

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a wooden boardwalk leading towards a beach. The boardwalk is made of light-colored wooden planks and has a simple wooden railing on both sides. It leads from the foreground towards the ocean. The beach is sandy, and the ocean is visible in the distance under a clear sky.

the Organizing Maven

Media Quick Reference Guide

Your Resource For Questions About:

Clearing Clutter

Simplifying Life

Clarifying Priorities

Creating Habits

Managing Time

Setting Goals

Finding Happiness

Organizing Anything



the Organizing Maven

Clear your clutter, find your **HAPPY!**

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Whether you need a quick quote, a bit of insider info, or something more to supplement your research, I am here to help.

About this guide....

I created this quick reference guide to answer the most commonly asked questions I receive. I hope you find it helpful. You are free to reference this information in your publication and quote from it. Proper credit is always appreciated.

Source Info:

Kelly Jayne McCann, Professional Organizer & Clutter Coach at OrganizingMaven.com

It would also be appreciated if you would [drop me a line](#) to let me know where and/or how it has been used.

You should know this: I take my work seriously and consider myself a true professional. It's deep and meaningful work - it changes peoples lives. I'm somewhat different from many in my field because I always take a holistic approach; I focus on mindset and behavioral changes first. Frequently, people describe it as a therapeutic experience. However, I am not a licensed health care professional and my expertise does not replace that of a licensed health care professional.

I welcome direct questions and connections....

You can [email me directly with your questions](#). I will get back to you within 24 hours - usually much sooner. If you need a quicker response, try [my personal email](#) or give me call at 802-881-2456 (I am EST). I am always open to conversations and interviews.

If you're so inclined, I'd love to connect (actually, I'd be thrilled!). I'm probably in some of the same places you are.....



Props...

I'd like to give a big round of applause to [Unsplash](#) - the photographers there never let me down. They share amazing images that I am honored to use, like the lovely cover photo.

A Quick Bit About Me

Prior to launching The Organizing Maven in 2004, I worked as a training consultant with an international company that provided corporate education and professional development programs. I worked to match the needs of employers and employees with proper training and development solutions.

While I loved what I did, I knew I wanted to make a bigger impact and engage with the people I served in an even more meaningful way. I envisioned combining my business experience with my passion for the science of habit and happiness. Most importantly, I wanted to share all I had learned through my many life experiences (it's been a wild ride!). So I took the leap and went out on my own. Now I share my skills with my own clients, still matching needs with solutions, with a special emphasis on helping people break free from overwhelm and guilt so they can create lives they truly love.

My approach is holistic. I believe that our outer lives are a reflection of our inner lives. So my focus always starts with mindset, beliefs and behavior. My ability to ask the right questions and actively listen really helps me fully understand my clients. I am able to quickly identify solutions that will work for the long term and really make a positive impact. [You can read more me and my philosophy here](#) (it's all about empowerment and getting real).

Continuing education is of paramount importance. I am constantly reading, researching, and learning. For example, these are just a few of the many for credit classes I have taken:

- Time Management for the Creative Person
- Organizing with the TBI Client
- Inside the Procrastinator's Mind
- Learning Styles and Differences
- Project Planning: The Key to Success
- Working with Elderly Clients
- Grief and the CD Client
- Working with Clients to Downsize
- Working with Adult Children of Elderly Clients
- Understanding and Addressing Chronic Disorganization
- Understanding The Process and Meaning of Disposition

Inspiration & Jumping Off Questions

Wondering what people want to know about? These questions are always of interest – feel free to ask me about them, or anything else.

- Why is creating a vision important? Aren't vision statements just for businesses?
- I have so much clutter, where do I even begin? How do I start?
- How come I'm busy all the time, but never actually accomplish anything real?
- I don't think I was born to be organized, so why even bother trying to be?
- What are the authentic motivating factors you talk about? How can they help me?
- Everything seems important, so how do I clarify and prioritize what really is?
- I don't have any free time, so how can anyone expect me to get organized?
- My partner is such a slob, how do I get them to see the light and ditch the clutter?
- I am always running behind schedule, it's so stressful! Is there any hope for me?
- I've tried getting organized, but nothing works - should I just give up?
- I hate to throw anything away, what if I need it someday?
- I feel so ashamed of my clutter and disorganization? What's wrong with me?
- Why won't you declutter and organize for me? Why do I need to be involved?

I really do love to help the media out. Print, web, radio, mainstream or niche, I am always happy to lend a voice. Here is sampling of the of the places my expertise has been featured:

- Chase.com
- New England Business Journals
- Spare Foot
- The Unchained Entrepreneur
- The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur
- Money Watch
- Green Living AZ
- Vermont Public Radio
- Mashable
- Better Homes and Gardens

Frequently Asked Questions

It's hard to be alive today in a developed country and not hear about decluttering, organizing and simplifying on a weekly basis. What are the biggest misconceptions about the process?

The biggest misconception is that it's a one time event. It's actually an ongoing process, one that requires commitment and habit change. You can clear all the clutter you have, but unless you are committed to replacing clutter allowing habits with clutter reducing habits, you will wind up right back where you started.

Whether you're decluttering or organizing, you're creating change. And that process can be very challenging, so I always suggest that people get crystal clear on why they are doing it. And the reason why needs to be authentic and truly compelling. That 'why' becomes the motivating force.

I actually have people craft a vision statement that captures the 'why' in written form. Clutter clearing and habit change require effort. Overwhelm and fatigue are often by-products of the process. The vision statement serves as a motivational tool. A quick read through reminds people why they are doing what they are doing. It can quickly refocus and re-energize you when doubt sets in. I think of vision creation as the foundation for change – without it you risk collapse – it's that important.

Another misconception is that once you start living a clutter free life, it will just stay that way. If you are committed and your life remains static, it very well may. But most people do not live static lives. Our lives are much more fluid. Our situations change, whether we seek that change out or not (hello getting older!). Anytime we experience a situational change, big or little, it's important to set aside time to evaluate what's working well and what may need tweaking.

For example, you could have wonderfully supportive habits in place, but a job change could create a situation where your routines are regularly interrupted. Perhaps you now travel on a frequent basis, so you will need to figure out how to adapt to that situation. Most likely habit change will be required (as you can tell, habit plays a leading role all around). Bottom line, regular evaluation is a critical component when it comes to maintaining a clutter free life.

*"Organizing is not a one time event, it is an on going process.
You don't just get organized, you decide to be organized."*

Why do so many of people struggle with clutter—both physical and mental, at home and at work?

There are many reasons. [We live in a material world \(we so often choose quantity over quality\)](#). Success is often measured by what we own. And it's a world of great expectations. Our culture suggests we do more and more.

Yet we don't teach people how to let go of, or manage, stuff and commitments. Those are life skills we have to deliberately develop, usually on our own through trial and error. I could go on and on about the societal reasons, but I'll spare you my soapbox speech right now (feel free to ask me though!).

Most people think clutter is clutter. But the truth is clutter stems from many sources. Until you identify the root source(s) in your life, it's incredibly challenging to address it. [Root sources run the gamut from good old overwhelm, to emotional avoidance, to compulsive shopping.](#)

Of course, you have to be willing to acknowledge that you are playing a role in allowing clutter in. And you have to be willing to address the underlying issues.

We also live in a world where busyness is a badge of honor. We try to squeeze in just a bit more every minute, every hour, every single day. It's exhausting and it creates an incredible amount of mental clutter.

The remedy requires bucking the trend. I work a lot with people on clarifying their priorities and their overall life vision. Once that's done, it is used as a rubric for decision making. [This helps people say no to anything that isn't in alignment with their priorities.](#) This works with commitments, stuff, and relationships. When you start saying no, you start curbing clutter.

And we can't forget the fact that [we are loss averse!](#) [This is a hardwired tendency that stems from the endowment effect.](#) The science of behavioral economics shows we view our stuff as having much value than it actually does, so when it comes time to let go of something, *we feel we are losing more than we really are.* And unless one is aware of this, it's super challenging to let go of anything. No one wants to lose, right?

"The first step in clearing clutter is acknowledging that we allowed the clutter in. There is power in taking responsibility, because if we allowed it, we can also disallow it."

Do most people struggle with disorganization/simplification (or lack thereof) in both home and work settings, or can they be organized in one but not the other?

Some people struggle in both, some in only one. Usually what sets these apart is structure. Work settings usually have very clear expectations and built in processes. Systems are in place and you follow them. Deadlines are set and you are expected meet them. Most work environments involve accountability partners (e.g., clients, team members, management). It's hard to go off the rails unless you have a high degree of autonomy.

Let's say you do have autonomy, then the fact that people are counting on you and you have a reputation to uphold may be all the motivation you need to focus and follow through. It's also possible you just may be replicating the behavior you have seen modeled, and it works.

Contrast that with your home situation. There you may not have a clue about how best to create a system that works for you – there is no model in place. It's very easy to feel overwhelmed and fall for the 'it takes too much time to get organized' myth. [That's a convenient excuse, but the truth is that it takes very little time to set up some systems that will have real impact.](#)

In general, I have found people who are organized in their home life are often organized in their work life. When they aren't, what I have witnessed is that their work environment is usually a less than ideal fit for them. It may not have enough structure or clearly defined expectations, and just that bit of chaos can throw less flexible personality types off balance.

That can be challenging, but it can be overcome. Often it's about looking at the situation from a different perspective. Working backwards usually helps people identify what kind of systems they need to put in place. A reverse mapping of the process is really helpful. Take a look at what the goal/expectation is, decide on a timeline, identify when tasks need to be completed, and then assign those tasks in a specific way so they are completed successfully. This sounds simplistic, but most people never take time to plan. And almost no one works backwards. [I'd be happy to explain the how the planning fallacy plays a significant role](#) - and why it's so easy to be a victim!

Time is a kind of currency, but unlike money it can't be banked. I teach people how to figure out just how much they have available and that really helps people realistically plan how to spend/invest their time. [Feel free to ask about this](#) - even if it's just for your personal use. 😊

"You can learn how to be organized. But to reap the benefits, you must commit to practicing what you learn daily.

In other words, it's all about habit creation"

Guilt often accompanies being disorganized and/or having a cluttered space. What can people do to overcome and address this less than helpful emotion?

First, I need to say guilt has no place in the quest to get organized or clear clutter. Organized people are not better people. The difference is they've taken the time to identify and adopt certain habits. (And I feel the need to say that some people thrive in a cluttered environment – clutter free living is not everyone's idea of the good life. Some people equate organization with loss of freedom – while I think organization makes life better, I never would judge those who choose a different path, they know what's best for them.)

Some people are naturally more organized because it's more intuitive. We are all born with different gifts, so I encourage anyone who feels even the slightest twinge of guilt to let it go – now. It serves no purpose other than to make you feel bad about yourself.

Next, I would say get clear - and I mean crystal clear! - on why you want to get organized and clear clutter (without this clarity success will be elusive). Then come to terms with the fact that it takes effort and time. New skills and habits tend to develop slower than we'd like, and that's because trial and error often play a significant role. Get comfortable with the idea that change won't happen overnight, but know that if you keep at it, it will happen.

Take it bit by bit. Implement new routines one at a time. Work on one goal at a time. Master those before you move on. You want to set yourself up for success. Success breeds success – plus it feels great! **One the easiest ways jump start the cluttering clearing process is by harvesting the low hanging fruit.** This task takes only a few minutes and you are immediately rewarded with a real sense of accomplishment.

Then create an action plan. Take your overall goal and begin breaking it down into projects. Break the projects into tasks. Once you see what you're dealing with, you can create a realistic timeline.

Beyond this, I would say be sure to **grab my free ESCAPE Clutter and Get Organized E-Course.** I take people step by step through the clutter clearing and organizing process.

*"Guilt is a great manipulator, but it's not a great motivator.
If your goal is to let go of clutter, then you've got to let go of guilt.
Remember this: Guilt thwarts action. Action thwarts guilt."*

It's tough to make decisions about what to let go. How can the process be made easier?

I have a series of three questions that make letting go of clutter quick and easy. The questions are designed to give you crystal clear answers about what to keep and what to let go - very black and white. The process is as simple as the questions themselves. You must be able to answer a resounding yes to at least one of the questions if the object is going to get the green light to stay. If you get a no – it's clutter and it's got to go!

The questions are:

- Do I need it?
- Do I use it?
- Do I love it?

Super simple, right? If you need it, you keep it. If you use it, you keep it. If you love it, you keep it. Everything else can safely be let go. If you don't need, use, or love an item, then its not really serving you well, which makes it clutter. [You can find the meanings for each of the verbs - need, use, love - right over here.](#) The meanings are as clear as the questions and it's important people read them before they begin the process so that it's as effective as possible.

What would you say to someone who has tried to get organized and failed?

Clutter clearing and getting organized is a very personal process. It is not one size fits all. There are some standard principles, but no two people are the same, so no one way will work for all. It's actually a very creative process. Some people are chronically disorganized, some people have ADHD, some people process information and relate to space in a very unique way. There are loads of things to take into account. Personality and learning style are the two biggies. Trial and error is always to be expected. It takes time. It takes effort. It takes commitment. Assuming you are willing, there is a way forward. Don't give up, it just means you haven't found the right solution.

"Before you allow a new object into your space, ask yourself whether you're really willing to take responsibility for that item. If you don't truly need or absolutely love something, why would you want to take responsibility for it?"

Here are a few more things people often ask about – each link is to blog post or short video. If you'd like use substantially more than a few quotes, please consider linking back to the original post.

[How to overcome overwhelm and find focus \(this simple action will put you in control\).](#)

[How to set SMART goals and why it's a must \(I make it easy with a step-by-step plan\).](#)

[What to do about paper clutter \(there are just 3 things you can do!\).](#)

[What do when you live when you live with a clutter lover \(you might even call them a slob\).](#)

[How mindset plays a critical role in clutter clearing \(with a simple shift you can truly enjoy it!\).](#)

[Why clutter feels so burdensome \(it's not just stuff, it's so much more!\).](#)

[How to say no graciously \(and without any guilt\).](#)

[How to decide where to store stuff \(it becomes obvious with the quick glance guide\).](#)

[Why perfection is not required \(it actually hinders organizing\).](#)

" When you find yourself tempted to strive for perfection, stop and ask yourself if the way you are using your time is in your highest and best interest? Often good enough really is good enough. "