

Take Control Module 7

Get Organized



Objectives

You will

- Take all the pieces you have learned and tackle your organizing project.
- Learn strategies for your specific needs.
- Have access to additional organizing resources and tools.

“Organizing is not about getting rid of things, it’s about identifying what’s important to you and giving yourself access to it.”

- Julie Morgenstern, [Organizing from the Inside Out](#)

Instruction

Jane Hall, professional organizer with Sappari Solutions, says that organized people are lazy. They will do just about anything to not have to do a task again or have it take longer than absolutely necessary. It is true! On the flip side of that, I have yet to meet a truly 'lazy' disorganized person. The first, and most obvious, reason is that disorganized people are always busy looking for things, creating and recreating projects and running errands. The second, possibly less obvious reason is that often times these folks are extremely giving of themselves, their time, their money and their energy. These gifts that they give take priority over using their time to get organized. Ironically, if they put a few simple organizing systems into place they could both slow down the pace and even give MORE! Crazy, I know!

Organizing is not rocket science but it doesn't come naturally to everyone. What follows are a few foundational concepts that you need to know in order to take control of your stuff, time, and thoughts.

Foundational Organizing Concepts - An Overview

1. Make a plan
2. Let go of the excess
3. Group like items
4. Refine your items & choose favorites
5. Develop your system & Assign a home
6. Install your system

Foundational Organizing Concepts Defined

1 Make A Plan

You are ready with your plan from Module 6, having compiled all of the components in the previous sections into one area. Making a plan ensures your success because you know where you are going and how you are going to get there. Benjamin Franklin supposedly said, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

2 Let Go of the Excess

This step is so important that we started with paring down before moving to organizing. Why? Because you will spin your wheels and waste your time organizing what you are not going to keep in the end. The [FlyLady](#) says, “You can’t organize clutter.” You’ve got this. Modules 1, 2, 4 and 6 all covered topics having to do with clutter and letting it go. If you need a refresher, head back to these sections to go over these topics again.

Foundational Organizing Concepts **New!**

3 Group like items

Grouping items together in a space can reveal what you have been using that space for and may change your perceived purpose of that area. In addition, when you group items, you can see where there are too many or too few of a particular item. Last, once items are grouped you can determine more easily where to put those items based on how much space they will need. Never buy containers before this step! You may buy more than you need, and the wrong sizes.

4 Refine your items & choose favorites

The clutter clearing you have engaged in so far has been what I would call a ‘first level purge’. You were sloughing off the easy stuff: the items that you haven’t been using, the trash, the extra stuff that is just getting in your way, the items that belonged to someone else or somewhere else. Now that you have all the items together that you think you want to keep, you can determine if they fit in the space you have. One of my favorite ways to refine the items is to ‘play favorites’. If you have a one hundred books and only space for fifty on the shelf then pick your fifty favorites. If you come up with sixty favorite books then make swaps until you are down to just fifty. Pretend you are an expert in whatever item you are organizing: a fashion designer, a museum director, an art or movie critic; then refine your collection and pick only the best.

5 Develop Your System & Assign A Home

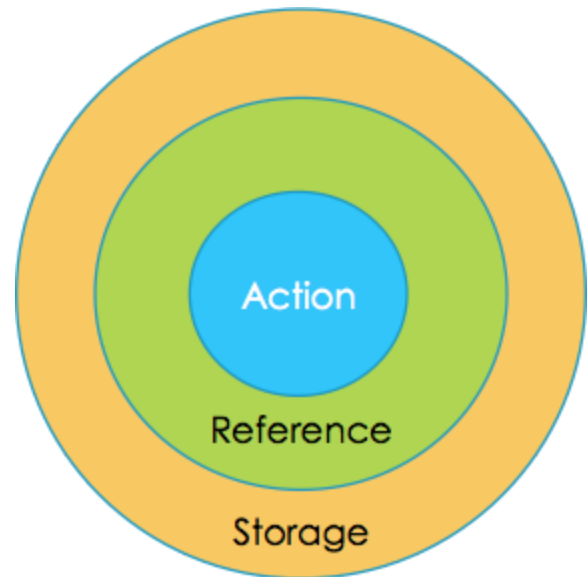
In Module 3, Define Your Goal, you wrote your own definition for ‘organization.’ Go back and review that definition now. For this section, we are going to define “being organized” as “things, time, and thoughts - have a home.” If this is not true for you right now, take a deep breath, it will be.

When deciding on where your stuff should live consider using layers. When you assign a home to your items using layers, you define three levels based on how often you use an item.

What goes in each layer?

- What is your goal for this area or this item?
- Who will use the item?
- Where would you look? / Where should the item go?
- When do you use it?
- How frequently?

It is possible that the item will move around a bit until you settle into your system.



1. Layer 1 – ACTION These are items that you USE on a daily basis, weekly at least. They should be within arm’s reach. Tops of counters, lowest cabinets, etc.

2. Layer 2 – Reference These are items that you use weekly or monthly, at least. These can be stored in higher cabinets, top shelves in closets, under bed, bookcases & filing cabinets.

3. Layer 3 – Storage These are items that you use yearly at most or never! Store in garage, back of closets, file boxes, out of the way.

Some of these items may “change stations” depending on the time of year, or family situation. Things like grilling supplies, sports equipment, pool towels, or folding chairs, may be used almost daily in the summer but need to go into storage over the winter. Designating a place for rotating items to live, while they are out of service, gives you a place to put them as soon as the season ends.

Don'T MiX Your Layers!

Let's look at an example of organizing by layers in the kitchen:

Layer	What's In This Layer?	Where Does it Live?
1 - Action	Everyday dishes and utensils Coffee maker/tea kettle Inbox for mail Dishwashing supplies Food storage Toaster	Top drawers, Cabinets just above the counter tops, Within arms reach Countertops
2 - Reference	Crock pot or Specialty Cookware Mixer Bread maker Baking supplies Vases Cleaning supplies Cookbooks	Lower cabinets Higher Upper cabinets Pantry handy to the kitchen
3 - Storage	Turkey Roasting Pan & Plate Holiday dishes Seasonal Supplies- Grilling, picnic, etc. during the Winter Party supplies- Fondue, trays, punch bowl,	Uppermost cabinets Back of cabinet storage Cabinets above the refrigerator Pantry or designated storage area

“...(Getting organized) means a *system* is in place. It's a system that you create and tweak as the demands of the moment and time dictate. Most of all, it's a system that you honor.”

- Regina Leeds, [The Complete Idiot's Guide to Decluttering](#)

Zones are another system you may choose to utilize in conjunction with layers. When using 'zones' you assign activities to a specific area. In the kitchen you may have the following zones:

cooking, baking, food prep, food storage, eating, dish washing, dish storage, etc. In a bedroom you may have: sleeping, dressing, reading. Be sure to compile all the items you need for each activity into that zone. This may mean you could have some duplicate items if they cross over zones.

7 Install your system & lighting

Now, you may purchase and install any items you need in your new system. This could mean shelf dividers in a kitchen or clothes closet; bookshelves in the living room; baskets for toys in the playroom. Be sure to MEASURE your area and the stuff you are trying to contain. It is no fun to come home ready to put your great new system into place only to find out it does not fit.

Lighting is a very important piece of your organizing puzzle. Surprisingly, it can make or break your system. If you need more lighting in an area that does not have outlets, consider battery operated lights.

Label your system. Labeling means that you can easily find items and return them home when you are finished using them. Labeling also allows for others to participate in using your new system.

Organizing By Area

What follows are articles and vignettes to help you tackle specific areas in your organizing project. Read them all or just pick and choose the ones that apply to you.

Area	Article	Page
Bedroom	Organizing In the Bedroom	8
	Make-Over Your Closet	20
Office	Digital Organization	9
	Tackling Paper Clutter	10
	New Year's Resolution: Get Office Organized	12
Kitchen	Sort Your Spices from A to Neat!	15
Storage Spaces	Skeletons In Your Closet	17
	Make-Over Your Closet	20
Kids	Cutting the Clutter with Kids	22

Bedroom - Organizing in the Bedroom

Organizing in the bedroom is one of my top four favorite places to start. The benefits of organizing in this area are:

- you sleep better when you are not surrounded by clutter and have a comfortable place to rest,
- you are prepared for the day when you can access the clothes you need and they are clean and ready,
- and you have a sanctuary, a place to retreat either alone or with your partner.

All of the above allows you to have a more positive daily experience and to be ready and productive in whatever activities you wish to pursue.

In the bedroom you have zones related to sleeping, reading or quiet activities, dressing and clothes storage. Do not allow your bedroom to be a storage place for all the things you do not wish company to see! Other than items stored in this room that do not belong; books and clothes are often the biggest issues and items that need to be handled in the bedroom. Be sure to have a bedside table, bookcase or other piece of furniture to hold your quiet activities. Your items should all fit into this space. Follow the tips below to get a better handle on your clothes:

Clothes Closets

- Group like items
- Hang pants on the top rung (they are uniform in size when folded over a hanger) and shirts on the bottom. You will then have space on a shelf in between.
- Short bookcases work great for shoes especially if they do not have a back.
- What categories will you sort your clothing into? Consider seasonal, type (pants, shirts, dresses, etc) whole outfits, color.
- Use a rotational system for seasonal clothing or even clothes you are ‘in between’ sizing in wearing
- Use a portable clothing rack to sort your clothing as you are going through this process. You’ll be able to better see what you have.
- Check out [The Project 333](#) for ideas on how to build a capsule wardrobe.

Remember the fewer clothes you have, the fewer clothes you have to wash, store and maintain! And you will reduce your ‘what do I wear’ conundrums!

Office

Digital Organization

Try to go to your email at least once a day. Sort through it just as you do your paper mail. Junk the things that you know you don't need to look at, and organize what is left by creating folders or labels. Spend time answering the emails that you need to get to, and try not to leave anything in the inbox for more than a couple of days. If you are on a large number of mailing lists, spend a little extra time unsubscribing and after a while there won't be as much to work through.

In the same way, the files and folders that we squirrel away in our hard drives can become a problem if we never spend anytime attending to what we have there.

Too many items can eventually slow the computer down, and there is always the potential for a crash that can destroy a lot of hard work and personal information. Go through your documents occasionally and get rid of anything that is no longer relevant or necessary. Backup the things that you need to keep on an external drive or an online backup system.

Pictures saved electronically are a joy forever, but only if they are safe from digital destruction. They are large and can add up faster, especially if you are an avid photographer and take many, high quality photos. It might be a good idea to buy an external drive just for photos. They are secure, can't be accessed by anyone on the internet, and they are protected in the event of a crash. You can leave copies of anything that you want to work on in the computer, but you will have your originals somewhere else for safekeeping.

Just a few things to keep in mind as the time for filing taxes approaches. It is always better to be able to find what we need, when we need it, and the electronic world is no exception.

Tackling Paper Clutter

The year is 2016. The idea that technology was going to eliminate our paper handling was erroneous. In the United States alone we use about 71 million tons of paper each year¹. That is 450 pounds per person living in the United States² in just one year! We receive more mail in one year than our grandparents received in their lifetime. It is no wonder that handling paper has become a problem and time drain.

The first step is to stop the intense flow of paper. Think about the ways that paper comes into your home: mail, magazines, newspapers, flyers, school work from your children, work documents, documents that you print. Slow the flow by removing yourself from lists. Similar to the ‘Do Not Call’ list for your telephone, you can remove your name from mailing lists and choose which catalogs you would like to receive. Go to <https://www.catalogchoice.org/> In addition, as catalogs and solicitations arrive in your mailbox call the customer service number provided and ask to be removed. It may take 2-3 mailings but you will reduce the amount of mail coming in. Lastly, enroll in online billing and manage your finances online. You have more options to keep track of your spending and you receive less mail, a win-win.

Next, set up a system for handling paper as it comes in. “O.H.I.O” or Only Handle It Once is a great rule to apply to slough off the first layer of obvious recyclable paper. Items in this group are expired coupons, solicitations to businesses you do not frequent, magazines more than 1 year old, duplicates, etc. Once you separate the junk from the gems then you may further categorize. Do not overthink your system. Consider broad categories such as:

- **Stuff to Act On**, which would include bills, invites, coupons, and other time sensitive items.
- **Things to Read**: articles, magazines, letters, books.
- **File**: papers related to tax, medical or family information that must be retained but not referred to except for 1-2 times a year.

Once a week, set aside time to deal with the ‘Stuff to Act On’ category. Make an appointment with yourself so that you know it will be completed. Put the ‘Things to Read’ in a convenient

¹ http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw_2010_rev_factsheet.pdf

² (71 million tons/315.5 million people in the US) * 2000 lb/ton

spot like next to your bed, in the bathroom or in a basket near a comfy chair. Be sure to empty the basket when it gets full! File your bills once a month. Plan to purge your files a second time as checks clear and items become irrelevant.

Create a filing system.

Using layers, create a filing system. Layer 1: Action is for papers that need to be handled every day. These can be stored on your desktop in file box or using a pile filing system. Layer 2: Reference is for items that need to be accessed weekly or monthly. This is the place where your traditional filing system with hanging folders and filing cabinet comes into use. You may also use a bookcase for books and supplies. It is not necessary, and often counterproductive, to create a category for every item that needs to be filed. Like your paper handling system, your filing system should allow for broad categories. You want to be able to find the item you are looking for in two to three minutes. A file for 'Utility Bills from 2013' would be easier to maintain than files for each billing company such as 'Water', 'Electricity', 'Trash'. Remember the question, **'How hard would it be for me to get this information when I need it?'** Rather than saving each document in the chance that you might need it someday. Layer 3: Storage is saved for the few items you are required to retain for tax, legal or sentimental purposes. These items do not need to live in your office but can be stored in a closet or off site facility. Use bankers boxes and label clearly with the items inside and when they can be destroyed.

Paper is constantly coming into your life, into your home and into your office. The trick is three-fold: slow the flow, have a system to handle the paper, create a filing system that allows you to find documents when needed. Don't forget to be green as you go, you can save 1 tree per year by recycling as you discard.³

Photographs

We have discussed working with your digital photos, but what about the photos that you have in closets, drawers, and various other places, that you come across as you are working on the projects around your home? What do you do with them, in the short term, as you find them, and then when you are ready to make a project out of them?

³ <http://science.howstuffworks.com/environmental/green-science/question16.htm>

While you are in the process of working through the larger areas of the home, photos can be a real distraction. They are pieces of your past. They bring to mind people and places that you may not have thought of for a long time. It can be tempting to grab that snapshot of Mom and the grandkids and decide, right then and there that you need to put it in its place, but then you remember; you don't have the albums that you intended to buy, and where is that box of photos from that year anyway? The attic! Yes.....no. Do not go to the attic.

There are very good reasons and methods for organizing your photos, but unless you have decided that this is the time to make it the top priority, you simply need a place to store the photos that you do come across, with the promise that you will get to them when it is their turn. You will want this to be a place that you intend to store all your photos so be sure that it is large enough for the number of boxes and possibly albums that you may come across.

You should get boxes that are just for photo storage. These can be found at most office and hobby supply stores. It is important that they are made of the right material and that they are of archival quality.

Keep one of these boxes handy when you are working in a space where it is likely that you will come across photos, and simply put every photo you find into the box. Don't reminisce, don't try to figure out who is in the picture, don't call your sister. This is going to be a lot of fun when the time is right, but if you let these things pull you away from the job at hand, you will lose momentum.

As the boxes fill up, take them to the place that you plan to keep them until you start the photo project, or if you already have a place to work on them, leave them there. You might want to label the boxes with the locations in which you found the photos; for example "Office Closet", "Living Room Side Table Drawer", etc.

When the time is right, and you are ready to tackle the photo project, you can find articles online, such as this blog post at the blog "Home Storage Solutions 101 - How to Organize Photos" <http://www.home-storage-solutions-101.com/organize-photos.html>
This post contains step by step instructions and ideas.

There are many more that you can search under “Photo Organizing”.

New Year's Resolution: Get Office Organized

How often is this resolution on your list? Start the year right with a clear, organized workspace and you will not only cross this resolution off your list but you will also improve your productivity and reduce your stress. Often, we do not set aside time for cleaning, organizing and maintenance tasks because they do not fit into the multitude of deadlines we have at hand. However, a workspace that functions well is essential for maximizing the time we have to get things done.

These days it is hard to stay on top of an orderly workspace. Because many of us work from multiple locations and carry digital devices to help us stay connected at all times, we are constantly connected and our work is everywhere. In spite of the digital age, we have more paper to deal with on a daily basis and we are attempting to fit more activities into the same amount of time.

Bruce Hechmer has been the office top producer at Long and Foster Real Estate in Belcamp, MD for seven of the eight years that he has been a realtor. The first year, when he wasn't the office top producer, he was Rookie of the Year. As both a successful realtor and an attorney at law, Bruce is well acquainted with getting things done. He has systems in place and does not miss appointments, has an excellent rapport with his clients and he knows how to produce great results but, with papers and notes on every horizontal and vertical surface, even the floor, Bruce's office was an eye sore. He needed to organize, but keep in place those systems that were working well for him.

In only four hours with an organizer and the same amount of time on his own, Bruce was able to transform his office from messy to neat and keep the systems that have been so successful for him.

Follow these steps to tackle the ever-growing mountain that is your desk and you, like Bruce Hechmer, will be checking 'Get Office Organized' off of your resolutions list.

1 – **Dedicate Time.** You will need to set aside time for this project but it does not have to be all at once. Set an appointment with yourself to work for two hours the first time then 15 minutes daily until you are satisfied. You will make progress and learn the habit of maintenance.

2- **Gather your supplies.** You will need a trash can, several large boxes (depending on how much stuff is on your desk) a box to act as your ‘inbox’, a box for papers to be shredded or recycled, a shredder, file folders, a place to put those folders (either a drawer, a portable file box or a desktop file box), hanging file holders, a labeler or sharpie, your planner/calendar and a notebook or your computer. It is helpful to have everything you need at hand so that you do not spend time searching when you could be working.

3 – **Clear your space.** Use the large boxes that you acquired. Put papers to sort through in one (or several) boxes and all the other items in a box of supplies. Take this time to sit back and envision your space. Write it down in your notebook or in a file on your computer. Where would you like things to go? The items that you need or use the most should be within reach on your desk. The items that you need periodically will go in file drawers and the items you must save for tax or other reasons should go in file boxes in storage.

4 – **Set up your space.** Replace the items that you have removed starting with the tools you use the most. You will likely need a place for: your computer, writing tools, a printer, an inbox, supplies like paper, stamps, envelopes, business cards, etc. and a telephone. Next replace the items that you use periodically: books, brochures, manuals, etc. Your last category for items to save will come as you sort through the paper you have collected.

5 – **Deal with the paper.** You will sort the papers and attempt to touch them only one time in this process. You will use the principles outlined in the book, Getting Things Done by David Allen. Pick up the first piece of paper. Is it still relevant? Can you complete what needs to be done within 2 minutes? If so, do it. Otherwise start a to-do list in your journal or on your computer and place the paper in a folder titled ‘To Do’. If it is an event to attend, RSVP and record the date in your planner along with the pertinent details. If it is a paper to be filed, either do so or create the folder to file it. Paper takes a while to sort and this is the place where your habit building will come in working a little bit at a time to move through the box.

6 – **Maintain your space.** Even before you have completed the task of sorting through the paper you will need to begin to maintain your space. As new paper comes in, place it in your Inbox. Schedule an appointment with yourself daily to sort your inbox as you have done with the rest of the paper. Make a point to write down items to do as they come into your mind on

the list you started. There are many to-do apps available including: Omni Focus, Remember the Milk and Nirvana.

7 – **Increase your productivity.** Make good use of your new space by following these tips. Make the first activity of your day a task that requires deep thinking, instead of checking email. Set times during the day to check and respond to email and make phone calls. At the end of your day, write down your to do items, clear your desk and pick three tasks to complete the next day.

The biggest success factor for Bruce's office clean up was the removal of out-of-date items. I call this the 'first layer' cleanup, by removing the obvious items – papers for appointments that are completed, old client filing, trash, duplicates, etc, you will make a large visual impact that will encourage further clean up. After clearing this first layer, the office was rearranged to create a more open feel and provide increased horizontal workspace. Items used only periodically were moved to the filing cabinets and those cabinets were placed in one corner. Items that needed to be accessed frequently were placed with the line of sight and at Bruce's fingertips in desk drawers. Because Bruce works from home and his office, I recommended a laptop to replace his outdated desktop computer to provide more room and better access to his information.

Next, the files that were on the floor, so that he could see them all at a glance, were organized in a step file sorter. Large tags were added so that the visual cues Bruce was used to were still there. He has a large, well-established client base of friends, family and referrals that he keeps in touch with by thank you notes, photos, and annual Christmas letters. Having that kind of encouragement produces positive energy so we kept those, his children's school photos and artwork and the awards for his achievements and simply neaten them on the walls.

Now, take time to schedule an appointment with yourself to get started on your own office clean up. You will be amazed at what you can achieve with even a small amount of consistent effort. The results for both your comfort and your productivity will show and you will make this year the one you check off, "Get Office Organized." Happy New Year!

Kitchen

Sort Your Spices From A to Neat!

As an avid cook and foodie, kitchen organization is near and dear to my stomach... I mean heart. The kitchen is called the 'heart' of the home and must include not only food prep and storage but also accommodations for entertaining, serving, household management, and family activities. How does one find the space to do it all? With zones. Using zones allows for compartmentalization and organization of all the activities that often take place in the kitchen.

No matter what kind of cook you are, you will have a zone for food storage. Handling this zone well simplifies food preparation and keeps you focused, especially if you have specific dietary needs.

Make a Master List. This list is everything that you need to have on hand in your pantry, refrigerator and freezer. You can start with a prepared list, like this one from [EatingWell Magazine](#) or create one of your own. But whichever path you take, be sure your list contains everything you need to make a week's worth of meals. If you are not sure what to put on it then:

- Check your past grocery receipts
- Shop at Wegmans? Use their online tool to track past purchases and make a list. Bonus – your list is ordered by the layout of the store.
- Start a file on your computer with the following categories: Fresh, Canned/Dried, Prepared, Bakery, Baking, Beverages, Frozen, Dairy, Meat
- Check out [my master list](#) for more ideas. It was created for a plant-based family of five.

Meal Plan. Your master list should allow for 5-7 basic “go to” recipes plus enough for breakfasts and lunches. If you have your pantry stocked, then you can always answer the question of, “What’s for dinner?” You are less likely to splurge on last minute purchases.

Store Your Food. You will have at least three areas of food storage: Dry or Pantry; Freezer and Refrigerator; and Spices or Baking.

My favorite dry storage for easy access and viewing is wide mouth canning jars either quart or pint sized. Use a permanent marker to indicate what you are storing and how to prepare it on the lid of the jar such as, “Brown Rice – 1 c rice to 2 ¼ c. water – cook 45 min” The jars are air and water tight and line up nicely in a cabinet. They also show clearly how much of each staple you have left. They make storing and transporting left-overs for lunch simple.

In the freezer, use permanent markers to write directly on freezer shelves and indicate: veggies, fruits, meats, prepared foods. Use reusable grocery bags, not plastic bags, to group like items together. These bags will not tear as they get cold and you can remove the whole bag at once to get to items behind or underneath eliminating the constant shifting or things getting lost in the freezer.

Use a similar technique as the freezer in the refrigerator to assign shelves for left overs, beverages, fruits, veggies and condiments. Be sure to clean out old food once a week to keep your refrigerator in order.

Your spices, baking supplies and cooking oils are best kept near the cooking area. Be sure never to store these directly over the heat source as it diminishes their flavor. If you buy items in bulk, transfer to airtight containers and store the extra in the refrigerator or freezer.

Label. In all your organizing, labeling takes the guesswork out of your system and allows others to participate in using the space. Be sure to consider the other users of your food storage zone when you place items so that cereal is not too high for little ones to get their own and older adults do not need to bend and stretch to get their food.

Food storage is just one zone in the kitchen. Consider the zones for your other activities and group the items together for that zone. You can make the most of a small kitchen space and make a larger one more efficient. Bon Appetit!

Storage Spaces & Closets

Skeletons In Your Closet?

Do you have skeletons in your closet? If so, you are not alone. This year Sappari Solutions Professional Organizing and Everything Goes Consignments and More held their 2nd ‘Messiest Closet Contest.’ It was difficult to choose a winner because there were so many qualifying applicants! But rest assured, a winner was chosen, the work to make-over this closet was completed and those skeletons are going to have to find someplace else to reside.

When this year’s winning closet was submitted one specific part of it’s description stood out, “I often use my camping headlight when I need to find something.” Can you see it? I can. It speaks to so many poorly set up closets. In addition, the home was built in 1932 when closet storage was at a minimum and those closets that were available were small or awkward.

What follows is a description of our work with this ‘messiest closet’ and how you can tackle yours.

First of all, know your closet’s purpose. This may seem a bit grand for a lowly closet but defining the space is the first step in getting organized. When we take care of our storage areas, an often neglected space, we free up room to make our main living areas more functional. It may not seem like a priority but by working on storage areas early on in your organizing project, you will have the room to create the home you desire. For our closet winner, the purpose was storage of the following items: clothes, books, school related items and shoes. When we got to work, everything that did not fit into these categories was put away where it belonged or purged.

Second, categorize. If you are having trouble with step one, then try step two to reveal what kinds of items you have been storing in this space. By grouping like items together, you will see how many of each is in the space. You can evaluate if your closet’s purpose is in line with the way it is being used. I invite you not to force a system that is destined not to work. Think about your existing habits and be sure that these habits and your desired purpose for the closet will support each other.

Third, purge. In most instances, the American population has more than they need or could possibly use. Purge what you are not using, is the wrong size, worn out or brings back bad memories. In most cases, you can cut down the contents of a storage space by half, without much effort. It may seem like a high number but, it is normal to hide away those items we do not want to deal with or make decisions on. When you finally sort your things, you find that you are ready to let go. From the our closet winner, three bags of donation and two bags of trash were collected.

It is often easier to let items go if you know they will be used. Consider a donation such as a local shelter or a consignment shop where you could earn cash for your stuff. Remember to recycle when possible. Earth911.com is a great resource to find recycling options for unusual items.

Fourth, put away. Every item needs a home but sometimes things just get misplaced. In our winning closet, which was in a daughter's bedroom, Mom's clothes had accumulated and items that belonged in the daughter's new apartment were living here. A dresser that had been a catch all was sorted and items were put away. If your items do not have an assigned home, it is impossible to put them away. You will also find that you have more family support if all family members know where things belong.

Now that you know what you are storing, you can put into place a closet system. You have many choices, from the standard bar across the length of the closet to a more customized system. Some are self installed and others include installation. The Container Store (www.containerstore.com) has a tool online to help you design a closet from their Elfa storage systems and their customer service representatives are very helpful. A large deep closet is not well served by only one rack to hang clothes. However, you can get creative and use what you have. Consider moving a bookcase and baskets or a dresser into the closet. Store pants hanging on the top portion of a double rack and tops on the bottom. You will then have a more uniform space to store some items on a shelf in between. A shelf was brought in to store the books that were kept in the winning closet as well as a labeled box for keepsakes.

Functionality is very important so be sure you have a working light in large closets and doors that open and close properly. These things, as simple as they seem, will prevent you from utilizing the closet if they are not working.

Before putting all of the closet items back in, give your closet a quick clean up. Sweep the floors and wipe down the racks. All of these efforts will encourage you to use the closet keeping the clutter in the remaining parts of the house to a minimum.

After a team effort by Mother, Daughter and Organizer, the winning closet was fresh, accessible and had lost pounds of contents. Here are a few remaining tips to make your closet clean out successful:

1. Tackle your closet with a team and make sure that all the decision makers are on board for the makeover.
2. If you cannot do it all in one sitting, do not take everything out of the closet. Instead, work your way around the space counter-clockwise. You may need to start from the floor up if the contents are spilling out. Set an appointment with yourself daily to work on this space until it is completed. Even 15 min at a time will get the job done sooner than you expect.
3. Make sure you have all the supplies you need before you start – garbage bags for trash, sharpie or label maker, boxes for donation, tape measure and paper.
4. Make it fun! Turn on music, bring in natural light or open a window to make the task more enjoyable.

Are you ready to chase the skeletons out of your closets?

Make-Over Your Closet

You know how high blood pressure can be an indicator of heart trouble? It is the same with messy closets and clutter trouble. When you have your storage spaces in check, the stuff has a place to go and does not clutter your home and other spaces. Every year Sappari Solutions, in coordination with GO (Get Organized) Month, sponsors a contest to find the messiest closet in Harford County. This year the event was also sponsored by a local consignment shop.

Choosing a winning closet is never easy with such messy entries from which to select, but eventually one was identified in Abingdon. When Sappari Solutions Organizers arrived, the closet owner stated, "I've already gone through this and will not need to get rid of anything more." Pareto's Principle, the 80/20 rule, applies to clutter just like it applies to everything else. The diagnosis for this closet's issue was that the owner works long hours and never puts anything away. In order to address these issues Jane and Linda took the closet apart and re-worked it. You can do your own closet makeover by following these steps:

1. **Clear Out the Space:** If you have a helper, 4-8 hours and a staging area; you can empty the closet entirely and start fresh. If you do not you can still do this process incrementally. Work on one section at a time.
2. **Group Items:** As you remove items, group them by like kind. In this way you will notice if you have ten pairs of similar black pants or fifty purses.
3. **Choose Favorites:** Most homes could use a reduction in the amount of stuff, remember the 80/20 Rule - You use only 20% of what you own. Pick your favorite items that you would like to keep. Set rules such as picking 5 of each kind of item to retain or one for each day of the week (for clothes). Determine to part with the remaining, non-favorite items. Be sure to know where they are going whether it is consignment, donation, hand-me-down or trash. Put the items to go in large white or clear bags marked for their ultimate destination. Use black bags for trash.
4. **Clean and Arrange the space:** Now that you can see what you are keeping, take time to clean the space and arrange the area for the types of items you have. Many closets only have a bar to hang clothes with no other organizing means. Check out ContainerStore.com for closet organizing ideas or Pinterest.com/SappariSolution An easy fix is to hang a second bar with a

shelf and store pants folded over a hanger on the top bar, shirts on the bottom bar and baskets for small items in between. In the case of the winning closet, the organizer unit was moved into a more productive location.

5. **Put it Away**: You could have the greatest design for a closet system but if you do not honor it, you will still have a mess. Take time to put your items back into your closet and identify a 'home' for them. You may want to label or put photos of what goes in each location. When your stuff has a home, it is easy to put your things away. Putting back what you use keeps your home in order and clutter at bay.

After Sappari Organizers worked with the winning closet's owner her response was, 'I could have never done this on my own!' Even more exciting was her response a few days later, 'I am so motivated now! I am going to keep going.'

Projects, like a closet or other storage space, are great areas to begin organizing. Starting in a storage area cleanses you and your home and makes way for the items you truly love and use. Often times the items hidden in the back of a storage area are easy to part with because they have been out of sight for so long, we just forgot they were there!

If your closets are out of whack and you are feeling the pressure of a clutter problem, take time to lower your clutter levels so that your home (and you) and function at its best!

Kids

Cutting the Clutter with Kids

The family dynamic has to be one of the biggest challenges to organization and efficiency. Does the husband have a need for more organization or less? Do the children have habits in place that are conducive to running a smooth household? Is the homemaker the only one making the effort to change? Who can she turn to within her family? Outside her family? A friend who can watch the children while she works at home? Her husband taking them out on a Saturday?

Children do not have a magic moment of enlightenment when they just start running through the house looking for their things and stowing them in the proper places. Neither do they suddenly realize that it is inappropriate to drink Kool-aid in the living room on the couch. (This is my greatest beef against sippy cups!!) Habits are formed from the earliest days. Give them a sippy cup at the table. Give them WATER in a sippy cup if they have to carry one around. A very small child knows the difference between water and juice. Also, the adults in the household HAVE to be willing to re-enforce the rules!!! NO, sorry dear, no beer in the living room either! Every family is unique and every family has a lifestyle and a comfort level within their living space.

Within each family are individuals with their own unique needs, likes and dislikes.

Different ages require different approaches.

Not every family has the same needs for organization. Some people are very functional amidst clutter. Determine the clutter comfort level in the family and then work to be SURE that everyone feels the same comfort. Children who need neatness may do better if they have a clutter free corner in which to do homework, build things, read etc. Some kids just need a place for their piles. They will probably work better if they can see all their stuff! This is not a license to be a slob! They must not allow their things to drool into the rest of the house and their space must be clean. No dirty laundry, dust, pet hair, etc! Pilers can still be organized.

You are not Mary Poppins.

- Children need a chance to practice the feeling of a tidy room, matched toys, and being able to find what they are looking for. Telling a child to "Clean your room" is like sending them to the kitchen to cook dinner. They need to be shown the logical way to put things away, and it can be fun!

- Make a "home" for everything.
- Encourage kids to put things in their home before bed each night.
- Don't let things go. A bedroom or play area can quickly become overwhelming for all of you.

Variety is the spice of life!

- When you need to deep clean the playroom or the bedroom, change the furniture around and give it a different look.
- Color code shelves, drawers, tubs and bins. It's fun, and it helps provide direction.
- Think about preschools. They always have a way to motivate "cleanup time"
- Try to make it easy to remember what goes where by giving each "home" a name or color.
- Write a poem or draw a picture.
- Encourage sorting.
- Older children need to see how to do it a few times first, but once they know where things go, insist on a picked-up room each night at bedtime. Within reason of course.
- Asking older children to help with the younger ones can teach them the value of systems.
- Try a "Family Closet" in or near the laundry room. This requires a bit of space, but it means that kids do not have clothes in their bedrooms, which can be a major source of clutter.
- Try shelves with bins. Dressers with drawers can be difficult for kids to manage. Drawers are hard to see into, and putting clothes away neatly can be a challenge. The bins can be removed to the floor for easy loading, and can be color coded according to which child is using them, or by what goes in each.
- A "sock basket" on top of the dryer can be used to collect socks and then you can have one of the children periodically pair and ball them. Do not buy socks that have only one mate.
- A seasonal clothing switch-out is a good time to go through and purge worn, outgrown or otherwise unusable clothes.
- Create a homework or study space. This is a place that you develop based on your child's individual needs. Some children need quiet, some need less visual stimulation, some have to have music playing, or a parent nearby for support. Try to have a shelf or cabinet nearby for supplies. Older children that use computers require supervision, so the homework area should be within sight if there is a computer in use.

- Keep each child's books in a bin or tub, and make it a habit to check and see if there are papers to sign before bed.

Our time as families can seem to evaporate everyday if we do not take extra care to manage it.

Our time is one of the most challenging things to manage, but it may be the most important. Efficiency can give you hours in your day that you didn't know you had. Good time management will certainly carry over into school, work, and many other activities. It can also greatly affect our children's behavior and performance at home and at school. It is a gift that you can give to them.

Do not forget the most important part of all this is that you are the most important person in the world to your family.

Do not let the clutter bring you down. Let the family happen and remember that there will be years and years ahead for clean floors and windows!

THIS is what it is all about. If you have a happy family, you are Blest!

Organizing Inspiration

Check out these places for lots of great ideas, systems and tools to get organized. Remember to look for your specific situation or need.

- [Container Store](#) – the name says it all
- [Ikea](#) – LOTS of great storage ideas, especially for small spaces
- Pinterest - <http://pinterest.com/sapparisolution/>
- Online bulletin boards of ideas on anything you can imagine!
- [Craigslist](#) or [Freecycle](#) for supplies

Tasks

- Use the Fundamental Organizing Concepts to tackle one area. In which will you begin?
- Review the articles that relate to your project.
- Check out the additional Organizing Inspiration online and write down 3 ideas to try
- Complete the [Review of Module 7](#) and meet with your coach.