

THERE IS A CURE FOR DISORGANIZATION DEMONS

Professionals show women how to de-clutter their lives.

By Andrea C. Reed

For some women, the clutter monster is a dining room table, piled two feet high with lunch mail, coupons, report cards and programs from plays attended months ago.

Others open closets in the basement, sifting up piles of sports equipment, out-of-season clothes, rain boots - always finding the single item you need on the spur of the moment.

Sometimes people are left with the lifetime collections of a loved one - to sort and decide what is family history, what is suitable for the charity and what goes to the trash.

Whatever disorganization confronts before you, a detailed professional organizer can help you fight the monsters that are draining your time and energy and free you to feel and look your best.

CHAOS - INSIDE AND OUT

Mary Sigmund of Coaching and Organizing Services of Ames says clutter and disorganization can be symptoms of internal chaos.

"When your life affairs are in disorder, it's so much more difficult to keep your surroundings in order," says Sigmund, who has been a professional organizer based in her Ames home since 1994. "You really need to work on them together. The internal can often

be more difficult to deal with. So, the environment is a great place to start."

As things come together in one's physical surroundings, "You get a sense of relaxation and safety that allows you to deal with the internal chaos of your

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life," such as making and meeting goals, making better health choices and following a spiritual path.

Pat Woods of Insight WorkLife Solutions in West Des Moines, says, "The ultimate benefit of organization is peace of mind. Clutter is stress. Clutter is chaos. Clutter is the stress that you are not in control."

HOW CLUTTER HAPPENS

"Harried lifestyles often start a cluttered state," says Nicole Carroll of Simply Organized, a professional organizer for nearly four years.

continued >



WHOM TO CALL?

These members of the National Association of Professional Organizers serve clients in central Iowa.

Pat Woods
Insight WorkLife Solutions
West Des Moines
(515) 275-0470
(515) 258-0307 (text)
www.insightworklife.com

Nicole Carroll
Simply Organized
Burlington (515) 967-2486 or
(515) 966-2786
www.gainfulorganizingand.com

Mary Sigmund
Coaching and Organizing Services
Ames (515) 233-9580
www.farmingtonia.com

HOW IT WORKS

Sigmund says organizing is mostly evaluating one item at a time and deciding what to do with it. She sets up a box or bag — use the ones to give away, one for things to keep, one for things to throw away, and one for things to evaluate later.

"It's part of where it is manageable," she says.

"An organization plan must be about you, what you use, and how you use it," Frisvold says. "If the plan is going to be a success, you must be a part of that process."

Carroll says she's seen closets that look like a boutique, only missing the size placards.

"This works against you," Sigmund says. "You're reminded of the way you once looked, and feel pain over gaining weight."

Each offers the same advice: Get rid of the ones that don't fit.

"If you're willing to get back to a size 4,

you're not going going to want to pull those old clothes out of a box," Carroll says.

In some cases, people are left with other people's clutter that is too painful to handle because of emotional ties. She dealt with a couple who lost four parents in the span of 18 months.

"I start with the things that are easiest to deal with — the paperwork, the furniture," Carroll says. "Things that are the toughest, we just set aside until they are ready."

Like many professional organizers, Carroll will personally remove painful items from the premises for donation.

In these emotional cases, Carroll says people often don't give themselves enough credit. They are only the maximum amount of work done.

Her advice: "Take pride in what you've managed to accomplish under the most difficult of circumstances." ■

THINK PINK

Anniversary celebration benefits charity

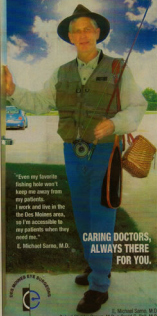
Solar's Continental Shops will celebrate their five-year anniversary with a "Think Pink" charity event Oct. 2 to benefit the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. Attendees are asked to show their support by wearing anything pink.

The event will be from 7 to 10 p.m. and will include a silent auction, spa and salon giveaways, drinks and appetizers. Survivors of breast cancer also will share their stories, and additional donations will be accepted.

Tickets are \$15 a person or \$10 a couple and will go on sale on Sept. 1. They can be purchased by phone at the shops or at the doors. All proceeds will go to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

For more information, call (315) 221-7599.

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Mary Stigmans helped this homeowner regain surface area for work. She suggested regularly filing papers and keeping supplies contained.

Woods agrees. "The mail comes in, and they sit it on the dining room table. The intention is, 'This is only temporary.' Days turn into weeks. Then it's a mound, and they don't know what to with it."

Sometimes clutter results from an emotional experience, such as the breakup of a relationship or loss of a loved one, Stigmans says. Or people get stuck trying to be a perfectionist. "People say to themselves, 'If I don't have the right amount of time or the right kind of tools, there's no sense in beginning.'"

Though situations vary, Woods says she sees a commonality in nearly all cases of disorganization: postponing a decision without an organizational system in place.

HELP IS HERE

Every time you have to struggle with disorganization you're using up physical and emotional energy you could use in other ways, Woods says.

Disorganization costs people in time spent looking for things, money spent

on buying duplicate items that can't be found, space consumed by clutter and

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energy of worrying about it and looking for things she says.

"When you are disorganized, those resources get used in ways that are not efficient," Stigmans adds. "Then you feel guilty, which drains even more energy."

Stigmans says even those who have struggled with disorganization for a lifetime can change their habits. "A person like that needs bare-bones simplification. Keep only what you use, what you treasure, what enhances your life," she says. "You have to be careful about what you bring into your life and be vigilant about getting rid of stuff."

She stresses the three "S's" — simplification, structure and system. "I've worked with many women who, once they get organized, never want to go back to the way they were before," Stigmans says. "People seem to get motivated from the results they get."

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