

Organizing From The Inside Out

The Foolproof System For Organizing Your Home, Your Office, and Your Life



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■ The Big Idea

Hundreds of thousands of people have broken through the clutter and streamlined their lives with Julie Morgnstern's proven techniques. There's no magic, no mystery. *Getting Organized is a skill that anyone can learn.*

The beauty of Julie's system, honed during her many years as a professional organizer, is that it enables you to design a unique organizing plan based on your individual goals, natural habits, and psychological needs – a plan that will work with your personality rather than against it.

Let Julie Morgenstern set you free to live the life you dream about – free from the clutter that can drag you down.

Why You Need This Book

This book will show you how to get organized and stay organized.

A THREE-LEVEL DIAGNOSTIC

The actual causes of clutter occur on three levels:

Level 1: Technical Errors. Simple, mechanical mistakes in your organizing system that can be easily fixed. Solving them is the equivalent of tightening a screw, changing a belt, or aligning the steering on a car. This is the first category of causes to review because all messes can be attributed to at least one technical error.

Level 2: External Realities. Environmental realities beyond our control limit how organized we can be. Recognizing them will save you from having unrealistic expectations of yourself.

Level 3: Psychological Obstacles. Hidden, internal forces that make you gravitate toward disorganization, no matter how much you crave control. Unless you are aware of them, they can lead you to sabotage any system you set up. Through awareness, you can find a way to work around these issues and achieve organizing success.

Keep in mind that it is not uncommon to have several causes of clutter operating at once. Everyone struggling with disorganization suffers from at least one Level 1 cause, but may also be suffering from some Level 2 and 3 causes as well.

ANALYZE: TAKING STOCK

In order to be successful you must answer the following on each organizing project you take on – whether it's your entire office, a room in your home, or just a sock drawer.

- 1. What's working?** One of the best ways to custom-design an organizing system is to start by identifying what works. Beneath the rubble, there are some systems that are working just fine for you.
- 2. What's not working?** Your answers here will identify everything that needs fixing. This is one of those rare moments in life when you get the opportunity to whine, rant, and complain as freely as you like. Let it loose. List absolutely everything that's frustrating you. Be precise and thorough; don't edit yourself.
- 3. What items are most essential to you?** By taking a moment to step back and define which items are most essential to your job or life, you will give invaluable direction to the sorting and purging process later on. Decisions will come easier, and you won't be prone to distraction or confused by the many tempting "finds" you come across during your archaeological dig.
- 4. Why do you want to get organized?** By taking the time to articulate what's driving you to get organized before you start, when you're at the peak of your motivation, you create your own coaching tool to turn to for inspiration when the going gets tough.
- 5. What's causing the problems?** Specify which technical errors, external realities, and/or psychological obstacles are at play so that you are sure to be addressing the right problem. Remember that the issues will vary from room to room, so you need to ask this question of each space you tackle.

STRATEGIZING: CREATING A PLAN OF ACTION

Julie's Secret Weapon # 1: The Kindergarten Model of Organization

Begin by developing a clear picture of where you are headed. This requires visualizing what you want your space to look like when it's finally organized.

Julie's Secret Weapon # 2: Estimate the Time

One of the biggest mistakes people make when it comes to getting organized is not being realistic about how long the job will take. Most people either dramatically overestimate or drastically underestimate the time required. If you overestimate how long a project will take, you're likely to procrastinate forever and never get started.

ATTACK: GETTING THE JOB DONE

To remember the steps of the attack phase, think of the word “**SPACE.**”

1. **Sort.** If your space is disorganized, you undoubtedly have many related items scattered in multiple locations. Not only does this make it hard to find them, it makes it almost impossible to quantify what you really have. So, here is where you go through each possession and create a sense of order.
2. **Purge.** Here is where you decide what stuff to get rid of, and how. You will always have several choices: toss, give away, sell, put elsewhere, store. Have appropriate labelled boxes on hand throughout the Attack process to sort your discards into.
3. **Assign a home.** Now it's time to take all the items you're keeping and decide precisely where, within each zone, you're going to store them – which shelf, which drawer, which side of the bed. Avoid being vague and indecisive about where to put items by applying the “Select One Rule” of giving each time a single, consistent home. This is key to “trusting” your system.
4. **Containerize.** Containers make it easy to keep your categories of items grouped and separated within their assigned homes so that retrieval, cleanup, and maintenance are a breeze.
5. **Equalize.** About two weeks after you've finished, make an appointment with yourself to evaluate how well your system has been working. Is everything as easy as you'd like it to be? Are you following your system? Do the zones and categories you set up work well for you? Re-evaluate again every couple of weeks thereafter until you're completely happy with your system.

APPLICATION OF ORGANIZATION FOR HOME-BASED BUSINESSES SET-UP

Here is a run-down of all the essentials we've discussed with the home-based business as an example for your actual application of organization.

ANALYZE

1. What's Working?

Example: "I keep a supply of promotional packets assembled and ready to go. When I get an inquiry, I can add a quick cover note, slap on an address label and stamp, and send it right out."

2. What's not working?

Example: "I sometimes don't send invoices to my clients because I can't find the documentation, and I have no way of tracking receipts for reimbursement. I'm losing money!"

3. What items are most essential to you?

Example: David T., a financial advisor, needed places for his active client files, prospect files, inactive client files, daily and weekly financial publications, and information on various investment products and companies to watch.

4. Why do you want to get organized?

Example: "We'll be able to use the living room again because my work area will be separated from it."

5. What's causing the problems?

Example: Complex, confusing system. Entrepreneurs tend to have a tremendous range of interests that are always evolving. It can be hard to keep things simple and broad; many items they save have significance for many other areas of their work. They often set up overly complex systems with hundreds of file folders, many with overlapping titles, and find it impossible to keep it all straight.

STRATEGIZE

- Selecting furniture. As many home offices are squeezed into small spaces, it's important, especially if you will be working there full-time, to choose furniture that is comfortable and ergonomically supportive.

- Plan your zones. People who work at home generally juggle many roles: sales, marketing, proposal writing, customer service, and the like. Your space can be set up to reflect these various roles, as “prompts” to what activities you should be taking care of.

ATTACK

1. Sort. Entrepreneurs tend to accumulate lots of potentially valuable information but they are not sure how to categorize it, so it ends up lost and forgotten in miscellaneous piles or folders. Consider sorting your papers and set up an easy retrieval system for them.
2. Purge. This can be a big challenge, especially to entrepreneurs who tend to see value in holding on to everything that crosses their desk in the belief it might be useful in growing their business. But things that “might come in handy someday,” or that used to be relevant, only become barriers, blocking access to the important information that makes you money. Space is at a premium, so keep it lean.
3. Assign a Home. Use a deep cabinet or even a top bookshelf to store oversize binders, reference books, literature, and mailing envelopes. Place items near each other based on your own associations. If you buy office supplies in bulk, keep an everyday supply in your main work area and store the excess in a closet or other location.
4. Containerize. Home-based offices are the perfect place to get especially creative and expressive in your choice of containers. Without the restrictions of a corporate environment, you can use color, texture, and style to create a space you will love being in.
5. Equalize. Nice job! You’ve created a custom-designed home office that expresses who you are and will be both comfortable and supportive in your work. Here’s how to keep it that way:
 - Daily. Set aside fifteen minutes at the end of each work day to put everything away, so your office will be tidy and ready for action when you come in the next morning. Doing it “when you have a free minute” is a recipe for never doing it at all.

Routine tune-ups. Home businesses grow and change, especially those of entrepreneurs. Make sure your space stays current with the requirements of your operation by spending a half day to a day each year reevaluating your setup

(especially your filing system), and updating it to reflect any shift in your goals and priorities. Add new files, delete irrelevant ones, and slim down travel and household files that have gotten too fat.

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