

In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

Albert Einstein, Scientist

CHAPTER ONE

The Foundation of Organizing

WHAT DOES BEING ORGANIZED MEAN?

I have good news for you—being organized does NOT have to mean being neat! Isn't that a relief? What being organized DOES mean is being able to find things when you need them...not 3 weeks later. Let's look at two situations.

1. Julie is in her office and she receives a phone call from her boss. He tells her he is stopping by her office in 10 minutes. What is the first thing that Julie does? She starts

shoving all the clutter into drawers, boxes, and cabinets. When her boss arrives, he sees nothing but a neat environment. Does this mean that Julie is organized? No!

2. On the other hand, Bob has piles of clean laundry in his bedroom...some on the dresser, some on the bed, a bit on the nightstands, and even some on the floor. It is not a pretty sight, but Bob knows exactly where to find his socks, pants, shirts, and underwear. Is Bob organized? Yes!

In other words, you don't have to live in a sterile, boring environment to be organized. You just have to have effective systems that work for you.

THE COLD HARD FACTS

Being disorganized doesn't mean you are a bad person, and isn't necessarily a reflection on a person's character at all. In most cases, a person is disorganized not because of some character flaw, but because his system of managing paper and "stuff" needs a tune-up. And sometimes, there is no system at all. Having said that, however, being disorganized does tend to reflect poorly on a person, and unfortunately, people may judge you if your home or office is in chaos. You may come across as incompetent because you can't find an important file. Just as importantly, there

are financial costs to being disorganized as well. If you don't think that being disorganized is a big deal, let me demonstrate in a measurable way that it is, especially in the work place.

Being disorganized means constantly having to search for things. If you spend just five minutes of each hour of an 8-hour day looking for things, that adds up to over four wasted weeks a year!

HERE'S HOW:

5 min./hour X 8 hours/day = 40 min./day

40 min./day = 200 min./week

200 min./week = 10,000 min./year

10,000 min./year = 166 hours

166 hours = 20.75days

20.75 days = 4.15weeks/year

Thus, if you are paying a person \$10/hour, faulty systems and disorganization are costing you \$10/hour X 166 hours OR **\$1660/year!** And that's just one person! If you multiply that times the number of disorganized people in your company, it can be staggering.

Now, if *you* are disorganized, figure what your time is worth and multiply it by 166 hours. Do you like what you see? I didn't think so.

The worst part is (yes, it gets worse!) that most people spend MORE than five minutes of every hour trying to find misplaced items. The reality is that most people waste an average of SIX weeks per year! The calculations above use conservative estimates, but they make the point. So the next time you spend five minutes looking for something, ask yourself if it's worth it to get organized. I think you'll agree that it is.

HOW ORGANIZING IS USUALLY DONE

Let's say you have a mess in your office. You get in that mood to straighten up, which usually means you are so disgusted with how your office looks that you can't take it any more. So you run around throwing things into drawers, closets, boxes, or crevices—any space that is hidden.

You step back a few hours later and admire your work. It is a masterpiece! The room looks so neat that you can't believe your eyes—that is, as long as you don't open the closet doors, look under the bed, behind the desk, or on the other side of the file cabinet. You even leave the room just so you can walk back in and get that rush over and over

again. You've never been more proud of yourself!

Then it happens. Within a week, the room is back to the way it was before you got that burst of energy to clean it up. It looks like a tornado has struck. It may even look worse than when you started to clean it up the first time!

The reason this happens is simple: you never took the time to establish SYSTEMS that are designed around the way that you work. You simply put things in a place that was convenient at the moment. To become truly organized, you must pay attention to your habits—those that work and those that don't.

Let's take a look at organizing from a professional's point of view...

PATTY'S PERSPECTIVE

As a professional organizer, my goal is to develop systems for my client that will help him stay organized day in and day out.

To prevent my client from staying mired in the disorganization cycle, I would lead him through a three-step process that is the basis for this whole book. When my client follows this three-step process, the result is a successful, effective, and long-lasting

organizing session. Skipping any one step can be detrimental to the results.

Step 1... get READY

Let's use David as an example. First, I spend about an hour with David at his location to explore how we could better organize his environment. I ask several questions to get to know him...how he thinks, how his daily life flows, what his day is "normally" like. About 45 minutes into the hour, a clearer picture emerges based on these questions, and I can identify David's most obvious trouble spots. The piles of papers have grown so big that he can no longer see over them, his telephone is too far from his chair, and his database is out of date. The questions I ask vary from client to client, depending on each client's personality, the severity of the problem, the client's willingness to open up, etc. But for now, I will tailor my questions to get to know David on many levels so that I can design solutions specifically for him. For example, how much of the piled paper on your desk is current? With which ear do you talk on the phone? How often do you access your database?

Step 2...get SET

From Step 1, I know more about David and his personality, what is hindering him, and what systems may be the best for him. Now I need to know:

- ☆ David's organizing goals.
- ☆ How David envisions the end result.
- ☆ If getting organized is a priority for David.
- ☆ If David has time to invest in getting organized at this time.

This information will allow us to establish David's goals and create a plan accordingly. If we don't know where or how far David wants to go with the organizing and how he is going to get there, we cannot measure our success.

During our meeting we determined that David's goals are: to clear off his desktop, to make using the phone more comfortable, and to clean up his database. In order to do this, we will: design a filing system for the papers on his desk, move the phone to a more logical location, and schedule time to enter his contacts into his database. Goals and plans are key components to accomplishing any challenge, and organizing is no exception.

In this step, we are also determining how David thinks. Does he like to see everything out on his desk or does he work better when there is NOTHING on his desk? We are

looking at David's style and thought process. Would colored folders be appealing to David? Or are plain manila and green hanging folders acceptable? Does David think alphabetically, numerically, in categories, or in geographic regions? I listen to David as we discuss his daily routine and from his answers, I can surmise his style and preferences. This is all part of the plan to customize systems for David.

Step 3...GO!

Finally, David and I set up a time for my return to put the plan into action. At that time, we sort through all of the clutter that is plaguing David, making decisions as quickly as possible. Before you know it, the systems that we had planned are quickly taking form. It's a beautiful thing!

The GO part of the process can last anywhere from 2 hours to 252 hours, depending on the nature and volume of the problem and the client's speed for decision-making. I must warn you: it will get ugly before it gets pretty.

By using the READY, SET, GO! System, you too can become organized.

So the next time you go into a room and find that you are overwhelmed by the clutter, try something new. Instead of unconsciously throwing things into any available container,

STOP and think about what you are doing. Make an effort to first understand your habits and the logic (or lack of logic) behind them. Only then will you truly be able to conquer your clutter.

YOUR REASONS TO GET ORGANIZED

Before you begin the process of becoming organized, I want you to take a few minutes and think about **why** you want to be organized. What is motivating you to want to be organized? Knowing this answer will keep you focused on your goal, especially when you get discouraged. Below is a checklist of some common reasons I have heard over the years. Perhaps some of these will apply to your situation, and if you have other reasons, please add them in the space provided. You may be tempted to skip this exercise, but don't—when you start to feel your enthusiasm for organizing waning, refer back to your answers and focus on the end result.

I WANT:

- To spend more time with my family
- To get promoted
- To set a good example for my children
- To set a good example for my staff
- To go home on time
- To be less stressed
- To feel less confused all the time
- To be able to have visitors
- To have more time for me
- To find things when I need them
- To be on time instead of being late
- To do what I want to do
- To have the freedom organization offers
- To feel in control of my life
- To have people trust me with their stuff
- To feel rested...not tired anymore
- To live in an uncluttered environment.
- _____
- _____
- _____

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

The READY, SET, GO! System is simple, practical, and easy to remember. This system will be fully explained in the first three Parts of the book. I HIGHLY SUGGEST THAT YOU DO NOT SKIP ANY ONE OF THESE PARTS. If you do, organizational bliss is less likely to take hold. These pages will give you the meat and potatoes (or tofu & sprouts for our vegetarian readers) that you have been yearning for—steps that you need to take before, during, and after you organize your life.

PART IV is jammed full with helpful ideas on how to maintain your newly found organization. So turn the page and let's get started!

