

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Get ready for 2021 in a big way! If clutter and forgetfulness are ruling your life, then it is time to take action. Organizing your closet by color, making your bed every day, or matching all your socks when the laundry is done does not work for everybody. Why? In most cases, tidy bedroom and folded clothes are good things, but some may find it too overwhelming to focus on staying organized. Once clutter builds up, it can take on a life of its own, leaving you feeling helpless with no idea where to start. What can you do? Follow these clutter-busting strategies, of course! The key to organization is efficiency; get it done quickly; and make it as simple as possible.

To do this, professional organizer Susan Pinsky advises adults to follow these four pillars of organization:

- **Routine:** Do not reinvent the wheel every day. Setting up a clutter-cleaning schedule (and sticking to it!) is key to keeping your home organized for the long haul. Once you build a habit, clutter is easier to stay on top of.
- **Structure:** Establishing rules and easy-to-follow systems (car keys always go on the hook by the door, for example) helps control impulsive behavior and keeps clutter corralled in certain areas as much as possible.
- **Boundaries:** Guard your space. Neatniks should not have to share space with the perpetually disorganized — and vice versa — and kitchen stuff should not overflow into the living room. If you find you are constantly breaking your set boundaries, get rid of the excess.
- **Support:** Do not go it alone! When in doubt about how to move forward, reach out for help from someone who gets it.

Routine

1. Do One Chore Per Day: The best way to make progress on clutter is not in one giant burst, but by scheduling 15 minutes of work each day. For a few minutes after dinner or before bed, eliminate clutter one square foot at a time. Pick one new mini project each day. Weed out the clothes your kids have outgrown. Tame the pantry shelves. File your bills. Focusing on one undesirable task at a time will keep you from feeling overwhelmed. Plus, it lets you check things off your to-do list, which always feels good.

2. Finish Something, Anything, Early in the Day: Starting your day by completing a clutter-busting chore — a small task or something larger that you worked on yesterday — gives you a sense of closure, making the rest of the day meaningful. No matter how the day goes, you can say you finished something, which gives you a sense of satisfaction that will encourage you to keep tackling clutter the next day.

3. Put It on the Calendar: It is not enough to write down a cleanup task on a to-do list. You have to enter it into your calendar. Assigning each task to a specific day increases your chances

of getting them done. With only a vague to-do list, you have a 40 to 50 percent chance of doing each task. Scheduling tasks increases your chances of completing them by 70 percent or so.

4. Play It Loose with Deadlines: Schedule more time than you think you will need to clean up clutter. Rather than trying to precisely estimate how long each task will take, just say, “I’m going to need 30 percent more time for everything I plan, no matter what.” Just pick a number: 20 percent more, 50 percent more, and allot that. The worst that could happen is that you finish it early — and have some free time in your organized house!

5. Switch Up Your Cleaning Routine Every Three Months: People sometimes get bored with their routines. The higher boredom factor keeps them from tackling things they once completed with ease. A cleaning routine — whether it is sorting mail or doing the dishes — should be kept fresh, by changing it up every three months. This does not mean a complete overhaul, just a tweak.

6. Follow the Two-Minute Rule: You hate wiping down the counter. Or sorting all your bills. Or filing last year’s taxes. But putting off these little tasks is often more emotionally exhausting and stressful — and results in much more clutter — than just biting the bullet and getting them done. Do yourself a favor and follow this rule of thumb: If you can complete the task in less than two minutes, do it now. You will free up mental space and confidence in yourself.

Structure

7. Create a Chore File: Staying on top of chores is a major challenge for anybody. Creating a weekly plan can keep you on track. Over the weekend, write down the chores that need to get done in the upcoming week on index cards. Arrange them in order of priority and keep them in a single location.

8. “Think Once” Also known as “Think Once Really Hard and Then Don’t Think About It Again.”: Take on a knotty, persistent problem — dealing with incoming mail, say — from all angles. You may spend a lot of time working through all the challenges and solutions to each problem, but, eventually, you can devise a workable system that will allow you to not think about the mail ever again.

9. Get a Grip: If a phone call or a request from your spouse distracts you from the cleaning task you are working on, hold on to a physical artifact to remind you what you were doing, an unopened envelope, for instance, will remind you that you were sorting mail before the interruption, and will focus your attention more quickly.

10. Simplify “Finishing Steps”: “Finishing steps” are often the hardest. Everyone loves to pick out paint colors, but when it comes to cleaning the brushes after the room has been painted — the “finishing step” — we get bored and leave them in the corner (for weeks or months). To help with organization, make the “finishing steps” as easy as possible, so you can sprint through and get them over with. Throwing out garbage is another example of a finishing step. If your garbage is locked away under the sink, you may lose steam and just leave your garbage on the counter. If the garbage can is out in the open and visible, all you have to do is sweep the garbage from the counter into the can. Reduce “finishing steps” and streamline systems so that every cleaning task is a short and workable sprint.

Boundaries

11. Stop the Clutter at the Source: Set a clutter rule: If you bring in two pairs of new shoes, you have to get rid of one old pair. The same rule applies to all household items. If you are a thrift store person or love yard sales, keep yourself from bringing clutter home by keeping your

hands in your pockets. There is a connection between touching and buying an item. If clutter tends to cover tables and dressers, make those surfaces less inviting. After you clean up your dining room table, set the table. It not only looks nice, but also eliminates the dining room table as a space waiting to be cluttered. Do the same thing with your bedside table — put photos or mementos on the table to “fill” the surface.

12. Designate Junk Drawers: Finding homes for items like unlabeled CDs and orphan screws can slow down de-cluttering efforts. To prevent this, designate at least one junk drawer in every room. If you do not know where an item should go, put it in that drawer. Once the drawer is full, sort through it. Use what you can and discard the rest. Then start the process anew.

13. Manage the Mail: To cut off junk mail at its source, log on to catalogchoice.org and have them alert marketers to stop sending you stuff. Have only one place for the day’s mail to land — maybe the dining room table. Yes, it piles up quickly, but at least you know where it will be when you decide to tackle it. Do not open junk mail. Each envelope can contain four to seven pieces of paper. Junk mail goes, unopened, right into the recycling bin.

14. Keep Related Items Together: Keep items that are used together near each other. That way, you do not have to keep running around to get the things you need to do a job. (And are less likely to go out and purchase duplicates.) For example, keep wrapping paper, tape, scissors, and ribbons in the same closet so you have everything you need to wrap presents.

Support

15. Enlist Help: Stop trying to be an ordinary person who keeps it together. Help might mean another set of hands, someone to keep your morale up, or someone to function as a body double. A body double is somebody who is physically present as you do a task but does not do the task with you. Your body double anchors you to the chore at hand.

16. Auto-Pay Bills and Set Up Paperless Billing When Possible: You would be surprised (or maybe not) at how many people have their power turned off because they have forgotten to pay the bill! In many cases, this is because the bill got lost in a mountain of paper clutter, and the due date slipped by unnoticed. Avoid late fees — plus the extra clutter of unpaid bill notices — by setting up your online banking account to send your bill to your email account and automatically pay your bills each month. If you are intimidated by the thought, ask a technologically savvy friend to help you for 30 minutes while you walk through the process of setting up auto pay and paperless bills. It is a small-time investment that will pay off big, each and every month.

17. Go Professional: If your clutter is completely overwhelming you, there is no shame in hiring a professional organizer. Do not look at it as a long-term commitment — in many cases, just one session is all that is needed to help you sort through the junk and learn good habits to stop clutter from building up again. the right mindset

18. Allow Yourself to Be Wacky: Do not stress yourself out with what other people are doing — figure out what works for you. In some cases, this may be a little wacky to the outside observer. One woman said her neurotypical friends were exasperated at her refusal to file things alphabetically, saying it confused them. But for her, it made more sense to file things by general category. It looked strange to an outsider, but her desk was clear — and for her, that is all that mattered.

19. Do not Worry About “Pretty”: Remember, not everything is going to look pristine all the time. If it is less daunting for you to just slip your shoes into your closet at the end of each day — without lining them up perfectly — do not beat yourself up. Is it pretty? No. Is it efficient? Yes. Even if it is not perfect, your home will look better a little organized than not at all.

20. Keep Calm and Carry On: As you start tackling clutter, do the first three things that worry you the most, to get them off your plate. The internal distraction of worry prevents you from getting things done. If you clean any small part of the larger mess that is stressing you out, chances are you will break the anxiety and move forward.

21. Leave Room For Improvement: After years of setbacks and an eternally-messy house, it sometimes feels easier to lower your expectations — or just quit trying altogether. But instead of saying, “I can’t,” challenge and tell yourself: “I can’t, yet.” For example, “I can’t keep my living room clean” becomes “I can’t keep my living room clean, yet.” Saying this to yourself is a powerful reminder that you are on the path to improvement. Soon, you will start to believe that the best version of yourself is under development right now — and will come out with hard work and determination.

22. Just Do It: Do not get overwhelmed about where or when to start a de-cluttering task. It does not matter where you start; begin at any spot in any room. After you start, continue in some kind of logical order. If you start on the left side of the room, keep going to the left. If you start on the top shelf of a cabinet, work your way down. There is no ideal time to tackle clutter — even if you only manage a few minutes, you will be better off.

Editor’s Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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