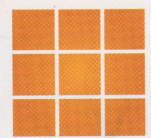


organizing your way to a brighter you



I felt overwhelmed and completely incapable of finding an edge to grab hold of and begin. In 10 years of home ownership, I had socked away everything including my high school year books, a glass Peanuts jar from 1985 that used to be filled with gumballs, stuffed animals from preschool, a library of hiking books, coupons from 1992, computer peripherals, every type of electrical cord on the market, an assortment of keys collected over the years that went to who-knows-what locks, and many more chotchkes.

1 step back, 2 steps Forward

My contractor took a long look around the space set for demolition. "Get all this stuff out of here and then we can tear down that wall and start building. Two weeks?" He surmized by the disastrous state of things. I couldn't wait to build, and then move into, a new home office this summer. It would be like a **brand new start**. Two weeks to empty a room? Ha! I could be packed up in two hours, I thought as he said goodbye. But there I stood, surrounded by mountains of paper, books, memorabilia, office supplies, gadgets. You name it, **I had it somewhere in my office.**



What do I throw out? What do I keep? Where does it all go in the construction interim? And, most importantly, how do I keep my brand new office from looking like this one? Despite three college degrees, I didn't have the emotional or technical tools to deal with my mess.

"You need to confront your 'stuff'" said Jamie Tabish, a professional organizer from Salt Lake City. "Getting organized is like therapy. It empowers people. It helps them move forward instead of getting stuck. It's understandable that people get sick, have babies, deaths in the family, new jobs. Transitions throw you off and you get overwhelmed and don't know where to start [to be organized]. Your first step is to admit to yourself that you're not going to do it and get the help you need."

I found Tabish's Organize By Design company from a Google search for 'professional organizer' that landed me on the National Association of Professional Organizers' homepage. Out of 18 NAPO members in Utah, six live in Salt Lake City and all charge \$50/hr on up. Any home office project like mine will run you well over \$800. Ouch. Not exactly within my budget. It was easy to think, "I'll just do it myself and save the cash." Riiiiight. It didn't get done in 10 years, I wouldn't do it now.

"This is like laundry and dishes. You have to put it away and if you won't clean, then you hire someone," Tabish said. "I help you to decide what items are important [to your life and work], help you understand why you've kept them for so long and help you let go of what you don't need."

The 'intervention' began with a two-hour consultation where Tabish got to know me, my personality, my behaviours, my ADD-like impulses, my attachment to certain things. It was like therapy! I felt better just talking about the mess that's my office and my life and the stress it causes me every day I can't see my floor because of the papers or find my keys, my ID or my phone in the clutter. She nailed that I have a lot of little items and projects that distract and crush my focus which should be on the work that makes me money. I hung onto things because I suspected that one day I would need it...for something. And just like it's hard to let go of the past, it was hard to let go of my junk. "On the one hand, it's just your stuff; but it can interfere with the enjoyment of life," Tabish explained.

I had always assumed that spending all that

time putting things away interfered with life and fun. Turns out it's the opposite. "Organizers teach you to create structure and structure creates freedom," said Tabish. "To be good at your job, you need the environment, the zone, to succeed."

Tabish immediately spotted my inability to file - I had two file drawers of records that hadn't been touched since 1995 - and showed me that I could use lidless boxes and wire baskets to collect and categorize. "If you can't put things away, you use an open system," she said. A method much better suited to my spontaneous, hyperactive personality.

From the start, however, I worried about dropping the ball. Once I was on my own, how could I possibly maintain her/my organizing system? In fact, my boyfriend and my contractor both bet against me.

Like an alcoholic struggling to stay sober, I wrestled with the bigger picture. "Don't get overwhelmed by jumping ahead," she reassured. First, we sorted and tossed, then we categorized and labeled. "When you define your stuff you have accountability for your actions," she said.

I'm just now moving into my new office and terrified of what it will look like in five years. But I've learned to tackle projects in baby steps and not put them off until it's too late to fix the damage myself (a costly consequence). With Tabish's help I'm in front of the ball not behind it and that in itself has me on the path to a healthier, happy work space and the promise of a more vibrant and lucrative home business.

Organizing Tips:

Tackle one room at a time. Don't try to organize your whole house in one sweep. Throw out, sell or donate what you don't use. Put everything else in boxes or tubs and store away. FYI, if something hasn't been touched in a year, chances are you'll never miss it. Toss. Businesses can throw out all tax papers older than 11 years; individuals can safely throw out all financial papers older than seven years. Keep what you use often, close at hand. Important papers like birth and stock certificates



should be placed in a safe, fireproof box.

Once you've opened your mail or looked at a paper, look at it once. Do whatever you need to do with it right away so it doesn't wind up sitting on your counter. If you can't, create an "Action" file or basket for items that require immediate attention like bills or work projects with imminent deadlines. Go through it regularly so you don't wind up with late fees or angry clients.

Put the papers you need to follow up on in a "Pending File", then mark your calendar to remind you to make the call or email.

Put things back in their proper places ... immediately.

Not everyone needs to spend money to get organized but if you just can't motivate to do it yourself, log onto www.napo.net to find a professional in your area. Jamie Tabish can be reached at 801-913-6846 or organizebydesign@xmission.com.

