

real solutions

Winter 2006, Issue 5

Real Solutions is a periodic newsletter produced by Susan Stewart designed to provide practical organization tips to simplify your life.

Conquering Correspondence & Christmas Clutter in the New Year

The New Year is here,

Nicole is back in school and the in-laws have gone. Cindy should be breathing a sigh of relief but instead she is feeling overwhelmed—this time due to post-Christmas clutter. The tree and decorations need to be put away, and there are piles of Christmas cards, letters and pictures which have overtaken the house. And of course their annual Christmas letter that hasn't been written yet. Hmm.... let's shoot for Valentine's Day.

Cindy starts taking down ornaments and you can bet Megan and Zachary are there to help. While digging through the garage to find a box for the ornaments, the kids decided to decorate the living room with the ornaments that just came off the tree. The one hour project has turned into an all day adventure — or should I say fiasco?

Several days later, Cindy gets a rare moment alone and decides to knock out that Christmas/Valentine's letter. Writing the letter wasn't too much trouble but locating all the updated addresses was something she hadn't bargained for. "There must be a better way", she thinks to herself as she crosses out the old addresses in her address book.

Before she knows it, Zachary is up from his nap and it is time to pick up Nicole from school. On the way home, she stops to pick up the mail. The mail gets tossed on the kitchen counter and before Cindy can even consider picking up a piece of mail, she is bombarded with questions about homework, the kids fighting over the snacks and the ubiquitous question of "what is for dinner?"

The dinner scramble begins with throwing the pile of mail into a corner so she can prepare dinner on the kitchen counter. A few minutes later when Mike calls to say he invited a co-worker over for dinner, the pile of mail gets moved again. This time it is thrown into a bag and shoved in the closet. It seemed like a good plan until she couldn't find a few bills a week or two later. She vaguely remembered putting them in a bag. Cindy wishes there was something she could do to stop this exhausting cycle.



Brook is back in school and Tracy is anxious to get her house back in order. During Alex's nap time she gets the ornaments box out of the garage, wraps them and puts them away. Later that evening she and Kevin will take down the tree and lights. By the end of the week, she should have it all taken care of.

The next day, after dropping Brook off at school, Tracy stops to pick up the mail. It is much easier for her to deal with the mail in the morning than at the end of the day. She sorts it into categories and puts junk mail straight into the trash. The kids need attention so she will deal with the "needs action" items later.

On Saturday, 4 year-old Brandon, Brook and Tracy sit down for the special time they have planned together. Tracy grabs the envelope with all the pictures she received over the holidays, a paper cutter and the double sided tape. Her plan is to "crop" down the photos and tape them to a bulletin board which will later be hung in the hallway known as her "hall of fame". As Tracy replaces the old pictures with new ones, she gives the kids the old pictures to cut and paste into their own notebooks. The kids enjoy this activity with and it gives them a chance to talk about friends and family.

Most mornings Tracy gets up early to enjoy her coffee in peace and quiet. For the next couple of months, she will also use this time to read one or two Christmas letters from the "to read" pile. When she has finished reading them, she puts her initial in the corner so John knows she has read that one. Later, after reading it, he knows it can be thrown away. It takes longer to get through them this way but at least she can catch up on her many friends' lives.

Another project Tracy hopes to complete this month is updating the addresses on her computer database. She has all of her Christmas card envelopes in the "needs action" slot of her mail organizer and will take several chunks of time to check them with her database. This process will save her precious time later in the in the year and help her be ready for next year.

real solutions for real life • Dealing with Mail

- Most people happen to get the mail at a very stressful time of day (i.e. on their way home from work or picking up the kids). When they walk in the door there are other pressing issues, so the mail gets thrown on the kitchen counter or table. Keep in mind that the time of day your mail is delivered does not have to determine when you get the mail. Get it when it is convenient for you and you have time to sort through it.
- The amount of junk mail that arrives daily in our mailboxes can be overwhelming. Open the mail by a shredder or garbage can if possible so the junk can be weeded out immediately. It is also a little known fact that you can write the **Mail Preference Service Direct Marketing Association at PO Box 282 Carmel, NY 15012** and ask to have your name, phone number and address permanently removed from all direct marketing and pre-screening databases.
- Once the junk mail has been tossed, the remainder of the mail must be sorted. I have found the following categories to be helpful in sorting mail: Bills, Needs Action, To Read, To Be Filed, and Donation Opportunities. If there are several adults living in one residence, it may be helpful to sort by name instead. Using a mail organizer with slots, trays, or files that are clearly labeled will help with this process.
- The sorting is only effective if you set a time in your schedule to deal with the items in the various categories. Start a new habit this year of reading one piece of mail with your cereal and coffee in the morning or before your favorite TV show begins. Set a certain day of the week that you pay bills. Think of the time you will save not searching all over for them! Put it on a “to do list” to file 10 items once a week or allocate that job to a child that is old enough to handle that responsibility. To kids, filing is fun! Set time aside each week in your schedule to deal with “needs action” items.
- Let go of the guilt of not saving every coupon that makes its way through your door. Look at the expiration date and ask yourself how likely it is that you will actually use it before it expires. If you do decide to save some coupons, keep a small drawer designated to coupons or a small expandable envelope in your car so you have them with you when you spontaneously decide to stop at Linens ‘n Things on your way home from work.

If you have any other tips for dealing with mail, send them to me so I can share them with my other readers!

If you would like more help getting organized, call me at 623-202-9199 to set up an appointment.