



It's About Time

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Getting organized is easy **AS ABC**— yeah, right! It's true that some will find it easier to get and stay organized than others, but largely, it takes effort and consistent action. In honor of back to school, here are 26 organizing principles that can help you stay afloat between meetings, floods of paper, and your busy schedule.



Accessibility – Make your most frequently used things easy to access; between shoulder and knee height.

Bundle up – Use a bundle or batch approach to accomplish repetitive tasks such as errands, bill paying, food prep, and mending.

Containerize – Keep items grouped by category and separated in containers to help with retrieval, cleanup, and maintenance. A container also establishes a limit to how much you save in a given category, and provides an opportunity to show your style in the type of container you use.

Deadline – Is not a dirty word! A deadline can propel you forward to getting things done. Set your own deadlines and be true to yourself in meeting them.

Enlist help – When you need to get organized, having another person present for moral support and a second opinion can be quite helpful. Before I worked with a pair of teenage sisters, they helped one another sort in short blocks of time, going back and forth between their rooms.

Focus – Staying focused is imperative to successful organizing. Decide on the areas or changes you wish to tackle, and then concentrate on one area at a time. Dedicate your energy to one room until you finish.

Get started – Where you start is not as important as that you start. Start where you will see a noticeable difference. You will notice a flow, and momentum will build.

Home – Establish a home or resting spot for your belongings, and return items to their home after use. Put an end to homelessness in your habitation.

Identify – Remember when you were in kindergarten (or your child was) and everything was labeled so you knew where to find it? Identifying with labels helps overcome the problem of not being able to use something because you can't find it.

Just say no – Being disorganized can result when you have too much to do. You may need to say no to something(s) in order to achieve an organized life.

Keep – Keep it where you use it. If you need a lock for the gym, keep it in your gym bag in the car. If your kids like to do homework in the kitchen, keep study supplies such as paper and dictionary in that room.

List – Making a to-do list can relieve anxiety over “what am I forgetting?” Your list lets you download your brain and provides direction for what needs to be done. If you tend to lose lists, try a notebook. Or, you may like keeping your list on the computer, and print it when needed for errands.

Maintain – There is not much in our lives that doesn't need regular attendance to keep running optimally. Stephen Covey calls it “sharpening the saw.” When we defer maintenance, it's

harder to accomplish things and be productive (harder to saw wood). Avoid buying things that need lots of maintenance.

No more excuses – Everyone has reasons for their disorganization: “I was never taught, I come from a long line of pack rats, I grew up in a poor family, I had a debilitating illness, I moved, I work a night job,” etc. It's fine and dandy to recognize how chaos came into your life, but excuses will only take you so far. At some point, you must say, “The buck stops here”, and take responsibility for your life.

Out with the old – Stop saving “just in case.” What will you know tomorrow that you don't know today?

Purge – Regularly purge closets, drawers, cupboards, and the garage.

Quality vs. quantity – After sorting through your closet, you may discover you have five black skirts. Go for the best one that you have worn in the last year.

Receipts – Make a spot for these—even a shoebox! Save until tax time and evaluate then whether you need them to support your tax return or proof of purchase for warranty or returns.

Save – Save what you use or love and recycle or donate the rest.

Timer – Set a fixed amount of time for completing a task or project. Use a kitchen timer, the one on your watch, or cell phone. When the timer signals the end, you can evaluate your progress and energy level. You may find you are ready to tackle more.

Under – Look down under for storage space. Under my couch you'll find the dining room table leaves. Under bed storage boxes can be used to hold out of season clothes—anything you don't use often.

Visualize – Get a picture in your mind of what you would like your space to look like, and then consider vertical storage with hooks, shelves, and over the door racks.

Weed – Regularly weed out your storage areas. Just as weeds can take over and ruin a garden, clutter can be the demise of your home or office if not eradicated.

X – Follow the eXample of the most organized person you know, adapting as needed. Ask for her advice on your most pressing organizing issues. Try out the advice and see how it works for you.

Year – Keep goals for the year in a prominent place. Your goals help you decide what's important. This means you will make decisions on how to spend your time that reflect your goals, and store and keep what you value.

Zones – Organize your rooms into zones by what activity takes place there. In the TV zone, you'll want to have the TV guide, remote, video or DVDs.

It's About Time...

Bringing order to your space,
Making room for your dreams.

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E-TIPS

Are you receiving your free monthly E-tip from It's About Time? Don't miss out! D.B. of Walnut Creek said "That last E-tip really made me think about what's important. Thanks for shining a light on the subject of clutter." Send an email to mlm@marylynnemurray.com and we'll add you to our list.

Inspirational Quotes

"It's good to have money and the things that money can buy, but it's good too, to check up once in a while and make sure you haven't lost the things money can't buy."

George Lorimer, Long-time editor of the Saturday Evening Post

"Through the years I have found it wonderful to acquire, but it is also wonderful to divest. It's rather like exhaling."

Helen Hayes, Actress

NEED TO READ

Did you know that Contra Costa County's favorite Organizer is also a Columnist for The Contra Costa Times? Over 35 organizing topics—from First Impressions to Junk Drawers—are revealed in my "Get Organized" column. Look for it twice monthly in the Home & Garden section on Saturdays, or view columns at www.marylynnemurray.com. Click on "Articles."