



Linda M. Groat, M.A.
Professional Organizer & Life Coach
Simply Back to Basics
[Providing Customized Solutions for Life Situations™](#)

[Get it Together! Keep it Together! Let Linda Help!](#)

Williamsville, NY
716-631-5619
E-mail: Linda@simplybacktobasics.com
Website: www.simplybacktobasics.com

Linda's Organizing Tip for August 2007:

The Slippery Slope of Time & Technology

Shouldn't this be easier? Why isn't this working????? I had tried using the Palm Pilot™ PDA (for about seven months) and really wanted to like it. In fact, I upgraded my computer and various software programs to be "compatible" with Vista™ and Outlook 2007™. I even briefly tried a more "sophisticated" (and almost five times more costly) PDA than my \$99 Palm which I returned to HP a week later. Sadly I found (for I really thought that I should be able make it work), despite my best efforts, I just could not get used to the tiny, narrow, palm-sized window into my life. I noticed I was actually avoiding doing things (tasks, projects) or forgetting appointments because it was so tedious to input/retrieve the information and visualize the big picture of time. Plus, I was driving everyone else crazy, as it took me much longer to check my availability and record new appointments as I tap, tap, tapped on the screen. I found I sorely missed the visual picture that a printed calendar provides, and which I could display for the whole family to see. I tried printing my calendar from Outlook, and although it looked beautiful, it used a lot of ink (because I like color coding and it became outdated almost immediately, as daily (and sometimes hourly) changes happened in our lives. I was reluctant to let it go and try something else because I had invested so much time, money and energy in trying to get it to work (for those of you that have read my previous tips, this may sound like my "newfangled" washing machine saga---[February 2007: Letting Go: Do We Own the Stuff or Does the Stuff Own Us!](#)). However, when I finally admitted that it wasn't working, and spent the time to make a change (including developing a customized paper system that would fit our busy schedules), it was a HUGE RELIEF. I still enter my basic appointments into the Palm (so that I can utilize the handy alarms and handy Daily View), but I enter the data at the start of each week, on Sunday after our weekly family meeting, and once all the family's commitments are on the family paper calendar. I also use the Palm to back up my Outlook contacts, as well as to keep track of some personal planning items like extended family vacation schedules.

I know that many people successfully use PDAs every day, but I can't live without my paper planner system, and am so glad to have it back! My brother-in-law, who markets smart phones and PDA's, tells me this issue is a generational one, and that research shows that while I am not alone in my (40ish) age group at preferring paper, the younger generation seems to prefer the screen devices. We'll see what happens in the future...

Regardless of what system you use, whether electronic or paper, time passes quickly, especially when things are busy. I talk to people every day who are trying to improve their time and task management. If you are one of these people, you may wish to try the following tools to collect, process, organize and execute the tasks and projects in your life. There are links to these pages on my website.

- Keep a list of Must Do items. The Must Dos are divided into three columns: Now, Soon, Someday.
- Keep a list of May Do items or a Project List (the latter label is a concept from [Getting Things Done, by David Allen](#), loaned to me by a good friend/client)

Must Do includes things that are definitely going to need attention in the near (now, soon) to 1-2 week horizon. The Project List includes all those things that you need to remember to think about or do now or in the future, but haven't necessarily started them yet, or don't have a clear plan to do. David Allen defines a project as *any desired result that requires more than one action step*. For example, items on my Project List include: get the broken molding on the van door fixed, paint the border in my daughter's room and publish a children's book on adoption. None are immediate priorities and don't belong on my Must Do list so I put

them in the “parking lot” on the May Do/Project List. If I kept them on the Must Do list, not only will I get quickly overwhelmed, but I will get confused by all the clutter as there are currently 4 pages of *Projects* in various stages of incubation ☺. Most importantly, I do not lose ideas, as I know exactly where to write them down (as soon as I think of them) and get them out of my head (onto the Project List) so I can focus and choose my priorities. Of course, there are many things on the list that I may never get to, but at least I am not tying up current energy trying to remember things that are constantly going in and out of my head.

Important Keys to making this work:

- Review the Must Do list on a daily basis, and modify it as needed.
- Review the May Do/Project List on a weekly basis. You will need to transfer any project steps that are moving into the immediate horizon onto your Must Do list, once you have determined what the next action step is for that item.
- Keep these lists with you and take them wherever you go. (I even take mine to my bedside each night, as that seems to be when my mind searches for loose ends to tie up). David Allen strongly recommends getting it all out of your head—to free up your mind’s RAM for more immediate concerns.

In order to increase portability (and thus effectiveness), you may want to keep this list in a 3 ring binder (I like the kind where you can design & insert your own cover and spine label) with a set of 5-8 Tab colored dividers for the sections (or for those PDA fans, you can create a note or task category with these ongoing ideas). In this notebook, I also keep my printed Outlook contact list and a reminder task list for Recurring Tasks—like cleaning, shopping and banking and Tasks For Others To Do— i.e children and husband—(both forms are on my website). Inside the notebook, a zippered pencil bag holds tools including one set of Crayola™ thin markers (see calendar use below), correction tape, a pencil and a pen).

Another Important Key:

Keep track of all date sensitive commitments in a centrally located family calendar

- Families with more than 2-3 people may want to assign each family member a color.
- Keep the markers in a cup or mug right near the calendar, along with correction tape.
- Write each member’s items in that color. There is no need to write the person’s name on the calendar, as long as you draw a key somewhere on the calendar for the first few months and train the family with the colors. We use six colors; one for each of us, plus red for “all family” events, and orange for writing birthdays and holidays. I recently purchased the [More Time Mom Calendar](#) which unfolds to a large, 15" x 22" calendar and begins in September. It is a fun calendar to look at and includes stickers for events and holidays, to do lists, reminders and simple chore lists.

Time may be “Slipping into the Future”, but there are ways of coping.

I can design a customized planner for your specific needs.

If you need help with time management or any organizing project, call Linda 631-5619.

Please forward this tip to those you know who may be interested in organizing services.

If you have ideas or questions that could be the basis of future tips, please share.

I like to write about things directly relevant to my readers.

I welcome all feedback about these articles. Please feel free to e-mail me anytime.

Unsubscribe by sending me an e-mail with “No Thanks” in the subject line.

Previous month’s tips can be viewed at www.simplybacktobasics.com.

This article may be reprinted or reposted on a non-exclusive basis as long as Linda Groat's name and contact information is included.

