

Where Do I Start?

By Ramona Creel

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Ramona Creel
ramona@onlineorganizing.com

OnlineOrganizing.com <http://www.onlineorganizing.com>

Cleaning out your junk can be incredibly freeing -- but where do you start? There's so much to do!! Before we talk in detail about "de-cluttering," let's take a minute to look at the bigger picture. Here are a few rules of thumb to follow when you begin cleaning out -- either at home or at the office:

START WITH THE GREATEST PAIN

Begin working in the area that is the biggest thorn in your side -- the part of your home or office that causes you the greatest pain. If you find yourself saying, day after day, "Man, I wish I could get my (desk, storage closet whatever) straightened out. This mess is driving me crazy!" -- you know that's where you want to begin. What is your area of greatest pain?

HAVE A PLAN OF ATTACK

Create a list of the areas you want to work on, in order of priority. Be sure to include a deadline for completing each project. This will help you focus on the big organizing picture as you work your way through your home or office. It is much easier to stay on track if you have a specific timetable within which to work. Crossing tasks off of your "to-do list" as you finish them also reminds you that there is a light at the end of the tunnel! Just don't let yourself feel overwhelmed by it all -- understand that you will be getting to all of your problem areas, in due time.

LIMIT YOUR SCOPE

Try to tackle one SMALL AREA at a time -- a drawer, a cabinet, a shelf, a closet. Don't attempt to clean out the whole place at once. Chances are, you will get overloaded, you will become frustrated, and you will GIVE UP on the entire project. Plan to set aside some time each week to work on a different area. Once you get started, you will be surprised at how quickly the job goes. It's amazing what you can accomplish when you "get into the groove" of cleaning out.

WORK SYSTEMATICALLY

Do your best to move systematically through your home or office, completely FINISHING one area before you begin another. Avoid hopping from one task to the next if at all possible. There is nothing more frustrating (and draining!) than finding yourself surrounded by a bunch of half-finished projects. And it will be even harder to find things down the road if you have only organized part of your closet or cleaned out half of your filing system, while the other half is still a wreck.

FIND THE ORGANIZING STYLE THAT SUITS YOU

Some people work best if they empty an entire storage area before organizing it. Others find that too overwhelming, and choose to tackle their clutter one item at a time. You need to decide for yourself which of these methods suits your personality best. But there is no "right" way -- only what's right for you. Remember, there are as many different ways to organize as there are people on the planet!

ENLIST SOME HELP

If you can recruit some organizing "assistants" -- do it! This is a big job, and it will go a lot faster if you have some help. Consider drafting your friends, family members, or co-workers -- put on some music, serve them pizza, and turn cleaning out into a party. You might even consider hiring a Professional Organizer. Just be judicious about who you bring on board. If you what you need most is an objective opinion, your nosy mother-in-law may not be the best choice!

CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK!

This is hard work -- and it's going to take a minute. So don't get frustrated with yourself if you can't tackle every pile of clutter in one weekend! And don't drive yourself until you drop -- cleaning out does not have to be painful. Just go at your OWN PACE. Most importantly, be sure to reward yourself every time you finish a particularly challenging task -- even adults need "gold stars" (or a cappuccino or a movie or a soak in the tub) every now and then!

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