

Getting Motivated to Get Organized

By Kathy Paauw

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"Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going." --Jim Rohn

When I get calls from prospective clients who say they want to get organized, I often ask, "What's motivating you to get organized at this time, and what will be possible once you get organized?" I ask these questions because I've found that without a compelling reason, there's little or no motivation to change the habits necessary for lasting results.

My first year in business, I got a call from a woman (I'll call her Kelly) who said that her husband wanted her to get organized. As I walked through their home with her, Kelly told me what her husband wanted me to do. Among other things, he did not like the clutter scattered throughout the house -- stacks of unopened mail, piles of newspapers and magazines, unfolded laundry, and dirty dishes. After listening for a while, I asked, "Who owns the problem here?" With a bewildered look on her face, Kelly responded by telling me that her husband wanted her to "clean things up."

Although Kelly was the one who was primarily responsible for creating the clutter, and she was the one who was asked to do something about it, I came to the conclusion that Kelly's husband was the one who owned the problem. Why? Because he was the one who did not like the clutter, and she was perfectly content with the way things were. She was not the least bit motivated to change any of her personal habits that created the clutter in the first place.

Under the circumstances, I decided not to take Kelly on as a client. Although working with this client could have generated a significant number of paid consulting hours -- as well as fostered a dependency on my ongoing services to keep things organized -- I would have felt out of integrity

to work with Kelly when she was not ready to commit to the process. Without her readiness to take ownership of the problem, my working with her would not have helped in the long run. Had she and I de-cluttered and organized their home, I'm convinced it would have reverted back to its original state in a matter of weeks.

Who Owns the Problem?

I'll share a story to illustrate what I mean when I ask "who owns the problem." When our daughter was about four years old, I was the one who took her to day care on my way to work. Every morning I'd ask her to get dressed and be ready to leave the house by a certain time, and I'd give her a 10-minute and a 5-minute warning. And every morning when it was time to go she would not be dressed. My husband and I were taking a parenting class at the time, and I mentioned the problem in class one night. The instructor asked, "Who owns the problem here?" I said, "I do, because I am late for work." He asked me why I was late for work, and I repeated that I was late because our daughter would not get dressed on time. The instructor asked what would happen if I let her own the problem.

The next morning when it was time to leave the house and our daughter was not dressed, I put her in the car in her underwear, strapped her seatbelt on, and put her clothes in a bag on the seat next to her. It was January and it was cold in the car! Guess what? By the time we got to day care she was completely dressed (and with her seatbelt still on)! The next day she was dressed when it was time to go, and it was never an issue again. From that day forward, she was ready when it was time to go. By allowing her to own the problem, she had an investment in finding a solution. She was motivated to get dressed because she was cold and uncomfortable, and because I was no longer willing to own or solve the problem for her.

Experience has taught me that when someone says they want to get organized because someone else wants them to do so, lasting results are not likely. Why? Because without that internal motivation, one is not likely to change the habits necessary to stay organized. If you don't own the problem, you won't have a vested interest in finding a solution. Sometimes fear, shame, or intimidation can generate temporary motivation, but it usually doesn't last.

Inside-Out Organizing

My most successful clients have been those who want to get organized because they see something on the other side of their clutter and disorder -- something they desperately

want. Their desire and passion for whatever it is that they want creates the motivation that propels them forward and supports lasting change. Success has nothing to do with the depth of the piles of paper or the length of time one has been disorganized; it has everything to do with having a compelling reason to get and stay organized. I call this "inside-out organizing."

Most people are motivated by one of two things: a desire to either increase pleasure or decrease pain in their lives. That's what inside-out organizing is all about - getting clear about your internal desires...what you want more or less of in your life -- and then working outward to achieve the desired outcome.

In Kelly's case, although she has created the clutter problem, her husband owns it. Until she is ready to own the problem, nothing will change in their household. So how can Kelly become motivated to take ownership of the problem and do something about it? Let's revisit the question, "What's possible for Kelly once she gets organized?" To illustrate how this works, I've made up three scenarios in which Kelly could explore the answer to that question:

1. Kelly and her husband sit down together and add up the actual costs of the clutter and disorganization -- late payment fees because the bills are not getting opened and paid on time, purchasing duplicate items because they can't find what they need, canceling subscriptions to magazines that do not get read, etc. Then they determine some alternative ways to spend the money they'll save ... perhaps for a vacation they've wanted to take, or for a home improvement Kelly wants that they cannot afford. Motivating factor: Freeing up more disposable income to use for things on the wish list.

2. Kelly and her husband are both committed to caring for each other in meaningful ways. She recognizes that order is important to her husband and he is important to her. Therefore order becomes important to her for the sake of nurturing their relationship in a way that is meaningful to her husband. Motivating factor: Building a more satisfying relationship with her husband.

3. Kelly has a hobby that she has not done for years because there's no space in the house to work on it. She has a renewed energy and passion for resurrecting this hobby, and that serves as a motivation to begin de-cluttering their home. Motivating factor: Following a passion of hers and doing something she enjoys.

In each scenario above, Kelly might be motivated to change some habits if it's worth the prize that awaits her on the

other side of the clutter.

Being organized is not about how your environment looks, but about creating an environment and a schedule that enables you to work, play, and live exactly as you want to.

Stephanie Winston, author of *The Organized Executive*, reminds us that "a good system expresses the organization of your mind in the environment."

To assess your current level of organization at home, answer the following questions:

- * Can you find what you need when you need it?
- * Does your environment express and support who you are and what you value most?
- * Does your schedule express and support who you are and what you value most?

To assess your current level of organization at work, answer the following questions:

- * Can you consistently find what you need within a few seconds?
- * If you work with others, can they quickly find what they need in your office when you're not around?
- * Does your current system keep you focused on what's most important and remind you of important follow-up?
- * Does your current paper & information management system work? Do you like it?

If you answered yes to these questions, you are doing just fine, even if your environment doesn't look organized to others.

If you answered no to any of these questions, ask yourself what you would gain if you organized your time and your space around what's most important to you. What opportunities do you miss out on or turn away because of a cluttered schedule, cluttered environment, or a cluttered mind? Visit <http://www.orgcoach.net/whatitcosts.html> to find out what disorganization costs you or your company.

Someone once said that "one definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing and expecting different results."

If you were to get and stay organized, what different results would be possible? What will getting organized enable you to do that you are not doing now? Once you are clear about the answer to these questions, keep your eye on the prize and you'll have the motivation to succeed!

April is Stress Awareness Month, and the week of April 15th is National Organize Your Files Week. When you are motivated to reduce your stress by making a change in your environment and/or your schedule, I can help you get

started. E-mail me at <mailto:orgcoach@gte.net> to schedule a complimentary consultation or coaching session.

Kathy Paauw, President of Paauwerfully Organized, is a certified business/personal coach and organizing consultant. She works with individuals who are dedicated to moving their lives forward in powerful ways by helping them declutter their schedules, spaces and minds. Visit her website at <http://www.orgcoach.net> to learn how you can Find ANYTHING in 5 Seconds - guaranteed! Subscribe to her free monthly PaauwerTools ezine by visiting <http://www.orgcoach.net/newsletter/freenews.html>

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