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### THE TAO OF ORDER

by Ken Knox

With Summer finally upon us, two Professional Organizers offer some tips for clearing out unwanted clutter and simplifying your life



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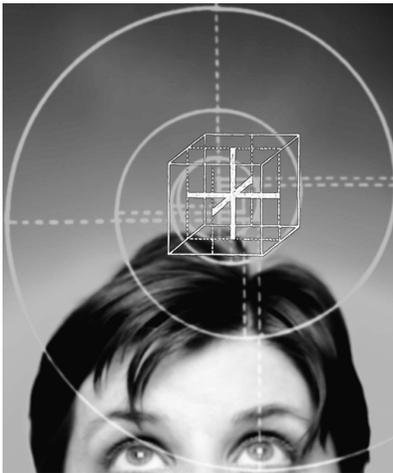
#### IT HAPPENS EVERY YEAR.

No matter how good one's intentions, that plan to spruce up your apartment with a hefty dose of spring cleaning goes right out the window, along with that other plan not to be such a slut. (Uh huh; you know who you are.) Perhaps it's because the task of wading through all the clutter is such a daunting prospect. Perhaps you just have a hard time letting go of things you feel emotionally attached to. Or perhaps you're just a big, lazy slob. Whatever the reason, now that summer has officially arrived, there's no better time to start pulling down those boxes of papers, rummaging through those unworn clothes and shoes, and (as Oprah is so apt to say) simplifying your life. So, in an effort to help you get your home into tip-top shape for those summer guests (and hell— who are we kidding?—tricks), we here at Frontiers sought out two professional home organizers—one established and one just starting out—to offer some practical, sensible advice on how to eliminate chaos from your life—stress-free!

#### GET PREPARED FIRST.

No sense getting started if you're not sure where things are going to go, says **John Trosko**, a long-time organizer (and member of the National Association of Professional Organizers) who runs his own business, OrganizingLA "Declare what the space is to be used for," he offers. Once you've done that, you can get started with just a few easy steps. "Line your walls with simple, adjustable shelving that match, color-wise. Dedicate a box or basket to toss unwanted items into for charitable donations. Arrange bookcases with boxes and baskets symmetrically on the shelves. This signals order and makes a cramped room feel larger."

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## THE TAO OF ORDER *continued*

### **DON'T GO OVERBOARD, MARTHA.**

When choosing storage units, Trosko recommends clear, plastic containers: "They're durable, inexpensive, and see through," he says) for the garage and pantry, while "for highly visible locations, decorative containers can compliment the surrounding décor as well." That

said, it's best to be practical, advises Chris Zimmerman, who channeled a self-professed "type A, obsessive-compulsive" disorder into the business he's just started. "If it's to be seen, it should take on a decorative and functional role," he posits. "However, décor doesn't matter if it's tucked away in a closet. It doesn't necessarily have to be pretty if nobody's gonna see it."

### **START SMALL.**

Terrified of attempting to whip that chaotic garage into shape? Well, try starting somewhere else less intimidating to help inspire you. "Pick one very small area to start in," says Trosko. "By choosing a small space, i.e. a bookshelf, drawer, or coat closet, you can generally finish within a few short hours and feel a great sense of accomplishment." "It's about breaking the tasks down and making them less daunting and time consuming," agrees Zimmerman. "Don't get sidetracked. Too many people procrastinate because they either don't want to be bothered or they're paralyzed by the fear of not getting it done or done right. You'll be surprised how motivated you'll be after you see just that little bit of progress." Just remember the next piece of advice....

### **DON'T DO TOO MUCH AT ONCE.**

Progress is great, but it's better appreciated when it comes in small doses. "Work in short periods of time and reward yourself for your accomplishments," Trosko offers. Zimmerman agrees, adding, "The best way to get organized is to spend five to 10 minutes a day doing something that is helping you to clean and organize. In those few minutes, organize one shelf in your pantry or one drawer in your desk. Before you know it, the entire desk or pantry will be organized."

### **LEAVE NOSTALGIA IN THE PAST.**

Sure, that satin jumper from 1985 is retro-cool and all, but what's the point in having it if you're not going to use it? "Get rid of things that you aren't able to, won't, or can't use," Zimmerman says. "Let go."

Meanwhile, Trosko offers his own advice to compulsive packrats: "Approach the area asking yourself, 'When was the last time I used this item?' If it hasn't been wore than a year, give serious thought to purging the item" ("Purge," Trosko notes, is the professional organizer's "kindler, gentler" way of saying "Get rid of your crap, mmm-kay?").

### **QUARANTINE YOUR CLUTTER.**

Here's a thought: You know that storage closet you have? How about using it for storage? "Put like items together," Zimmerman advises. "If you find CDs in the closet, but your cabinet is in the living room, take them to the living room. It's easier to find things if you only have to go looking in one place. Items for the kitchen shouldn't be stored in the guest bedroom." Of course, he adds, it helps if the space you choose is large enough to hold said items. "Everything should have a place and fit in that place," Zimmerman continues. "If its place is too small, think about whether it's time to throw it out. Don't let it outgrow its space."

### **STAY ON TOP OF THINGS.**

Getting organized is great, but what's the point if you're not going to stay organized? "Routinely visit your local charity to empty your charity box," Trosko says. "Once a space is more manageable, take another hard look at your buying habits. Pledge to yourself to not purchase or inherit anything unless you fully intend on using it. Lastly, establish a routine to keep the clutter at bay, but one that you can live with. De-cluttering and organizing can represent a major turning point in the quality of your life, as well as your partner's and family's." Which brings us to ...

### **THINK OF IT AS STARTING FRESH.**

"For many, organizing is a form of therapy," Zimmerman states. "It forces you to look at the reasons why you hang on to things, why you aren't making the most of your time and space, and why you're living the way you are." Just be realistic, he adds: "Organizing, unlike its portrayal on home improvement shows, is not about redoing a room in half an hour. Don't be fooled by the quick-fix phenomena, but don't be afraid to jump in and start clearin' the clutter!"

John Trosko can be reached through his Web site, [www.organizingla.com](http://www.organizingla.com).