

Realistic Resolutions

It's mid-January and your home has already reverted back to the cluttered mess you resolved to banish on Jan. 1. What's a busy homeowner/clutter magnet to do? Get your year back on track – and find your keys – with these smart guidelines

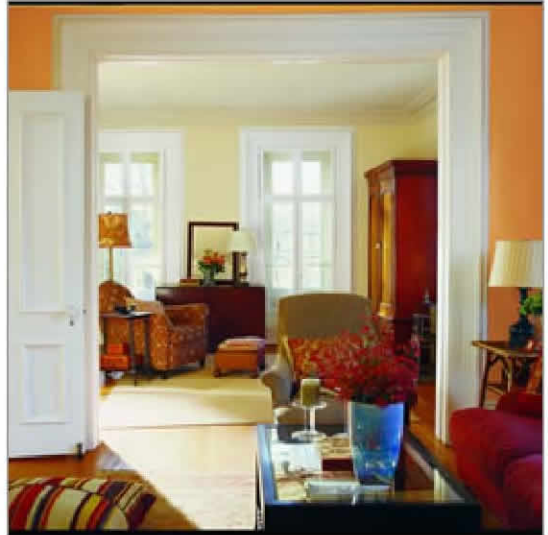
By Dani Altieri Marinucci
CTW Features

Organization is a mindset, says Pam Woods, a professional life and work organizing coach from Des Moines, Iowa who owns Smart WorkLife Solutions. “There are a million ways to organize, but the key to success is in the way your mind approaches the organizing.”

Woods says your resolutions fail because they are too general, and there is no plan. “You must create a plan with a handful of components. Think of it as a recipe.” Start by writing down why you want to organize. Is it to reduce stress, save time and money, stop missing important events? This becomes your motivation. Now imagine how you want the space to look. “This visualization will help pull you forward,” says Woods, especially when the going gets tough. Keep your mind's eye on the goal.

Next make an appointment with yourself. Go to your calendar or day planner and write down when you are going to take on that space. “Be realistic about the time you can devote to the job. For an average size room you will need 16 -24 hours. Set aside chunks of time or spread it over several weeks.”

And don't forget to build in ongoing rewards for yourself as you pursue a more organized home. Woods recommends small rewards throughout the project and then once you're there, give yourself a big treat.



The Art of Focusing: Clutter resolutions often fail because they are too general. Experts suggest zeroing in on a problem room, area or piece of furniture, and taking it one detailed step at a time. Image courtesy Glidden, an ICI Paints brand

Susan Kousek, a certified professional organizer at the Reston, Va.-based Balanced Spaces, offers some tips for creating a plan to tackle your clutter. Start small; select one room or, if that room is too much to bear, select an area of a room, i.e., entryway, kitchen counter, or tabletop. Next, resolve to keep that one area clutter free.

To be successful, says Kousek you must realize that keeping an area clutter free requires maintenance – it doesn't happen by itself. "You have to de-clutter that area on a daily basis; don't just move it somewhere else in the house. Make decisions – keep, toss, give away. If it's something to keep, put it away now. If it doesn't have a "home," create a home so you can put it away. Once you're in the habit of maintaining that clutter-free area," counsels Kousek, "move forward to another area to work on."

You've Got Mail

Professional organizer Susan Kousek offers these easy steps on getting started by practicing with your incoming mail. Once you've trained yourself with this task you're ready for something bigger – like the dining room table!

1. Open your mail on a daily basis
2. Open it near a wastebasket and a paper shredder
3. Get in the habit of making decisions immediately; toss or keep
4. If the decision is to keep, put items where they belong:
 - Bills in the "bills to be paid" container
 - Items that require action – add to your "to do" list or put in your tickler file system
 - Items that need to be filed – file now, or write the name of the file where it will go and put in the "to file" container
 - Catalogs & magazines – have a designated area where these are kept, tossing last month's issue before adding the current one.