

Getting Organized

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Educational Objectives

1. To learn the benefits associated with being organized.
2. To learn basic organizational strategies and tips.

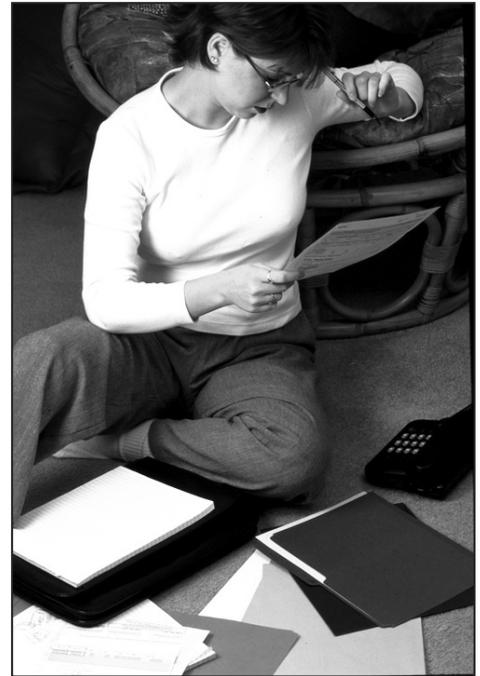
Activity: Write the following facts on index cards and distribute to members to read aloud.

- Lack of space is not the cause of clutter. Disorganization results in 80 percent of the clutter in most homes.
- In the average home, getting rid of clutter eliminates 40 percent of housework.
- Most Americans use 20 percent of what we own. The other 80 percent is made up of items we don't use, feel we should use, or think we might use someday.
- 23 percent of adults say they pay bills late because they lose them.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that 80 percent of our medical expenditures are related to stress.
- 25 percent of people with two-car garages don't park any cars in their garage, and 32 percent park only one (source: U.S. Department of Energy).
- 71 percent of polled participants said their quality of life would improve if they were better organized.

(Statistics from the National Association of Professional Organizers)

According to Albert Einstein, "Out of clutter, find simplicity."

These days, we are all looking for ways to simplify our lives. With busy schedules, emotional attachments, and too much "stuff," we can start feeling out of control and stressed. When we're too stressed, we don't always think clearly; sometimes we feel trapped and overwhelmed. Our homes should be a place to relax and escape the daily grind. However, when clutter and disorganization take over a home, it is difficult to find that peaceful retreat.



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Activity: Have members rate their clutter, using the Clutter Quotient in WL 213.

Ways We Complicate Our Lives

Clutter can take over our homes and workspaces and make it difficult to do everyday tasks. To effectively tackle clutter, we need to understand what causes us to hold on to stuff. Ariane Benefit, expert in chronic disorganization, shared some reasons we complicate our lives and hold onto the clutter.



Time and space. We accumulate more things and information than we have time and energy to take care of, organize, or use. What started out as being useful can become overwhelming.

One space that has grown significantly in the past 10 years is self-storage units. The United States has 2.3 billion square feet of self-storage space – more than 7 square feet for every man, woman, and child.

Storage units initially started out as a place to keep belongings during or after a transition, such as a move or death in the family.

However, half of Americans using them today are using them to store extra stuff, even though the average home size has nearly doubled.

Overcommitment. We say yes too often and overcommit our time with too many activities and projects. Instead of doing less, we sleep less and then it takes us longer to do things.

Delayed decisions. Getting and staying organized involves what is essentially an endless stream of decisions: what to keep, what to get rid of, where to store things, etc.

Putting off making these decisions can result in clutter buildup.

Fear, insecurity, and sadness. Sometimes we keep things we don't really want, use, or need because of the fear, insecurity, guilt, and sadness behind the thought of getting rid of them. Almost everyone has keepsakes from relatives. As you start to clear your clutter, you will uncover many emotions. Be prepared to face these feelings and be patient with yourself if you become emotional about keepsakes.

A lack of system. Often, clutter isn't an overwhelming abundance of stuff. It may be a lack of organizing skills or a system that works. Organization systems that work for some people may not work for others. We need to embrace our natural tendencies and work with them. If you are not a naturally routine person, don't set up too many arbitrary time-based routines.

Urge to buy. Every time we watch TV, listen to the radio, or walk into a store, we are urged to purchase more and more. We look for great buys and sales even though we might not need or have the space for the items.

Benefits of Being Organized

Becoming more organized and letting go of clutter can lower stress levels and improve your physical, mental, and emotional health. Organization allows you to have more time and energy for the things that matter most to you, like spending time with family, pursuing hobbies, eating healthy, exercising, or just hanging out with friends. In addition, it creates an environment of serenity and peacefulness.

You're in control. By getting organized, your stress levels will go down, and you'll be able to live a less chaotic, more relaxed life. With "a place for everything and everything in its place," you will be able to find things quickly, thus saving time, money, and hassle.

You'll have more time for yourself and your loved ones. By being more efficient, you'll spend less time "working" and have more time for yourself, your friends and family, and the things you love to do.



You'll feel good about your environment. When your home or office is organized, you will feel good about your surroundings and will not worry about being embarrassed by your clutter.

You're a role model for others. Children will learn to be organized and more productive by following your example. When you are organized, you will be respected by others who can depend on you to be on time and fulfill your commitments.

You'll be healthier. Being organized reduces stress, boosts your motivation, and frees your mind. Most organized people are full of energy because they are taking care of themselves both mentally and physically. You have more mental energy because you are not worrying about forgetting something or procrastinating on an important task.



You'll save money. You know what you have before you buy more. Last-minute purchases or grocery trips can be costly.

You'll be able to set and achieve goals. When you have an organized plan and list for the next day, week, and year, you'll have a greater ability to accomplish your goals. You can eliminate the barriers and unnecessary tasks, leaving more time to focus on your priorities and goals.

When you are deciding what to keep, think about:

- What brings you great pleasure
- What enhances your life
- What things you regularly use or need

Simple Organizational Strategies and Tips

- Make your bed each morning.
- Throw away the newspaper each night, even if you haven't read it yet.
- Push yourself to do any chore that takes less than one minute. Throw away the junk mail, put your dirty socks in the hamper, hang up your wet towel.
- Beware of "freebies." Never accept anything free unless you're thrilled with it.
- Get rid of things when they break.
- Hang up your coat.
- Before you go to bed, take five minutes to do an "evening tidy-up." Just a few minutes of tidying can make your house look a lot better, and it's a calming thing to do before going to sleep. The same techniques can be used for your desk at the end of the day.
- Make your organizational system fit your life.
- Sort and classify. Things that are used together belong together. Store them in one place.
- Clean out constantly. When you keep things you don't use, they get in the way and create more work.
- Label everything.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Make a decision and follow through. Decide to keep, donate, or throw away.
- Identify an organization or person to whom you can give things you no longer need. Envision someone else getting good use from it.



- Pause for a moment before you “store” something. Other than holiday decorations and seasonal clothes, you should strive to “store” as little as possible.
- Create a daily to-do list. This will keep you focused and turn huge, seemingly impossible goals into manageable chunks.
- Prioritize. Decide which tasks are most important to complete and tackle those first. Completing priority tasks can keep you from becoming stressed and overwhelmed.
- Assign objects to specific places. Then you will no longer have to hunt for things because you forgot where you put them.
- Focus on one room at a time.

What You Can Do with Your “Good Stuff”

Now that you’ve identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate, where does your clutter go? Here are some suggestions:

- Sell or give it away to a family member or someone else who will cherish the item.
- Have a yard or garage sale.



- Donate items to a local charitable organization for its rummage sale or to a local nonprofit thrift shop.
- You can sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement in a local newspaper or on an Internet auction site. Or, you may try to sell your unwanted “treasures” at a local consignment shop.
- Look for stores that specialize in buying and selling such valuable items as jewelry, antiques, coin collections, and musical instruments.

Make sure you check references for any business before you decide to use their service. For more information on the risks and how to protect yourself when either buying or selling through an Internet auction, check the Federal Trade Commission’s booklet “Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers.” Order it on the web (www.ftc.gov).

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