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Eliminating chaos: “Organization isn’t about shifting things around”

“My goal is to get people organized and work myself out of a job.”

—Laura Leist Bishop

LAURA LEIST BISHOP is organized. She says she always has been. That doesn’t mean her office is tidy all the time. But ask her for anything, and she can find it. At home everything is arranged in her kitchen—canned food in one area, appliances in another. Clothes are in the closet. Garden implements line one wall of her garage, athletic gear another.

Because she is organized, she manages her time better. She knows what needs to be done tonight to be ready for tomorrow. Sometimes she plans three days ahead. “Because I do that,” she says, “I’m able to accomplish a lot.”

As president of Eliminate Chaos, Bishop provides professional organizing services to corporations, small businesses, and individuals. Her goal is to increase efficiency and reduce stress in homes and offices, thus providing clients with “more time for life.”

After spending a decade in the corporate world as a business analyst, the Washington State University graduate (’90 Management Information Systems) grew tired of the 60- to 80-hour work week. With the encouragement of friends and relatives, she decided to capitalize on the skills she had developed in the business sector. In 2000, she founded Eliminate Chaos. Working out of her Mill Creek home, she has established a revolving client base numbering 75.

Bishop was recognized by the *Puget Sound Business Journal* as one of the 2001 “40 Under 40 Entrepreneurs” in Washington. She is author of a book of tips, *Eliminate Chaos in Your Home*, and is working on two new books.

Many professionals are good at what they do. Still, they can benefit from advice

that streamlines their business procedures, Bishop says. On a walk-through of a home or office, Bishop has clients explain how the existing system works, or doesn’t. She wants to know what is going on in her clients’ lives, what bothers them the most in trying to get organized. They discuss options for bringing order to various spaces. While clients have similar needs, she recognizes those needs may be at different technical levels. As a result, she designs systems based on clients’ individual strengths and tailors systems to their particular needs.

One firm had a dozen employees who worked with 50 contractors. Eight different systems were in place to track business transactions. After conducting an analysis,

Bishop helps clients bring order to their home and work place.



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Bishop introduced new software that reduced the number of systems to two. Now the office manager spends less time training employees on multiple systems.

Bishop introduced Microsoft Outlook to several law firms in Seattle and trained attorneys individually on their needs for tracking data specific to their law practice. In addition, she has shown firms how to utilize the global calendar to schedule appointments with clients.

For those conditioned to living in chaos, Bishop says, “One of the most frustrating things is figuring out *where* to start organizing, or more importantly, *how*.” While some people resist change, most are at a point in life where they want to get organized. They need someone to “hold their hand and work with them.”

For example, Bishop has had clients call and say they can’t find things in their kitchen. Her solution is to pull everything out of the cupboards and drawers. This gives people a fresh start, as if they just moved in. They can see what is there, group similar items together, and get rid of what is not needed. Then they look at what is left and the amount of space available, and determine what things need to be organized before they are put back or stored elsewhere.

At that point, the “system” is in place. All people have to do is maintain it, because now everything has a “home” where it remains when it’s not in use.

“My goal is to get people organized and work myself out of a job,” says Bishop. She now works 60-hour weeks, but not all the hours are billable.

She likes being her own boss and doing what she likes. “The work is extremely rewarding—to hear the sigh of relief when clients know they are organized and in control,” she says.

—Pat Caraher