

Chapter 1

The Principles of Do-It-Yourself Organization

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The fact that you're reading this book signals that you're serious about organizing your home. Congratulations! There are so many perks to having an organized home — your bills get paid on time, meals are cooked quickly, and you can find your child's sleeping bag in a snap. An organized home is a direct path to an organized life!

This chapter boils down my approach to tackling a house, one room at a time. With the five-step plan, I hold your hand throughout the process — setting goals, assessing limitations, emptying and sorting, enhancing the room with projects, and reassembling the room. In addition, I present several organization philosophies to motivate and inspire you.

Five Steps to an Organized Room

Are you ready to get serious about organization? The following steps guide you through the process from beginning to end. In the long run, it saves time to approach each room with a plan. (Chapter 2 outlines an organization schedule.)

Step 1: Determine the goal of the room

You may already have a firm vision for your space. Perhaps it's from a friend's home, a TV show, or a magazine spread. Or maybe you're so frustrated by the current state of your room that you can't see the forest for the trees. In either case, I recommend spending a little time sitting in your space, assessing what you like and don't like, and envisioning the way you want it to *feel* — and function!



The goal for your space should be specific, concrete, and directly related to the function of your space. For example, the goal for your home office may be a place to manage paperwork, a desktop on which to write letters, or a space to manage your thriving home business. If you still aren't clear on your vision, make a list of exactly what you *need* to accomplish in your space, and develop this into your goal. For inspiration, search spaces online or in magazines until one jumps out at you.

Step 2: Identify the limitations of the room

Is your goal realistic? To determine the answer to this all-important question, factor in limitations such as size, layout, and requirements of the room. For example, the goal of your living room may be a welcoming space for entertaining guests. The limitations of the space may be its small size, lack of entryway, and the reality that it's the only room in the house for the home office. The fusion of the goal and its limitations is a living room with an entryway table for guests, a single sofa with an ottoman/coffee table to provide additional seating, and a discreet office nook.

Step 3: Sort the room

After you set a realistic goal for your room with the room's limitations in mind, you can empty out your room. This process is vital for organizing a space because it allows you to assess the storage needs for the items that will stay in the room.



Sort items into four large bins as follows (Chapter 2 has the details on tools):

- ✓ **STAY:** The items in this bin are in good condition, are used often, are relevant to the room's goal, and will stay in the room.
- ✓ **MOVE:** The items in this bin are in good condition and used often, but they don't belong in the room you're organizing (as related to the room's goal).
- ✓ **SHARE:** The items in this bin are in good condition but haven't been used in the last year, are duplicates of other items, or no longer serve the room's goal.
- ✓ **GO:** The items in this bin are trash — simple as that!

After the contents of your room are sorted, transfer all your MOVE items to their proper places in your home, place your SHARE items in your garage to donate at a later time, and throw away your GO items. Review your STAY items to make sure they really do support the goal of your room.

Step 4: Build and install your projects

Pat yourself on the back: After emptying and sorting the contents of your room, you now have an empty space! If you plan to paint your space, this is the opportune time because the area is cleared out and wall-mounted projects haven't been installed.

Each chapter in Parts II and III is devoted to organizing an entire room. Read up on your specific room and decide which projects are appropriate for your space. Most projects take about an hour and can be installed with a level, screwdriver, and electric drill. Some of the more advanced projects take several hours and require the use of a nail gun, carpenter's square, or ladder. (Turn to Chapter 2 for the scoop on installation tools; Chapter 3 provides details on carpentry basics.)

Step 5: Reassemble the room

Now the fun can begin! Your newly organized space will have more storage options and far fewer items. How ever did you manage before? Reinforce your commitment

to an organized space by putting like items in a single container and labeling it. Add decorative accessories and a touch of whimsy to every room. I can't help but smile while I walk through my front door in July and see my Buddha statue wearing sunglasses. Then fall rolls around, and Buddha is wearing a scarf!

All the chapters in Parts II and III include inspirational ideas for reassembling a given room; be sure to check them out. Chapter 2 has a list of helpful finishing tools.

Four Organization Philosophies to Embrace

My organization philosophies in this section are meant to add dimension to the steps you execute when organizing a room. Familiarize yourself with these concepts; if you ever find yourself off-track when you're organizing a room, return to them to refocus your efforts.

Be disciplined

Life runs so much smoother when the members of your household know where to find items and where to return them after use. Drive this point home by sticking to clever systems, locating like items together and putting items away after each use. Here are some suggestions for keeping to a relatively disciplined organization routine:

- ✔ **Set up systems around your home.** Personally, I couldn't run my household without a to-do box and a donate box. Even my kids are onboard! When they've outgrown an item of clothing or toy, they add it to the donate box. When you get a phone call from a charity soliciting donations, say "Yes!" and relish in the fact that your donations are packed and ready to go.
- ✔ **Use baskets, bins, and boxes.** Group like items together, find an appropriate home for them, and label it. Resist the urge to just stuff items in drawers or cabinets. Taking one minute to put items away properly saves many minutes of future frustration associated with trying to find them!
- ✔ **Relax — everyone is allowed to have a junk drawer.** There's probably a drawer in your home that's a constant problem. Nothing in this drawer seems to fit into the other categories, making it an endless source of frustration. Decide to let that drawer be a junk drawer, and move on. Heck, even label it "Junk" if it makes you feel better. As this drawer fills up, weed out the trash, but don't try to make more sense of it. Just be sure to discipline yourself to limit this affliction to a single drawer!

Be green

Reduce, reuse, and recycle! Buy locally. Act globally. Help your neighbor. You're familiar with the earth-friendly catchphrases of the 21st century, but are you living them? Follow these guidelines for keeping your organizational efforts green:

- ✔ **Make green decisions.** You have a choice in every item you purchase or donate. Be green by reducing your purchases, reusing containers you have on hand, and recycling everything you can. If you can, borrow an item instead of buying it.

- ✓ **Act locally.** Donate gently used items to local women's shelters, charities, and schools. Use your purchasing power to support local businesses and help your chosen neighborhood flourish. A community is built from within, so do your part!

Be frugal



Once it's organized, the best way to maintain your space is to reduce the influx of items coming in. When you're about to buy an item, ask yourself this series of questions: "Do I need it?," "Can I afford it?," "Can I borrow it from someone else?," "Can I get it secondhand?," and "Can I store it?" You may be surprised by your answers! When you do purchase a new item, follow the sage advice of "one in, one out": If you buy that new sweater, prepare to get rid of an old one.

Here are a few additional ideas for embracing your frugal side:

- ✓ **Repurpose items.** I'm a firm believer in the fact that you can accomplish a lot of organization without spending money. Cardboard boxes and old jars are far better organizational devices than piles of stuff on the floor. Consider turning an old door into a desk, repurposing an unused wine rack as a magazine holder, or transforming an old shower rod into a clothing bar.
- ✓ **Stop paying for storage.** If you're currently paying for offsite storage, I encourage you to give your 30-day notice. Employing the tips in this book will help you weed through the items in storage and determine if they support the goal for your home. Donating or selling unnecessary items from storage will make you feel better, and the money you save from eliminating this fee goes straight to your bottom line!
- ✓ **Regift.** You're bound to come across unopened items when sorting through a room. Return things for which you have the receipt, and regift whatever else you can (gifts that were nice but not to your taste, for example).

Be clever

When you see a chance to make life easier, go for it! In general, start with less stuff to manage and fewer things to do, and you'll soon find that you have fewer frustrations in life. Remember, when it comes to stuff, less is more! Consider these guidelines:

- ✓ **Imitation is the most sincere form of flattery.** There's a reason that home organization stores, magazines, and TV shows are so inspirational — they display the work of professionals! If you see an idea you love, copy it!
- ✓ **Less is more.** Purchase toys that don't require batteries, which need frequent changing. Cancel subscriptions for magazines you don't have time to read. Get rid of items you use less than once a year and struggle to store. Small changes like these add up and result in more time, less frustration, and fewer items on your to-do list!
- ✓ **Embrace technology.** Store your DVDs and CDs in media folders. Upload your CDs to your hard drive. Scan your photos onto your computer. Embrace technology whenever you can, but don't forget to back up your hard drive regularly.