



Getting Organized to Make a Difference

by Marilyn Paul

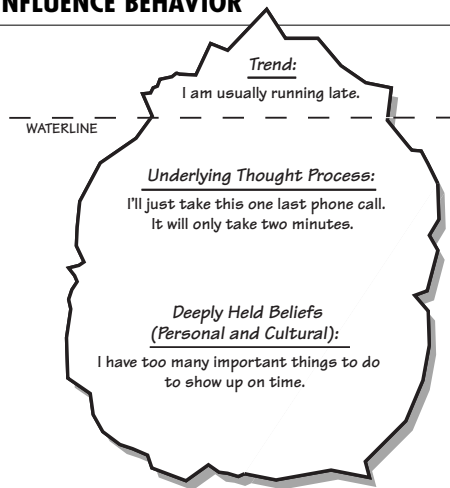
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COMMUNICATIONS

In this age of information overload, many of us struggle to deal with the seemingly endless stream of data that lands on our desks and floods our e-mail inboxes. But failing to organize this and other aspects of our lives can compromise our ability to honor agreements, meet deadlines, keep track of important documents, and even accomplish what we really want in life. We can become trapped in seemingly endless cycles of sorting through mountains of clutter just to see the piles grow again the next day.

Getting and staying organized both at home and on the job is not about simply changing behavior; it requires fundamentally shifting how we think. As we begin to notice the flaws in our deeply held beliefs, we can develop productive new ways of engaging in our daily activities.

HOW BELIEFS INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR

Using the metaphor of an iceberg allows us to explore the thoughts and beliefs that might underlie our actions and make it difficult to get organized. For example, suppose we decide to be more punctual for meetings, yet much to our surprise we continue to arrive late. What's going on? When we look below the "waterline" of daily activities at our thought processes, we might become aware that we consistently underestimate how long one last phone call will take. Looking even deeper, we might discover that we believe we have too many important things to do to worry about arriving to meetings on time. Thus, even if we want to be punctual, our beliefs make it easy to take actions that lead to lateness.



THE SEVEN-STEP CHANGE CYCLE

To shift your mindset and approach to living so that you can be more organized, begin by applying the following seven-step change cycle.

1. Establish Your Purpose. Explore why you want to get organized, and identify how being organized can help you. Articulate what you want to do that you currently can't, or identify the costs of disorganization to your life, such as money, time, relationships, family, and spirit. *Make a deep commitment to change.*

2. Envision What You Want. Visualize in detail how being organized can help you lead the life you want. Find role models—people you admire, be they friends, artists, or political leaders—from whom you can learn how to become more organized. *Find an image that expresses what you value about being organized—it might be the high-speed coordination of a basketball team or the powerful tranquility of a still lake in the wilderness—and use this image to constantly remind you of what it feels like to be in sync with life, to be grounded, to move with self-mastery and grace.*

3. Take Stock. Look realistically at what you do to create chaos and frenzy in your life. Examine the thinking, beliefs, emotional attachments, and actions that lead you to disorganization. For example, you may discover that you gain unacknowledged benefits from being unreliable. *Observe how many appointments you miss in a month, uncover your feelings and inner commentary when you try to clean your office, discover what is truly meaningful to you.*

THE SEVEN-STEP CHANGE CYCLE (Continued)

4. Choose Support. Accept the fact that most people need help getting organized. Identify people who can support you in this change process. *Consider talking with someone openly about the progress and setbacks you're experiencing, hire a professional organizer, or get a high-school student to help you sort your mail.*

5. Identify Strategies for Change. Learn the principles of becoming organized (see "Organizing Wisdom"). Clear up any backlog—mail, articles, old equipment—you may have; build new systems that help you deal with routine tasks; develop new habits, such as putting things back immediately after using them; purchase only items you're sure you'll use; keep a list of top priorities in front of you every day; and make sure you keep your word. *Identify one change you could make or one small habit you'd like to break; for instance, resolve to leave your desk clear at the end of the day or to write phone messages in one place.*

6. Take Action. Ground yourself in your vision and purpose, and commit to getting results. Set reasonable goals for organizing yourself, allocate time to work on them, energize yourself when you get stuck, arrange for someone to help you, and reward yourself when you accomplish something. *When you arrive somewhere on time, take a moment to celebrate!*

7. Go Deeper to Keep Going. Learn how to face the inner challenges and obstacles that may arise as you organize. Get in touch with the hidden aspects of yourself that hold onto the mess and frenzy. Deepen your understanding of how you want to live and what it takes to live that way. *Talk to yourself in new ways; rather than "This is just the way I am," try "I've developed a few bad habits that I can unlearn." Do the inner work that helps you prepare for living with less stress and anxiety.*

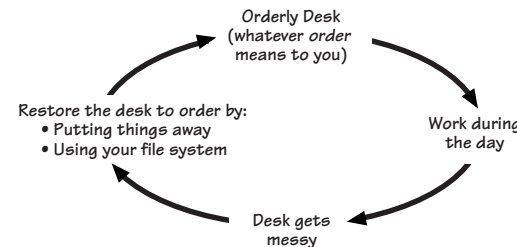
ORGANIZING WISDOM

"Organizing wisdom" refers to a specific set of strategies that allow you to achieve "readiness"—a state of being able to take action and respond to a situation wisely. These strategies help you develop skills for taking care of your possessions, navigating through time, making and keeping agreements, and focusing on what's important to you.

- **Getting to "ready"** means regularly returning to an organized state, for example, by continually clearing space in your office and ensuring that your commitments help you meet your goals.
- **Creating new habits** involves identifying simple steps, such as hanging things up and putting things away, that return you to "ready" (see "Restoring Order to Your Desk").
- **Building effective systems** includes developing organizing routines for accomplishing tasks such as tracking phone calls, handling mail, and scheduling meetings that you can integrate into your life to return you to "ready."

The goal of organizing wisdom is not necessarily to become neater, more orderly, or more punctual. Rather, it's about becoming ready for what life has to offer at any moment.

RESTORING ORDER TO YOUR DESK



As you put things away at the end of the day, you feel more energized and ready for what life will offer you the next morning.