

Organize and Simplify

A Guide for the Busy, Overwhelmed, and Overworked



Introduction

When someone says 'in your free time', do you laugh? Are you stressed out and frustrated, overwhelmed by everything? Do you constantly run late, forget things, and miss appointments? Have you fantasized about throwing your cell phone, pager, or laptop into the nearest body of water? Our busy, overloaded lives often leave us wondering where the joy and serenity have gone.

Last year, I started work on my master's degree. I knew life would be tough, but I really had no clue just how 'tough' it could get. As a wife, mother of three, system engineer during the day, and student on nights and weekends, I found myself in tears several times. My husband, who also works full time, was doing a great job trying to juggle tasks as well, but the bleak truth was that things were falling through the cracks. So we had to figure out how to fill those cracks! In the following pages, I've summarized the tips and tricks I learned during my year of juggling that literally saved me. Some may work great for you, some may not fit well into your life. Take what you can and use it to ease the chaos that seems to be present in our lives.

In addition, let me say that 'Having It All' isn't what it's cracked up to be. In fact, you can't have it all. Not only would you have no place to put it, you would have no time to enjoy any of it. Many of us, especially women, have been sold a

faulty idea. We've been told we can have it all. If you attempt to have it all and be it all, I truly think you will be perpetually overwhelmed. Instead, focus on what you love. Go for what makes you happy and fills you with joy. Prioritize everything based upon your standards, not everyone else's standards. In the end, it's all about happiness, contentment, and fulfillment. You won't find those things if you're busy chasing 'It All'.

Organizing: The Most Important Rule

Don't get so overwhelmed that you give up. Remember: baby steps. Any amount of organizing is going to help. Long journeys are made up of many single steps.

Time Management: Planning

First and most importantly, PLAN. I was never much of a planner, and I had to make myself start, but the benefits are tremendous. When your head is filled with your to-do lists, they feel larger than life. This causes worry and stress. Getting it all down on paper or in an electronic format will not only be more efficient, you'll reduce your stress. You'll remember what you need to do, be able to prioritize your tasks, and increase your organization.

Use a planner. At home on the refrigerator, I can't say enough good things about [Mom's Family Calendar](#). If you have multiple family members with busy schedules, this will keep you on track. Also, [Franklin-Covey](#) planners are a huge help. I was introduced to these planners in 1993 by my employer. Their use was required as part of our jobs. After moving on to other companies, I am still very impressed by this requirement. I record everything in my [Franklin-Covey](#), and would be lost without it. I use it at work, and carry it home with me.

When you are preparing for an event, trip, or even getting the hang of a daily routine: checklists, checklists, checklists. Keep them in a notebook or in your planner. You can find checklists on the Internet, or make your own. I have checklists saved in my computer for vacation, groceries, parties, business trips, spring cleaning, and the like. Put your grocery shopping list in order of the store you visit to save running around the store. Checklists are great for tracking what you've already gotten, packed, or accomplished, and they free your mind for other activities!

Speaking of daily routines, make your life run more smoothly – get routines. When I started my master's program, I laminated routines for my children to guide them through school mornings, evenings, and chores. They looked like this:

School Morning

Evening



Breakfast

Complete homework

Clean up after breakfast

Dinner

Brush teeth

Clean up after dinner

Deodorant

Pack bookbag for next day

Brush hair

Pack lunch for next day

Make bed

Choose clothing for next day

Feed cat

Brush teeth

Your routines for children will vary, of course, depending on the age of the child and what tasks you have them complete.

Delegate. Give children chores. It teaches them responsibility and helps you. When my youngest was four years old, his chore was to brush the cat. We owned a Persian with very long hair. She was always shedding. It was a simple chore that both helped me out and gave the cat attention. My four year old also earned \$1 per week for his work. Older children can clean the kitchen, care for pets, clean, wash the car, do the laundry, and such. Try not to be a perfectionist. Children must learn, and their first efforts will be far from perfect. With practice, they will improve and take pride in their work.

Time wasters, like mindless channel flipping and web surfing, need to be minimized for efficient time management. Viewing e-mails that you don't really care about, and not filtering e-mail are another culprit of time wasting. If you have not realized it already, these activities can cut into your time by surprising amounts. I've been shocked to realize the time I spend surfing the web. We all intend to look up one thing, then get distracted and spend hours before we know it. Cut back on TV and computer, immediately delete unimportant e-mails, and screen phone calls to avoid idle chatter.

Is Clutter a Problem? De-junk and Organize!

Clutter and junk will drag you down. It drains your energy. It feels like an anchor around your neck. You worry about it, fuss and fume over it, berate yourself, get embarrassed when company arrives, AND it takes away from your joy and happiness. So... why would we want to keep any such thing?

Well, we all get a little sentimental for one thing. We are afraid we'll forget a special person, place, or memory without the reminders. The thing is – special people and moments live in our hearts and minds, not in our junk. Don't toss out a few items that are highly meaningful to you, but do limit yourself on what you deem to be highly meaningful. And the more 'stuff' that we have, the less meaningful each item is to us.

Another reason I believe we hang onto things is due to a scarcity mentality. 'Stuff' makes us feel secure. Perhaps we think we can sell it if hard times befall us. Or that we'll have 'enough' if disaster strikes. Scarcity thinking breeds more scarcity. If you want to breathe freshness and abundance into your life, let go of your grip on 'stuff'. Shut your eyes, imagine your space clean and open, and feel how wonderful it is. When you get frustrated or want to give up, repeat this step. Visualization is a great help in becoming motivated. I'm a huge fan of the Abraham-Hicks work, which speaks to how and why this works. For more information, see [The Law of Attraction: The Basics of the Teachings of Abraham](#).

Get some boxes and start de-cluttering. There are many methods available to you, most of which can be found on the Internet. My favorite is the following:

A box for garbage

A box for charity / give-away

A box for selling

A box for storage

A box for keeping (just needs to find a home)

While you need to exercise caution with your 'storage' box, some items truly are for storage. These would include items such as holiday decorations, seasonal clothing, and baby items (when you think there will be more babies!). One method I have used, although sparingly, is to store items when I am really

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struggling over parting with them. Tape up the box, label and date it, and re-visit it in 6 months or a year. I often find I'm not as attached when time passes, and I can bear to part with the items. However, this should not be a common practice, or you'll simply be boxing the clutter and cluttering your storage areas!

For some wonderful articles, advice, products, and more, a reference site that I use is OnlineOrganizing.com. OnlineOrganizing.com is a web-based one-stop-shop offering everything you need to get organized at home or at work. Shop for the latest "do-it-yourself" organizing products, get a free referral to a Professional Organizer in your area, hire a speaker to put on a workshop for your next event, subscribe to our free online newsletter, link to hundreds of "organizing-related" websites across the internet, and get tons of tips for organizing your paper, space, and time.

I love to browse bedbathstore.com for ideas and products for storage. When you do store items, always store similar things together, and label the containers. For example, I store summer items in one section of my storage room. In that section, I have a 'beach and pool' container. The contents include beach towels, beach bags, pool toys, goggles, a radio we use for the beach, etc. I also have a winter section in my storage room with a 'snow and ski' container. It includes ski goggles, ski suits, waterproof gloves, etc. This may seem to be a bit much of an effort if you do not store items in a similar manner. Believe me, it

pays off in the end when you can quickly find everything needed. Once you get your system set up, it is a breeze to continue.

A word on clothing: try trading items with your friends. I practice this little ritual with a very close friend of mine. When the seasons change, we clean our children's closets. We trade clothing, shoes, toys, books, games. It is a fun way to not only get rid of your 'stuff', but to have some new (used) items of your own. My children look forward to the trading. The items we can't trade or don't want are gotten rid of in other ways.

Other ways of getting rid of your 'stuff' are available that also add cash to your wallet. Everyone knows about yard sales and garage sales. Make certain you are organized to have the most successful sale.

- Place an ad in a local newspaper giving date, time, location, and items for sale. The investment in the ad is well worth it.
- Place signs in your neighborhood with arrows pointing to your location, and signs on any local bulletin board on which you are permitted to post.
- Have your items clean and clearly marked with a price. Know ahead of time if you are willing to bargain on the price.
- Have a change fund ready to make change for your customers.
- Keep bags handy for those who buy many items.

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- And my favorite thing – when the day is done, take all leftovers to the local charity of your choice.

[E-bay](#) and [Half.com](#) are also excellent places to sell your used items. I am a big fan of both, and am both a customer and a seller. I rarely buy a book, CD, or game at retail price thanks to [Half.com](#) and the used section at [Amazon.com](#)!

Another hint about music: use [iTunes](#). You don't need an [iPod](#) to make use of [iTunes](#). Simply click on the [iTunes](#) folder at the top of the page and click on download. You can purchase music, then play it on your computer or burn CDs. The best part to me is that you can purchase one song from a CD rather than buying the entire thing if you are unsure about the rest. I can't tell you how many CDs I used to purchase to discover I really only liked one song. Now I mix and match, and if I burn a CD, it is my own compilation. And I don't have the CD clutter from many unwanted CDs!

When you are de-junking, it comes down to keeping what you love. Buy only what you love, keep only what you love. Be a fierce guard as to what comes into your home. Use great caution and care about what may pass through your doorway to stay. If you don't love something, or really, really like it, then get rid of it. What are you tolerating that really just annoys you? Would someone else love it?

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