

Julie's book sizzles with wisdom, inspiration and practicality. Even the most disorganized person will feel comfortable and empowered reading her work. It's refreshingly clear, leaves no stone unturned and will serve as a go-to guide for years to come. As an entrepreneur, I cannot allow myself to waste time or create more problems to solve. Implementing Julie's techniques has been powerful and has opened up a new door of time-saving and stress-reducing results for me both professionally and personally. Highly recommended!

—Eric Johnson MBA,
Finish Your Project Consulting
www.finishyourproject.com

Congratulations, Julie, for taking on the task of documenting your years of writing and organizing experience in book form. Your desire to encourage and empathy for those who have struggled with organizing is evident. Your style of putting tips and concepts into bite-sized pieces may make the difference for readers who have been overwhelmed or intimidated by other organizing books. Additionally, I found myself thinking that your book would make a handy reference tool for individuals and couples setting up a first home.

—Anne McCallister,
Inside the Box Organizing,
NAPO (National Association of Professional Organizers)
Oregon Chapter President

From
Frazzled
to
Freedom

STEP-BY-STEP
ORGANIZING
FOR YOUR HOME,
OFFICE AND LIFE

Julie Starr Hook

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Acknowledgments

WRITING ORGANIZATIONAL COLUMNS for the local newspaper had been very rewarding for many years. Still something was missing and that was writing a book on organizing. Writing a book is something I knew I couldn't do alone and it would take many people working together.

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Book Introduction

“I’M GOING TO get organized.” Have you ever said that? But do you know what it takes to make it happen?

“Doing something in a systematic way and sticking to it” is how Barry Izsak, Certified Professional Organizer and Board member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) defines being organized. Many people spend their time spinning their wheels and accomplishing little when they decide to “get organized”—whatever that means to them—primarily because they don’t know where to begin.

The time and effort you put into organizing *will* pay off. Getting organized will not only free up your schedule and allow you time for life’s pleasures, it will also take an enormous burden off your shoulders. You can’t afford *not* to be organized.

It is possible to get organized in a short amount of time. The key is not to give up!

My primary goal in writing this book is to encourage and direct you through the organizational process. The length of time it takes will depend on how much time you decide to find in your schedule to dedicate to the process and how determined you are to get organized. The amount of time will vary for each person. Generally, the longer you haven’t been organized, the longer it will take. You *are* trainable, and I am confident that you can learn the tools of the trade. My goal is to teach you how to free yourself from the chaos in your home.

This book is designed for those who are just starting to get organized, as well as for those who want to fine-tune their organizational system. It also has helpful ideas to assist a professional organizer as he or she helps clients get organized.

This book is written very simply and will allow you to begin organizing right away in whatever area you decide. My approach for organizing is: “Simple is better.” And as you tweak and implement my suggestions to fit your situation, they will work for you. The purpose of this book is:

- To get the distracting “stuff” out of your life
- To find an organizing system that works for you
- To encourage/coach you through the process of organizing
- To lead you step-by-step, to tell you how to organize each room or space in your home in a systematic way, and to offer suggestions at the end of each chapter about how often to organize that room or space.

This book is written in a way that will assist even those who have ADD (Attention-Deficit Disorder) in getting organized. Many of my clients struggle with this disorder, and there seems to be a correlation between ADD and disorganization.

I have structured this book to make it easy to read by using lots of bullet points and short comprehensive chapters. I hope this will help keep you focused, encouraged and able to stay on task.

In Part III, Organizing Room by Room, I offer a timeframe at the end of each chapter for suggested maintenance on your home organization after you have done the major organization work in each room. Hopefully, this will assist you in maintaining your organized home.

Below are some ideas to make the organization process easier. These are also good ideas for those who don’t struggle with ADD. Everyone can benefit from using these tactics.

- Break down your organizational projects into 20–30 minute intervals. This “little and often” approach can work well.
- Work while listening to your favorite music if that helps keep you more motivated.

- Set a timer for yourself. This can help you stay focused and not waste time plus it will give you a time frame for working and breaks.
- You might try working with an accountability partner—someone who is able to get you excited about organization—thus ensuring that you get the job done. By working with someone, you can brainstorm ideas and stay motivated during the process. If you go this route, choose that person carefully. A family member may be too close to the situation and may have difficulty being objective. Choose someone who is nonjudgmental and would be a good “coach.”
- Do not “should on yourself” if you don’t achieve your organizational goals. Some people beat themselves up (mentally) when they don’t get things done that they feel they should. This mental clutter is a stumbling block in getting organized. Be gentle on yourself and praise yourself through the process. Negative self-talk is self-defeating. Decreasing the “shoulds” in your life may open more doors to the coulds and the why nots.
- After you’ve accomplished an organizational task, reward yourself in some way. It may be sitting down and enjoying a movie at the end of the day or making time to read your favorite book. You’ve earned it!

From unorganized to organized!

Because I’m not a born organizer, it’s something I’ve had to teach myself. I was never considered the organized child in my family and was more concerned about other areas of my life—even though my parents were organized.

When I graduated from college with a communications degree, I began working as an outside sales representative for a food broker. Because of the nature of my job, I was forced to learn to organize. I worked out of my car and had to be able to get to my samples, paperwork and merchandising material quickly and efficiently.

If I hadn’t eventually worked out a system, I would have been in big trouble. I learned how to merchandise products, use shelf space wisely, and develop a system for the stacks of paperwork that were part of the job.

After about six years of sales, I hung up my briefcase and exchanged it for a diaper bag in 1996. As a stay-at-home mom and wife, I quickly learned that I needed to get better at multitasking. I recognized the value of organization. I took the skills that had served me well in the business world and incorporated them into how I organized our home.

I was also involved with a moms' group where I became acquainted with a friend who ran her household efficiently and from time to time she also organized for others. She had a place for everything in her home and impressed upon me the value of creating order. Those principles helped me as I implemented the organizational process throughout my home.

When my friends saw how freeing it was for me, they asked me to organize their homes. Seeing the transformation of each person and having them experience freedom in their life gave me the drive to continue volunteering my time.

In 2003, I decided to parlay these skills into a business and named it Five Starr Organizing. (I expanded my business name in 2010 to Five Starr Organizing and Design.) Also, in spring 2003, I started writing "In Its Place," a weekly and, then, bi-weekly column about organizing for the daily newspaper in Salem, Oregon, and did so until the summer of 2011. To replace the regular column, I now do specialized columns for them.

As a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO), I am passionate about teaching others to free themselves from the clutter and chaos so they can live more abundant lives with less. I feel that I have the gift of organizing and want to use it to help others. As I follow my calling, I have continued confirmation that I'm doing exactly what I was made to do as a career.

Every client presents me with different challenges; however, no matter how drained I might feel after an organizing job, I can't wait to take on the next project.

PART I

The Practical Side of Organization

INTRODUCTION

AS A PROFESSIONAL organizer, I hear the same litany of reasons over and over when people tell me why they can't get organized. Some are good, but what I find most is that people need focus and direction.

Why aren't you organized? Is it because you lack the knowledge of how to get organized? Or do you lack the discipline or maybe the energy to do it? You've already discovered, I'm sure, that good intentions are not enough. You have to want to be organized more than you want to make excuses.

According to Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary, unorganized means "not brought into a coherent or well-ordered whole," and disorganization means "the destruction or interruption of the orderly structure." The word disorganization indicates that something was once organized. Being unorganized means that something was never organized.

Some of my clients were once organized, but a major life event (a death, a move, a divorce) caused disorganization, and they got stuck there and thus fall into the unorganized category.

It doesn't really matter how you got there. The fact that you reading this book is an indicator that you know you need help to get things in order in your home and your life. And your reading this book shows that you are willing to walk through the process of getting organized. I thank you for that privilege.

The next three chapters will revolutionize your mindset and open your eyes to the powerful pay-offs of being organized.

Chapter 1

Getting Started

WHEN I READ other organizing books, I find that many authors tell the readers what specific amount of time it should take to complete an organizing job. My approach is different because I recognize that every person has unique organizational abilities and time commitments. I don't want to set you up for failure by decreeing that a project will take a specific amount of time. After you read some of the questions below and answer them for yourself, you will be able to get a better idea of how long it will take you to get organized. Here is an example of what I am talking about. Let's take two clients and compare their abilities.

Working together, it took a client and me ninety minutes and a lot of negotiation time to get rid of three bags of newspapers that were four years old. Another client took five minutes to purge a similar stack of newspapers. The length of time varies from person to person. Remember: you are not in a race. Go at your own pace. What may take hours and hours of work for one person to get an organization project done may take much less time for another person to finish.

Getting organized is a process. My goal is to teach a new way of thinking as you learn my step-by-step approach to organization. The key is hard work, consistency and a desire for change. Don't give up, give in, or let up.

How long have you been unorganized?

Getting organized depends on how long you have been unorganized. I received a call from a potential client who wanted to know if I could get him organized in a few hours. “How many years have you been unorganized?” I asked. His response: “For about 40 years—my whole life.”

The longer people have been disorganized, the longer it will take to get organized. People tend to be set in their way of doing things and change has challenges. Some people have temporary disorganization in their lives, often due to a major life change like having a baby or dealing with a death. In these cases, it’s generally much easier to get back on track than it is to help someone who has spent an entire lifetime being disorganized.

How much time and effort can you put into getting organized?

I began working with a new client. The first day of working together, we both realized that the amount of work that needed to be done and what she could realistically tackle weren’t in line with her schedule. I suggested she call me back when her life was more settled. (Getting organized can take a tremendous amount of time, energy and commitment.) A couple of years later when she had more time we reconnected and accomplished her organizing goals. For her timing was a huge contributor to getting organized. Don’t be surprised if you find that learning how to be organized is more time-consuming than you thought; it’s okay!

Can you make decisions quickly?

Some people find it difficult to make decisions. For those who can make them quickly, the organizing process can go much more quickly than you might expect. Getting mentally prepared to make decisions quickly, without agonizing over choices too much, will help speed the process. If you are organizing with someone, they can also assist in keeping you focused and avoid distractions that might interfere with the organizing process.

Do you have hoarding tendencies?

Hoarders have to deal with many more issues than someone who is just disorganized. Getting to the root of why a person is hoarding takes a great deal of physical and emotional energy, and also it takes more time to help them get organized because they have much more stuff.

It can often require assistance from mental health professionals and doctors to assist in uncovering the source of the hoarding. The process of getting there can take a tremendous amount of emotional energy. For some it may require facing the pain of abuse, devastation of losing a loved one, or facing another life trauma. Uncovering these things can help the hoarder get a better understanding of why they are hoarding. Many times, it takes an accountability partner like a professional organizer, who understands hoarding and can serve as a coach. For hoarders, it may take years to get organized and be able to maintain a life of organization. That's okay, too.

How much “stuff” do you have?

People have lots of “stuff” for many reasons. They might be a collector, someone who has numerous hobbies and interests. In my experience, I have found that the longer a person lives in one place, the more “stuff” they have. Moving generally encourages people to purge. The more a person moves, the more likely they are to have less “stuff.”

How sentimental are you?

There are those people who have a story for everything and have a strong memory attached to objects. Purging for them can be almost unbearable.

People who are sentimental often have to go through “layers” of work in order to be able to let go of items. If the item represents a relationship to another person or place, then getting rid of the item may be more difficult. This could mean layers of decisions about the same items until you are ready to deal with them.

What are layers?

The first layer may be simply removing trash and things that can be recycled, given away or tossed.

The second layer might include looking at items that are not associated with a person or event, and choosing to let go of them.

The third layer could be taking a serious look at your things and assigning a value to each item, prioritizing what is truly important or sentimental to you and what is less valuable as far as the memories attached to it.

The fourth layer would involve a serious evaluation of each item to discern its true value to you. What memory is attached to the item? How does it relate to the event involved, or the person who gave it to you? How significant is that memory or person in your life?

For example, I had a client who was unable to part with a teacup that her grandmother had used when she visited one time. While it's understandable that this teacup might bring back a special memory, will that memory remain if she lets go of the teacup? The answer should be "yes" since hanging on to an inanimate object is not the same as keeping the loving memory of a person in your heart. These are also good tips for those of you going through the belongings of a loved one. A professional organizer can be especially helpful in working with people who are sentimental. The key is to be patient and work on your time frame. (Understand the process may take layers of work.) My desire for my clients, in letting go of sentimental objects and what they are capable of, are not always in line. I always have to remind myself that if my client is moving forward and not backwards in the process then that is a good thing! A little encouragement and empathy on how difficult this may be for others goes a long way.