount we'd be spending." This is such a helpful idea, Elizabeth, and I bet a lot of you listening either already do this or will totally make a Notes app note right now. Consistency in seasons like this is helpful to the giver and kind to the recipient. Thanks for the message, Elizabeth, 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!