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Linda's Organizing Tip for January 2007:
National "Get Organized Month"

Stuck? Simple Steps to Getting Organized

One of my goals for the first quarter of 2007 was to publish an article about organizing. As it is with any task, getting started for me was the hardest part. My self talk sounded a little like this: "I really should write that article—but noooo, not now, I only have five minutes." "I really should write that article—but noooo, not today, I have too much to do." "I really should write that article—but noooo, I don't know where to begin."

It was not that I did not have any ideas. In fact, I had *too many* ideas. That is exactly what made it difficult to begin; my mind was overstuffed with ideas! That is what made me realize I could write my first article about simply getting started. Organizing is basically about making choices. It is about choosing among *too many or too much of* something.....*anything*. When we have too much, our minds get dull, overwhelmed, stuck, and shut down. We avoid doing anything about it, which makes it worse the next time we think about it.

Many of us know, that if only we could get a handle on "X, Y or Z", we would feel so much better, but for many of the reasons I stated above, we just cannot get started. Sometimes it may help to choose a friend or relative to sit with you while you organize, or turn on music you enjoy. Alone or together, choose a first project you know you can begin and finish in one sitting, in a short amount of time, approximately three hours or less.

Got the project in mind? Okay, now schedule that three hour block on your calendar. Make sure you have support from your family or make it at a time when you know that you will not be interrupted. Now follow these simple steps:

- Begin by making four index cards and writing on them: "Keep Here", "Keep Elsewhere", "Donate/Give Away", and "Chuck". Arrange these four cards in quadrants around you, far enough apart to have clear boundaries between them.

- Take each thing out of the space that you are going to organize (the drawer, shelf, closet, entryway, etc.) and place it into one of the four piles. This may be difficult and painful, depending on the types of items you are going through. If you really cannot decide which category it goes in, come back to it or put it in either the “Keep Here” or “Keep Elsewhere” pile.
- When you have finished sorting into piles, box up the “Donate/Give”, take the “Chuck” out to the trash or for recycling, put the “Keep Elsewhere” either away where it belongs or set it aside (in a container) to put away later.
- Next, look at the “Keep Here” pile. Begin to sort that into natural categories of items that go together.
- Decide if you need additional storage containers to house those natural categories. If so, make a list of “Supplies to Purchase”. You may also have discovered a few “Tasks” that need to be completed, such as hanging hooks or shelves. If so, make a list of “Tasks to Do”, as well.
- You can return the items to the area you are working on, as soon as you are satisfied with their category, container and useful placement. Try to think about storing things where you use them. For example, if you live in a condo or apartment, keep the keys to the basement near the front door. If you have “Tasks to Do” or “Supplies to Purchase”, make a date on your calendar to do them.

Congratulations! Just like me, now you have accomplished your task! You have organized your space and narrowed your choices. You have decided what to keep and what to part with. Just like me, you first had to make one overall decision; which project to focus on, then, many smaller decisions about what to include in your final space. It is difficult, but rewarding, and hopefully encouraging, as one good finished project will inspire more.

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