

Elizabeth Mullen

From: Free Book Summaries <info@freebooksummaries.com>
To: List Member <em@cornerstonecoaching.com>
Sent: Tuesday, December 11, 2001 6:09 AM
Subject: Free Book Summary: Organizing from the Inside Out

A Free Book Summary
www.freebooksummaries.com

Forward this summary to friends and family.

ORGANIZATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT
 THE FOOLPROOF SYSTEM FOR ORGANIZING YOUR HOME, YOUR OFFICE, AND YOUR LIFE

JULIE MORTGENSTERN

Buy this book: <http://service.bfast.com/bfast/click?bfmid=2181&sourceid=39038993&bfpid=0805056491&bfmtype=book>

Part 1 * LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Most people think that an organized space is neat with minimal items. However, being organized is really about creating a workable space that functions for you and reflects who you are. Many homes look neat and tidy but if you open a closet door you'll find chaos.

 MSICONCEPTIONS ABOUT ORGANIZING

Myth 1

ORGANIZING IS A TALENT YOU ARE BORN WITH

Fact: Organizing is a skill that you can learn. I know this because I was once incredibly unorganized. Things changed when I had a baby. Jessie had just woken up and I wanted to take her out to the park for the first time. I decided to pack a few things but by the time I finished it was 3 hours later and she had fallen asleep. I figured that if I didn't get my act together my child would never see the light of day.

Myth 2

GETTING ORGANIZED IS A HOPELESS CHORE

Fact: Getting organized is very achievable and will make you feel empowered.

Myth 3

STAYING ORGANIZED IS IMPOSSIBLE

Fact: You can easily remain organized if you have a system that suits you and your lifestyle.

Myth 4

ORGANIZING IS A WASTE OF YOUR TIME

Fact: With more demands on your time these days than ever before, staying organized is the only way to stay on top and manage your life without feeling completely overwhelmed.

ORGANIZING FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

This is what happens when you try to get organized without really thinking about it. You may adopt some superficial organizational mantras or buy some containers etc without taking into consideration what you really need.

ORGANIZING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

This is where you design a system based on your specific goals, lifestyle, personality and needs.

WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

If you are sick and go to the doctor, she can't help you until she has diagnosed what is wrong with you. Each symptom may have a number of different causes.

Similarly, you need to understand the root of your organizational problems before you can fix them. Most people believe they are either inherently lazy or that they just don't have enough storage space. I usually find that neither of these problems are to blame. The problems are more likely caused by technical errors, external realities or psychological obstacles.

TECHNICAL ERRORS

Everyone who has a problem with organization will have some technical errors. These include:

- 1) **OBJECTS HAVE NO HOME.** You may want to put things away but it is very difficult to do if you have nowhere to put them. You need to take time to designate a place for everything.
- 2) **INCONVENIENT STORAGE.** When your storage space is too inconvenient to use, it will hamper your effort to put things away. It may be that the drawers of your cupboard stick, there's poor lighting in the closet, or the storage space is too far away from where you actually use the item.
- 3) **MORE STUFF THAN STORAGE.** If all of your storage space is over-full with things and has items stacked on every surface, you have too many belongings. You either need to reduce your possessions or increase your storage.
- 4) **COMPLEX CONFUSING SYSTEM.** Often people create very elaborate systems, which become far too complex to use on an everyday basis. For example they might create a filing system with 100 folders with only 2 pages in each, making it difficult to find anything as it is hard to remember the system.
- 5) **"OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND."** Some people leave out items as reminders of what they need to do to, such as pay the bills, return books to the library etc. It's OK if there are only a few items but often it can get out of control.
- 6) **ORGANIZING IS BORING.** Sometimes people find putting things away is boring. However, if you buy

aesthetically pleasing storage systems it becomes much more enjoyable.

EXTERNAL REALITIES

Sometimes an external obstacle puts a limit on how organized we can be. Some external realities are:

- 1) **UNREALISTIC WORKLOAD.** You can only squeeze so much into one 24 hour day. For a couple of weeks record all of your tasks and how long it takes to do them (include things you didn't do or finish). You may be able to find where you wasted or misused some of your time.
- 2) **SPEED OF LIFE.** Life is going pretty fast. Just remember that just because you can work 24/7 doesn't mean that you have to. You don't have to have your mobile phone on all the time, or respond to your email messages the instant you get them.
- 3) **IN TRANSITION.** Whenever we go through major change such as, marriage, moving, business growth spurt, etc we become disorganized because that is the nature of transition. You either need to wait until the change is over before you reorganize yourself or put in temporary systems with the view that they will change once you've re-established yourself.
- 4) **UNCOOPERATIVE PARTNERS.** If your boss, spouse or flat mate does not help keep things organized, it can be very difficult. Try to motivate them to become organized by showing them the benefits or at least get them to agree to keep common areas tidy.
- 5) **LIMITED SPACE.** If you have absolutely no space left in any closet or cupboard and the space inside them is used efficiently, and you have no belongings that you don't use then you may have hit the limit of how much you can fit in your space.

PSYCHOLOGICAL OBSTACLES

Many people have psychological obstacles that stop them from becoming organized.

- 1) **NEED FOR ABUNDANCE.** Some people have an enormous need to be surrounded by things as it makes them feel full, and secure. This need is often based on a childhood of deprivation, or it can be inherited from a parent. These people often get very anxious at the mere thought of getting rid of anything. Carry was a mother who grew feeling isolated up in a household of 8 children. During her childhood she found comfort in making craft, which she now enjoys doing with her children. The house is full an overabundance of craft materials stacked in every corner and cupboard mixed up with regular household items. Rather than reducing her craft supplies we consolidated everything into a large closet in neatly labeled and accessible containers.
- 2) **CONQUISTADOR OF CHAOS.** Some people have a need for fixing things -- making order out of chaos. They are good at working under pressure and crisis management so they keep themselves in a constant state of chaos so they can manage the problems arising from it. They often move from one set of organizational systems to another on a regular basis thus always being in transition from one system to the next. If this is you remember that no system is completely perfect and try to stick to one for 6 months at least and focusing your energies on something more beneficial than continuously reorganizing things.
- 3) **UNCLEAR GOALS AND PRIORITIES.** It is difficult to set up an organizational system if you have unclear goals and priorities. Everyone gets distracted or feels unfocused from time to time, but if you feel like you are being pulled in a million directions then you have unclear goals. My friend Gordon, wants to learn about the world, but rather than trying to study everything all at once, he chooses one topic to study in depth each year.

4) **FEAR OF SUCCESS/ FAILURE.** Sometimes people stay unorganized as a way to stop them from obtaining the success they secretly fear. Stanley was a dentist whose business could have been flourishing if it wasn't for fact he found it hard to get it together long enough to do things like advertise or send the bills out. Stan realized that he was afraid of his own success, and particularly of being more successful than his father. If this is your problem I suggest you work slowly to overhaul your system so you can get used to the changes you are making.

5) **NEED TO RETREAT.** Some people use their mess as a protective barrier against the world. They can't invite anyone over because they place is too messy and don't go out because they have to stay home and get organized. Dan was an extreme example of this. There was so little room in his 2 bedroom flat that there was barely a place to sit. He called his flat the "isolation tank". It was filled with clothes and piles of old newspapers. Dan's childhood was very traumatic so we reorganized his apartment very slowly, one section at a time so he could get used to the changes.

6) **FEAR OF LOOSING CREATIVITY.** Many creative people have a fear that if they will loose their creativity if they are organized. Jennifer was a writer with a tremendous amount of ideas for stories and books, but because she was so disorganized had trouble, finding her notes or research material when she needed it. We set up a great system with multi-colored files so she could visually distinguish between various projects. We had some mail-room slots so that she could keep up to 8 projects on her desk at any time without getting them mixed up. There were boards for storyboarding and keeping track of projects and deadlines. Jennifer found that her new environment was incredibly stimulating and really stimulated her creative juices to flow without the frustrations she had previously.

7) **NEED FOR DISTRACTION.** Some people use their mess and disorganization as a way of distracting themselves from other events in their life. Kevin was a sales executive who was so disorganized that other members of staff would never give him a document without making copies of it first. He was always worried about the things that he had lost or the deadlines he couldn't meet. After we got Kevin organized he started to backslide and gave me a call. His new office gave him such freedom that he was now overwhelmed with worry about the other things in his life, such as his marriage. He had been avoiding thinking about these other things by burying himself in his mess. If you are in this situation you need to use your new free time to find long-term solutions to some of your other problems.

8) **DISLIKE THE SPACE.** If you don't like the physical environment of where you live or work, for whatever reason than you are going to find it difficult to settle in and get organized. In this case you need to either move, or redecorate so that you find the place appealing.

9) **SENTIMENTAL ATACHMENT.** Some people put great sentimental meaning onto their belongings. Their objects become a representation of people they have known, places they have been, important events in their life. It is hard to get rid of things that have our lives history mentally infused into them. You need to remember your objects have no bearing on who you really are and you can keep all of the memories you want without having to necessarily keep the objects. If you can't bear to part with your things then move them to off-site storage or a garage as an interim measure. The hardest thing I had to do was to throw away all by papers associated with my former career in the theatre. But once I did, I never missed them.

10) **NEED FOR PERFECTION.** Sharon was a perfectionist. Her perfectionism drove her to great achievement (she was the CEO of a large company) but also held her back. Like most perfectionists Sharon couldn't do anything unless she could do it properly. This resulted in her having an office of complete chaos. She even had boxes of unopened mail over 5 years ago waiting for her to be able to give it her full attention. Sharon learnt that some things are better done imperfectly than not at all.

Part 2 * SECRETS OF A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER

ANALYSE: TAKING STOCK

You need to find out where you're at before you can move on.

1) **WHATS WORKING?** You might think that nothing is working but take another look, there is normally something that is working or at least partially working. You might have one drawer where you keep all your bills, or a perfectly organized belt rack in an otherwise chaotic cupboard. You need to find out what is working so that you don't end up fixing things that are already working.

Janet loved to dump her brief case and coat as soon as she walked in the door rather than walking 20 feet to the closet. There were always a pile of belongings at the front door. Rather than trying to retrain Janet to walk to the closet it is so much easier to mount some hooks and a small shelf at the front door.

Mark was a businessman who wrote everything down on legal pads. His office had 20 legal pads which he was always going through to try and find the important bits of information. Rather than try another system I suggested he just write one idea to a page which he can later file, or throw away.

2) **WHAT'S NOT WORKING.** Here is your chance to write down everything that is not working about your space. You don't want to create a new system and only get to half of the problems. Think about the things you can't find or have no room for and the things you can't get to do because of all the clutter (eg, eat at the kitchen table).

3) WHAT ITEMS ARE MOST ESSENTIAL TO YOU?

Try to think the items that are most important in terms of your goals. For instance, if you travel all of the time you might need access to your summer and winter wardrobes. If you enjoy music after work you might need a place for your guitar and sheet music.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine what is important to us. If you find it hard, think about what brings you the most joy or satisfaction. Use the 80/ 20 rule which says is that we only use 20% of what we own. What are those 20% of things? What would you take with you if you had to evacuate the house in a hurry?

4) **WHY DO YOU WANT TO GET ORGANIZED?** If you articulate what you want to get out of being organized before you start it will help you stay focused and motivated throughout the process. Maybe you want to be able to spend more time with the kids, or feel in more control of your life.

STRATEGIZE: CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

The next thing you need to do is to create a strategy. I grew up very disorganized. I was interested in theatre and collected everything from costumes, props and memorabilia. My floor was constantly covered with clutter and every 6 months or so my parents would hit the roof and send me to my room for a clean up. On Friday nights I would survey the mess. I wouldn't know where to start but figured I'd start by putting the stuff on my floor away. I'd open a drawer and realize that it was jam packed, so I'd empty my drawers and closets onto the floor to purge my unwanted belongings and find so many unfinished projects and long lost treasures, but nothing I could part with. In the end I would end up shoving all my stuff under the bed and in every available nook and cranny only to stay tidy until the next day. I would have just spent 16 hours for no benefit.

That is why you need to strategize... if you have an action plan you can work out where you are going and how you are going to get there.

SECRET WEAPON NUMBER 1
THE KINDERGARTEN MODEL OF ORGANIZATION

If you look around a kindergarten you will realize that they have different areas or zones for various activities, eg: they have craft, residing and play zones. In each zone is everything the child needs to do that activity and when it comes to putting away everything has a special container with clear labels on it.

The kindergarten model of organization can be applied to any room in the house. For example in the kitchen your zones might be food preparation, food storage, cooking and dishwashing etc.

Each area should contain things for the activity, for example the food preparation area is normally located on the longest bench of the kitchen and in one of the cupboards nearby would be your mixing bowls, chopping board, herbs and species, appliances etc.

a) The first thing you need to do is to define your zones. Write down the major activities that are performed in that room. Then write all the supplies you need to perform that activity and finally list the types of storage units you need to perform that activity. For example, a zone in the living room might be watching TV, the supplies you need are: TV/ VCR, TV guide, remote control, video tapes. The storage unit could be an entertainment unit.

Next you need to map out your zones. Think about the natural areas in the room, what activities go together or need to be separated. For instance do you like to both read on the lounge or do your paperwork over at the window with the view. Use a pen and paper to map out the zones and to help you figure out if things will fit in new configurations. Don't worry about things such the location of power points -- you can always use extension cords or call an electrician.

SECRET WEAPON 2. ESTIMATE THE TIME.

Underestimating or overestimating the time organizing a room will take can cause problems. The average room will take one to one and a half days to complete. A one-person office can take two to three days bathrooms and closets only a couple of hours.

A typical plan will look like this.

Sort 5 hours

Purge 2 hours

Assign a home 1 hour

Containerize 4 hours

Equalize Daily 3-5 minutes

ATTACK: GETTING THE JOB DONE.

Now you need to get the job done:

1) SORT. Go through all of your belongings, pick up each one and ask yourself if you love it, use it or if it makes you money. Group similar items together on the floor or bench. Make sure you go through everything.

