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Bottom Line

PERSONAL



THE WORLD'S BEST INSIDE INFORMATION

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Secrets to Getting Organized and Staying Organized

From America's
Top Experts



One of the most common New Year's resolutions is to get organized, but that can be an elusive goal. *Bottom Line/Personal* asked some of America's top professional organizers for their favorite ways to create a more organized life.

GETTING STARTED

To the chronically disorganized, organization can seem like an impossible goal. Here's how to take the initial steps...

Focus on what you're already doing right. If you consider yourself completely and hopelessly disorganized, you always will be. Yet even the most disorganized people are organized in some ways and on some days. You're probably on time for many of your appointments, even if you feel as if you're always running late. You probably have a general idea of where most things are, even if you see your home or office as a disorganized disaster. Rather than obsess about your organizational weaknesses, consider how you can repeat or expand upon the successes.

Example: What went right the one morning you got to the office on time last week? Did you skip part of your morning routine? Perhaps you could skip that every morning or shift it to the previous evening.

 **Debbie Stanley** is an organization coach in the Detroit area and founder of Red Letter Day Professional Organizers, which provides organization coaching for individuals and training for professional organizers, www.rldpo.com. She is author of *Organize Your Home in No Time* (Que).

Think about how you work. Everyone's mind works differently, so orga-

nizing systems must work differently, too. Before taking any organization advice or buying any organization products, ask, "Is this appropriate for me?"

Are you easily distracted? Then clutter and nonpriority projects should be stowed out of sight, where they won't sidetrack you. Or do you need visual reminders of your responsibilities? If so, choose a desktop system for projects—one that looks good and works for you. Or keep a highly visible list of your projects.

Do you need to be reminded of responsibilities? Then an electronic organizer with an alarm might be perfect for you. However, if you have poor tolerance for technology, a paper tickler file and an old-fashioned kitchen timer might serve you better.



Barbara Hemphill is CEO of Paper Tiger Productivity Institute, an organization consultancy based in Raleigh, North Carolina. She has more than 25 years of experience in the professional organization field and is author of several books, including *Taming the Paper Tiger at Home* (Kaplan). www.productiveenvironment.com

KEEPING THINGS ORGANIZED

Tips for sorting the things in your life...

Organize by action, not by subject. The most efficient way to organize virtually anything is according to what needs to be done with it next. Rather than keep separate files for electric company bills and cable company bills, have one file labeled "bills to be paid." For the bills that have been paid each month, have a set of 12 files, each labeled with the name of a month. Other files might include "Reply," "Keep ▶



▶▶ for Tax Reporting,” “Order Placed, Waiting for Product Arrival” and “Discuss with Spouse.”

Barry Izsak is president of Arranging It All, an organization company in Austin, Texas, and president of the National Association of Professional Organizers. He is author of *Organize Your Garage in No Time* (Que). www.arrangingitall.com



Keep a spiral-bound notebook by the phone for messages and other information. In most homes, messages are jotted on loose pieces of paper or Post-it notes, which are too easily lost. A centralized notebook ensures that messages get through—and each family member knows where to look for them. You also can use this notebook to jot down information from important calls.

Example: When the cable company fails to correct a billing error, you can look through your notebook and say, “I called you about this discrepancy at 4:15 on October 22. A representative named Julia said that it would be taken care of immediately.” You’ll win more disputes when you can cite details.



Barb Friedman is president of Organize IT in Milwaukee. She has recorded two audio CDs on organizing, including *Home Organizing 101*, available on her Web site, www.organizeitbiz.com.

Label shelves. Everything stored in closets or cupboards should have its own designated place on a shelf. Place category labels on the edges of shelves in the linen closet, pantry and other storage areas. Establishing assigned closet locations will make finding things faster, noticing missing items quicker and putting things away easier.

Scott Roewer is president of Solutions by Scott LLC, an organizing company in Washington, DC. He is president of the Washington, DC–Metro Chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers. www.solutionsbyscott.com



GETTING MORE DONE

To use time more productively...

When you're busy, ask yourself, “What’s the most important thing for me to be doing right now?” There are going to be days when you can’t get everything done. *Example:* Some days, being organized means that I leave the bed unmade and the breakfast plates in the



sink if I am running late to the office.

Ronni Eisenberg is an organizational and time-management expert based in Westport, Connecticut. Her books on organizing include *Organize Yourself!* (Wiley). www.reisenberg.com



Work your to-do list from the bottom up once a month. The top entries on to-do lists generally get crossed off quickly because these tend to be urgent matters that we know we can't postpone—but larger, less pressing entries can linger at the bottom of a to-do list for months. At least once a month, start at the bottom of the list and work up. If necessary, break big bottom-of-the-list tasks into more manageable pieces.



Judith Kolberg is chief organizer for FileHeads Professional Organizers, based in Decatur, Georgia. She is author of *Conquering Chronic Disorganization* (Squall). www.fileheads.net

Leave things where they're closest to getting done, not where they're the neatest. If we store projects and problems neatly away, they can be easily ignored or forgotten. If we leave them out, they're harder to overlook. *Example:* A shoe with a broken heel shouldn't be put in the closet. It should be by the door to take to the shoe-repair shop. You might place a bin by the door for things that need to come with you when you run errands...another by the base of the stairs for things that go upstairs.

Jan Jasper is a productivity consultant in the New York City area. She is author of *Take Back Your Time: How to Regain Control of Work, Information, and Technology* (St. Martin's). www.janjasper.com



Turn off E-mail's "ding." Most people can't resist dropping what they're doing to check E-mail whenever there's an alert signaling a new message. Knowing the moment an E-mail arrives makes it difficult to get anything else done. Many E-mails are spam anyway, and those that are not spam can wait minutes or hours. If a message is truly urgent, a person will usually call.



Stephanie Winston is president of the time-management consulting firm The Organizing Principle in New York City. She is author of five books on organizing, including *Organized for Success: Top Executives and CEOs Reveal the Organizing Principles That Helped Them Reach the Top* (Crown).

