

Happy New Year!

Yes, it's that time of year again, Get Organized month! With the start of the New Year, January offers us an opportunity to revisit our goals from the previous year and consider changes to our lives based on priorities for this year. As you draft your list of "to-dos" for 2007, consider projects that will create immediate results, and rank projects based on what's important to your life now. Also, a project will seem less daunting if your list reflects step-by-step actions needed to get it done, instead of the end result. The ability to make progress on long-term goals one stage at a time encourages completion, and will foster a sense of accomplishment. In return, we feel good about our efforts and justified to reward ourselves accordingly!

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Paper Management (PM): Help! I Can't Decide!

How many times have you picked up a piece of mail or an important paper, considered it, and put it right back down, only to have others pile right on top of it? With the constant inflow of paper and accumulation of things in our lives, how do we deal with it all? With paper, our success for reducing the load is directly tied to having a functional system in place to process what comes in, and a daily commitment to make decisions on the importance of that item ("deciding to decide").

Most of what we view daily falls into 4 or 5 categories: important papers (bills), important things to file (household or personal reference only), things requiring direct action or scheduling, things we like to do (or might consider doing), and reference materials (school papers, magazines, other). If you currently have no system set up for processing paper, using these categories is a good way to begin. Start by sorting papers by category, each into its own container (labeled file pockets and vertical standing magazine files are easy to start with, and are portable). Adjust categories as needed, based on volume and type of incoming paper.

PM: Important Papers and Action Items. Bills and personal files (reference) should be processed (paid and filed) on a scheduled day(s) of the month. As you go through mail, separate bills from personal reference papers, and relocate to wherever you pay bills or file papers. Items requiring action can be dealt with in several ways: 1) Do it now if it takes 5 minutes or less (as you sort); 2) Delegate it (pass to spouse/co-worker/other); or 3) Schedule a 15-minute block of time during the day/evening to address items (calls, correspondence, other follow-up).

PM: Interesting Things to Do. If you have a tendency to accumulate articles, pamphlets and other reference papers related to subjects of interest that are time-sensitive (business conference, an upcoming play or workshop to attend, a fun family event), check your datebook for availability, and put a note in your calendar to follow-up with that item within a week of the event, or sooner if tickets are required. Keep the paperwork in your "action" location until you've decided (or not) to do it, mark important information in your datebook (directions, time of event, phone number) and then toss.

PM: Reference Materials of Interest. For papers and articles on subjects of interest, (such as magazines, catalogs, professional journals, Sunday paper), determine where you tend to read each type of material and designate a place to store it at that location. If you peruse catalogs at the kitchen table, or at your desk, keep a magazine file on the counter or nearby bookshelf to hold them. If you tend to read mostly on the couch or in your bed, contain them nearby and weed through regularly. Keep catalogs only if you think you may be purchasing an item soon, otherwise recycle it. If you need catalogs or journals for business or professional reference, store collections by year in upright magazine holders away from your active desktop. For magazines, keep 1-2 month's worth if you have a backlog. Avoid the accumulation of newspapers by recycling the entire week's worth on garbage day, regardless if you've read them or not. Trust that you can catch up on world or local events as you need, and consider the Internet as an alternative source for columns or weekly sections of interest. It's okay not to read it too!

PM: School Papers. If you have children and tend to accumulate school papers, be ruthless on what to keep, deciding based on whether you or your child needs it for reference or as a keepsake (be especially ruthless with artwork and classwork, keep the best of the lot and file it by year/child's name). If you just can't spend the time weekly on school papers (non-action related), at least designate a separate home for each child's papers, and sort through this collection once a month, or at the end of a marking period. (Expandable file pockets placed on a bookshelf, or stacked desktop trays are good for this. Keepsakes should be kept contained in a covered, acid-free environment in long-term storage. Check www.schoolfolio.com for large-size art storage needs.)

PM: Old Files and Paper Backlog (those bulging file drawers or bags in the corner). For the long-standing paper piles, or old files taking up active file drawers, your approach to deciding what to toss should focus on 1) importance (i.e., personal reference or tax-related); 2) relevance to life now; and 3) realistic evaluation of using saved material. One of the most



important reasons for scheduling time to go through your backlog is to determine what, if any, important papers are lurking there. Did your passport go missing? What about those savings bonds your kids got or the reimbursement check that came in the mail? Especially as we approach the 2006 tax season, it's important to make sure you've located all possible supporting documentation for deductions and claims. To archive annual documents, remove previous year(s) files from active file drawers and store in labeled file boxes in your long-term storage area. Some questions to ask yourself as you determine what to keep or toss include:

- ❑ Why do I need it?
- ❑ Can I find it elsewhere if I absolutely have to have it? (Helps with the "what if..." conundrum.)
- ❑ Is this serving my current goals?
- ❑ Will I use this soon? Ever?

Avoid saving items for other people and be selective about saving reference and reading material, especially if you have limited time or have other projects that take priority.

For information on tax-related documentation and record retention guidelines see IRS Publication 552: Recordkeeping for Individuals, or visit <http://www.irs.gov/publications/p552/index.html>)

WDC-Area Community Resources: Finding A Home for Music, Eyeglasses and Other Household Items; GO Month Project

Donate Music CDs and CD Players. Has your addiction to iTunes and the MP3 craze created an unused collection of music CDs on your shelf? If so, or if you just have some to give away, consider purging your CD collection to benefit musiKares, a program dedicated to bringing music to adult and pediatric patients at hospital centers to help relieve patient anxiety and lower pain perception. Founded by Lisa Flaxman, owner of locally-based musiKids®, musiKares has donated over 1,000 CDs to Georgetown Hospital's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center along with portable CD players. The program continues to accept donations of music CDs and portable CD players (in working order). If you wish to make a donation of items to support this program, email Jackie Kelley to coordinate collection (jackie@clearinghousenow.com) or you can drop CDs directly off at a musiKids® location. (Rockville, MD: 1701 Rockville Pike (B-1), Hours: M-F from 9:30-2:00 and Sat. 9:30-12:30 or Bethesda, MD: 4900 Auburn Ave, Hours: M-F 9:30-4:00 and Sat. 9:30-12:30.) Visit www.musikids.com for more information about this program.

Donate Household Items. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with serious mental illness and their families through advocacy, research, support and education. NAMI Montgomery County is able to carry out its important mission with support from a thriving thrift shop in Kensington, MD, staffed by volunteers and consumers of mental health services. The shop accepts donations of clothing, toys, collectibles, appliances, accessories, furniture and household furnishings (in good condition only, please.) Donations



are welcome Wednesday through Friday, 10 am to 4 pm & Saturday, 10 am to 3 pm. NAMI Thrift Shop is located at: 10730 Connecticut Avenue, Kensington, MD 20895-2147, (301) 949-5731. Donated items that are not sold in the Thrift Shop are sent to other charitable organizations.

Donate Old Eyeglasses. If you have a collection of used eyeglasses or sunglasses stashed in one of your drawers (prescription or not) consider donating these items to organizations that collect them for use in other countries. Many individuals who cannot afford regular vision care benefit from these donations, and strong prescriptions are often in high demand. LensCrafters stores have teamed up with the Lions Club to serve as a collection point for donations of used eyeglasses. Individuals may also donate to Lions Clubs via collection boxes located at various local businesses, American Optometric Association, and Goodwill Industries. To learn more about organizations collecting glasses visit: The Lion's Club (www.lionsclubs.org), Unite for Sight (www.uniteforsight.org), and New Eyes for the Needy, Inc. (www.neweyesfortheneedy.org).

GO Month Project. The National Association of Professional Organizers (www.napo.net) proudly sponsors GO Month each January as a way to promote the benefits of being organized and encourage community service events around the country. As a card-carrying member of NAPO, and a proud supporter of GO Month, *Clearing House* will be among several local Professional Organizers this month who are donating time to help Community and Family Life Services (CFLS) organize their office and outreach programs. CFLS is a Washington D.C.-based non-profit organization that helps low-income and homeless families and individuals achieve self-sufficiency and independence. For more information on this agency and their efforts to break the cycle of poverty in our community, please visit their website at www.cflsdc.org. (This wonderful organization also welcomes donations of all kinds.)

Wishing you good luck in achieving your goals for the New Year. With mindful planning and a commitment to create change, by organizing our space we create a shortcut to enriching our lives. Warm regards to you for 2007!

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