

## Clutter Busting: Break it down into 10 steps, then get going

By LAURA LEIST

Is "get organized" one of your New Year's resolutions? You're not alone. It's consistently one of the top three resolutions set every year.

Making a resolution is great, but keeping it and acting on it are even better -- and harder. So rather than making a resolution, perhaps we should have "intentions." For example, the "intention to live an organized life."

Here are a couple of key points to recognize right at the start:

- Organization is not a one-size-fits-all approach. There is no right or wrong way. Rather, it's about creating and maintaining systems that work for you -- each day.
- Organizing is a process, not an event. Chaos and clutter did not magically appear in your life yesterday, and they will not disappear tomorrow. However, the good news is that clutter and chaos acquired over many years can be eliminated more quickly than they were accumulated.



Organizing is not going to be a quick fix to a lifestyle of chaos and clutter. Instead, daily maintenance will be the most important step. Without it, the system will break down and your once-organized kitchen, closet or garage may quickly become cluttered again.

It's often helpful to compare "losing weight and getting in shape" to "getting organized."

You chose to lose weight because you will look better, feel better and be healthier. You go on a diet, work out and the weight starts to come off. You feel great and look great.

However, to stay healthy you need to maintain this new regimen or the pounds you lost will find you again.

Clutter is no different. You organize your home and begin to feel less overwhelmed and more in control of your life. But if you do not maintain your new approach, the clutter can begin to reappear.

People often are so overwhelmed by their surroundings that they do not know where to start, so they never begin. If that's you, then remember this: It is much better to start small and do *something*, than to do nothing at all.

Two helpful suggestions for getting started: Begin with something small, or begin in an area that has been bothering you. Either way, you want to be able to see progress and have a feeling of accomplishment.

Start with just one junk drawer, a stack of papers, a single shelf or even your sock drawer. If you choose instead to start in an area that really bothers you, remember that the project may be larger, but you can always break it down into smaller pieces. That will give you the opportunity for quicker signs of progress.



For either route you chose, you may want to use the following "10-Step Process" I developed for my company. Notice that shopping is way down at Step 8. This is where a lot of people get into trouble, because they want to start shopping way too soon. However, it's difficult to shop until you know what you need to help you organize and how much space you have for the organizational items you purchase.

The other area where this process tends to break down is in not keeping focused on the task at hand.

Here's a brief description of each step. This process will work -- whether you want to organize one junk drawer, a stack of papers, one room or your entire home.

**1. Dedicate time** -- If you simply say, I'll get organized "someday," then "someday" will never come. You need to plan for this and schedule the time.

**2. Gather supplies** -- No, this is not the shopping step; it's where you gather the garbage can, recycling bin and boxes for items you will be eliminating.

**3. Establish a staging area** -- If the area you're working in is small, spread out to another area where you can temporarily use the space for the next step.

**4. Sort** -- The goal is to sort things loosely into groups of "like" items, so you can begin to see the quantity in each group.

**5. Purge and eliminate** -- During the sorting process, you will more than likely run across items you no longer treasure and can eliminate by donating, selling, recycling or pitching.

**6. Group "like" items together** -- Most likely you started this already in Step 4. Now it's time to be more specific about groupings.



**7. Examine your space** -- Is there enough room for what you are organizing? Do you need to take measurements so you can look for organizing products or systems?

**8. Shop** -- And you thought you'd never get to this step! Time to shop for products or systems that will be installed to help contain your groups of "like" items. Don't forget to take a list of needs with you, including measurements of spaces where products will fit or of items they need to accommodate.

**9. Install products** -- This could be as simple as putting things in a new container, or slightly more time-consuming, like installing a new closet organizing system.

**10. Maintain** -- Devote the 5 to 10 minutes it takes each day to ensure your new organization systems continue to work for you and your family.

As you work through this process, establish a "home" for everything you have. Once you've done this, it's important to review your new organizational systems with all family members. After all, you don't want your hard work to go to waste.

When you are finished, give yourself a pat on the back for a job well done, or better yet, treat yourself to something, such as a movie, lunch with a friend or a massage.

Notice I didn't list anything that would add clutter!

### **Staying Neat**

- Involve your children.
- At least twice a year, eliminate items you no longer use or treasure.
- When one new item comes into the house, one old item must leave.
- Resist feeling guilty because you are letting go of something.



## **Leist Joins @home**

With today's column, [seattle@home](#) adds organizing expert Laura Leist to our team of local writers.

Leist founded Bothell-based Eliminate Chaos LLC. Her company works with individuals, small businesses and corporations to remove clutter and repair disorganization.

She also has written:

"Eliminate Chaos ... in Your Home" -- Booklet, \$7; order online at [www.eliminatechaos.com](http://www.eliminatechaos.com).

"Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organizing Your Home & Life" Due in stores in April.

Laura Leist can be reached at 425-670-2551, [laura@eliminatechaos.com](mailto:laura@eliminatechaos.com) or through her Web site, [www.eliminatechaos.com](http://www.eliminatechaos.com).