Do you need professional help?

GETTING ORGANIZED

by Professional Organizer Jane Veldhoven

As the new school and work year begins, our thoughts turn from camping and swimming to those tall stacks of papers that have gathered over the summer. And where are those letters and lists from the school of things we need for the kids? They could be upstairs, but the home office room is blocked with boxes that should be moved to the garage, but it's stacked to the rafters. If only someone could find the phone book, we could call for help. But who you gonna call? Lifestyle Nova Scotia Magazine called Jane Veldhoven, owner of Get Organized! Professional Services. She was organized enough to tell us how to prepare our homes and offices for the year and when it's time to call for professional help.

The single most common reason for disorganization is that items simply have no home. Other problems that may be causing that pile of papers and those forgotten tasks could be that you have storage but it is not in the most convenient place so you don't use it, you have more stuff than space, you have too many places to look for the same thing, or you have this strong impulse inside telling you that you need to keep everything!

Organizing for the Family

You need places for household bills and receipts, school records, shopping lists, important family documents, correspondence with friends, vacation information and topic files on parenting, entertaining, and don't forget self-improvement. By organizing all of these items in a household-information center, you will pay bills on time, regain use of the dining table, feel less anxious that you are forgetting something, and save time and eliminate stress searching for misplaced papers.

Pick a central location where you and everyone else in the household naturally gravitate, make phone calls, etc. This would most likely be in the kitchen, dining room or a place near the front door. You will need a work surface, file storage and a supply drawer or basket for stamps, stapler, scissors, paper clips, etc. Set up in/out boxes for family mail, hang a family calendar and message board on the back of the kitchen door to save space, and use nearby shelves to store papers in some of your favorite containers if you don't have room for a filing cabinet. And use it!

Organizing for Work

Whether you work from home or outside the home, a clutter-free and well-organized work area that is both functional and pleasant to work in is key to your success. Today more than ever, companies are looking at profitability and employees can contribute to this by being as productive as possible. So, whether you work for yourself or someone else, having an organized desk and work area makes for a better and more productive work flow. The key is to know where things are and have easy access to them. Being organized has become a survival skill that you will need not only in your job but also at home and in the future.

When looking at setting up a new work area or revising an existing one, ask yourself the following questions: What is working? What is not working? Which items are most essential to me? What is causing the problem areas? How could being more organized help me? Write down all the major activities that go on in the space, list the supplies you need for each activity and list the storage units you have or may need.

Now it's time to attack the clutter. There are five basic steps to follow: Sort, Purge, Assign a Home, Containerize and Equalize.

When sorting, attack what is visible first and finish one area before starting another. When purging, be brutal — focus on items you currently use to do your job, not those you used to use or those you might use someday. When purchasing and deciding on containers, keep in mind that storage should be single-function, things should be easily accessible and remember "label anything and everything". Setting up a

functional, accessible and well-organized filing system is key — use colour coding, keep titles and categories broad, and group similar files. You should have three to five broad categories. Last, but certainly not least, is equalizing. This requires constant vigilance — follow a simple maintenance plan by setting aside 10 minutes at the end of each day to put everything away, and 30 minutes at the end of the week to toss out anything that has become irrelevant or to return items to other people, etc. Re-evaluate your system regularly as your job and the company changes.

When to Call for Help

Still feeling overwhelmed and don't know where to start? It may be time to call in professional help. Professional organizers create customized solutions to increase the efficiency of any home, office or individual. Services can include: office organizing including decluttering, filing systems, and workflow management; residential organizing including closet design, space planning for kitchens, garages and basements; seminars and workshops for education and training of employees and managers; time management and personal coaching and even meeting, event and party planning.

So, don't put it off — get organized! •

You can reach Jane Veldboven of Get Organized! Professional Services at 452-7674.

Top 10 Decluttering Tips

1. *Have a place for everything*
2. *Dedicate 10 to 15 minutes a day to picking up and putting away*
3. *Keep often-used items within easy reach*
4. *Group together like items for easy storage and retrieval*
5. *Designate an area for items regularly taken to and fro*
6. *Open the mail over a recycling bin and wastebasket*
7. *Set up a proper home-filing system and use it*
8. *Resist buying new stuff unless it is useful now and you have a place for it*
9. *Break down tasks into small chunks and use a calendar to schedule their completion*
10. *Regularly purge, delete, giveaway or throw out stuff even if you think it might come in handy someday. In most cases, it won't!*