



3 Secrets to Organizing Anything

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by Susan Stewart, Professional Organizer

Imagine for a minute going home today and straightening up the house in just a few minutes because everything already has a place. You don't have to decide what to make for dinner tonight because it's your daughter's night to cook, she knows what to make and you already have all the ingredients in the house. You need to pay the bills but they are all in one place and it only takes 15-20 minutes to get it done. Imagine if you had an afternoon to go shopping with a girlfriend planned for this weekend and you didn't feel the least bit guilty about it. How would you feel? All of these things and more are possible with organization. While I can't make that all happen today, I can promise you that by the end of this article you will know **3 Secrets to Organizing Anything.**

Have the Correct Ratio

You may not have known this but there is a magic ratio to reducing clutter. What is that ratio? You have to bring things in at a slower rate than they are going out. It's that simple. Let me demonstrate. Let's imagine that a common Mason jar is your house and noodles are the "stuff" coming into your house. Day after day "stuff" is coming into your house. But life is busy and you're barely keeping your head above water during the week so nothing goes out. Ah, then the weekend arrives but you have a soccer tournament, a football game and a school carnival to attend. Somewhere in between those activities, you managed to let go of a few things but you only

made a dent in the pile of papers on the counter. And so the cycle continues. Now it doesn't really matter all that much how big the jar is does it? It's about the ratio. In order to have the right ratio, you've got to do two things: Slow down the rate at which things are coming in and speed up the rate that they are going out. How do you do that?

- First, recognize when you are buying into the **More Mentality**. What's the more mentality? It's thinking that if having something is good, having more of it will be better. We see this played out all over. A large soda is no longer enough. We must have a Big Gulp. *Supersize* has become a household term. Large warehouse stores encourage us to buy everything in bulk. Commercials convince us that having the latest gadget will make our lives better. Sale gimmicks like "10/\$10" or "Buy 3, Get One Free" entice us to purchase more than we need.
- Second, set boundaries to help you know how much is enough. One of the ways I help people set boundaries is through the use of baskets and labels. Let's say for example that I am helping you organize your pantry. I might give you a basket for your rice and pasta and label it as such. By giving you the basket as the boundary, you now know how much rice and pasta is enough to have on hand. You have one place to put the rice and pasta and when the basket is full, you don't have room for more.
- Third, be willing to let go. I often hear "what if I need it later?" If you need something later, is there another way you could retrieve it? The internet is a wonderful resource for finding almost any story, quote, fact or illustration. There is a

cost to storing things and want to make sure the item you are storing outweighs that cost. Organizing is like monkey bars, you have to let go in order to move on. It may feel a little scary at first, but once you get going, you won't want to stop.



Have a System

When there isn't a system in place, everyone does what they want, when they feel like it and we all know how that goes! A system is a coordinated method or plan of procedure. Let's take your job for example. Are there policies and procedures? Do you have a job description and set of duties you need to perform? What would happen if there were no systems in place and every day you showed up to work you had to figure out and guess what you were supposed to do? Think about the difference mentally between having procedures in place and not having procedures in place? The same is true in our homes. When we have established systems and routines at home, it is not as mentally taxing.

Let me give you an example of how not having a system can cost you—literally. A friend of mine who is also a professional organizer recently told me about a couple she was working with. It was a whole house project that took several weeks to complete. In the process they began to find un-cashed checks and misplaced cash. In the end they found nearly \$10,000! Can you believe it? Setting up a system is an essential part of organizing and helps manage your resources.

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Follow Through

You have to follow through. You can have the best system in the world but if you don't follow through, it won't work. Most people need help when it comes to following through on something that is difficult for them. People are motivated by different things and knowing what motivates you is key to following through. Are you motivated by change? Seeing visual change is going to be important for you. Are you motivated by incentive? Rewards are imperative as you achieve your goals. Are you motivated by affirmation? Working with a coach or having someone alongside to give you affirmation will keep you motivated. Remember, it takes 3 weeks to develop a habit. After about 3 weeks of doing something, it will become a routine or habit and will no longer be as difficult. Keep on pressing forward. It will be worth it in the end!



Susan Stewart, professional organizer and owner of Perfectly Placed, has been organizing professionally for 9 years. With a degree in Human Development & The Family and a background in coaching and teaching, Susan is equipped in simplifying the organization process and teaching it to others.

Susan is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and her local NAPO-St. Louis chapter. Susan served as a board member, was involved in community service throughout the Phoenix valley, and was the recipient of both the Founder's and President's award in NAPO-Arizona, before moving to St. Louis. Perfectly Placed provides professional hands-on organizing services in both the St. Louis and Phoenix metro areas as well as virtual organizing and life balance coaching to clients around the world.

Find out more at www.perfectlyplaced.org

