Where in the world do I get started?

Is 'getting organized' on your list of things to do? Haven't quite gotten around to it yet?

Feeling a bit depressed looking at the pile of stuff in the basement or storage area that really needs to be sorted through?

Or maybe the kitchen cabinets could really use an overhaul. How about those closets? And let's not even discuss the office and all of that paper … YIKES!!!

If getting organized seems overwhelming and you aren't able to get going, perhaps a few easy suggestions can be just the push you need.

But first, let's dispel the myth of being organized …

To be organized means to be tidy and neat.

Yes, it's true that you can be neat and organized at the same time; however, a large percentage of neat people are still disorganized! They just know how to neaten up their clutter. Now here's something that's really going to confuse you … you can be sloppy and still be organized at the same time! So what does it mean to be organized?

- You get everything done when it's due
- You can find what you need when you need it

So forget about attaining perfection - perfection is an obstacle to organized and simple living. Let's focus on what's realistic and achievable.

Make a plan

Before you start your de-cluttering/minimizing/clearing out/organizing project, it's a good idea to determine exactly what your goal is for that space. What I mean is, if your goal is to rid the entire room of stuff you no longer need, use or love, and your intention is to simplify your complicated life, then it will be easier to decide what stays and what goes.

Get very, very clear on what your vision is for that space.

When you are clear on what your intention is for that space, then no longer is the deciding factor things like …

- How much it cost
- Who gave it to you
- What emotional attachment you may have to it
- How long you've owned it
- What imagined value it may have on the market some day
- Or any other reasons and excuses you come up with for keeping stuff

The only deciding factor is …

Does this thing bring me closer to my vision, or does it get in the way?

If it doesn't belong there – get rid of it.

A rule of thumb that I always use is: If you don't love it or use it, it's clutter. If you're struggling with a particular item, ask yourself if the item fits this criteria and see if it doesn't help in the decision making. Save the thought and toss the item. When you get rid of everything that has no real meaning or significance in your life, you will literally feel lighter.

So how do you know where to start? Choose an area/room that's bothering you the most and start with that. If it's a particular room, break it up into manageable sections and work on one section at a time. Often an entire room can seem a bit overwhelming. Promise yourself that you'll only work on that one area and stay there until the job is done. Move on from there, one task at a time until the room is complete.

Get some boxes for sorting

You know all that 'stuff' that you just don't know what to do with? Well, here's where you start to make some decisions. Mark your boxes as follows: **Recycle; Give Away or Garage Sale** (whatever your choice is for those things you no longer need or like); **Belongs Elsewhere** (how did that tea cup get in my bathroom cabinet?); **Trash**. These are just suggestions, you can mark your boxes in whatever way you feel is appropriate.

Now pick up every single thing in that area and make a decision. Right now! If you're having trouble deciding on something, maybe you need to have an 'Undecided' box as well. Just make sure that you tackle that box when the room is done! Don't leave it indefinitely. Most clutter is deferred decisions. Now you have a temporary place to put items that don't belong in your 'organized space.'

When you come across things that don't belong there, put them in the box marked 'Belongs Elsewhere' to put away later. Resist all temptation to leave the area and put the items away. You're in the mood to organize and you'll more than likely start organizing another area without first finishing the area that you're presently attempting to de-clutter. If an item is broken, it may be cheaper to replace when needed than to repair it. And for all the odds and ends we keep 'just in case' … you're running out of room. Get rid of them.

The golden rule of thumb for organizing is "like with like."

Store similar items together. Yes, it actually is that simple! If all of your canned goods are stored in one place, won't it be a lot easier to find that can of tomatoes that you need for your recipe?

Start creating 'homes' for everything. One of the reasons for our clutter is that we simply have not created a 'home' for our belongings. A cup that holds an assortment of pens, pencils and scissors on your counter (beside the phone, of course) now becomes a 'home' for those items.

And if you know that the scissors 'live' in that cup, you'll know exactly where to put them when you're done using them. Now try that principle out on all of your other stuff.

That old saying: *a place for everything and everything in its place* has never gone out of style.

What if you can't complete the room in a small time frame? Once an area has been de-cluttered and organized, treat that area as a sacred space. While your old habits of dumping may continue in other places, at least that newly organized area will remain organized. And as you move further along the process of organizing and you make more 'homes' for your stuff, you will have eliminated the need to re-do the areas already completed.

It's easy to become discouraged during this purging process as it seems the more you do, the messier your space appears. Hang in there … this is temporary. Once you've created 'homes' for your belongings and you've removed the unwanted stuff, your space will be tidier and you'll soon feel as if your life is under control.

OK, here's the deal … pick one area that could use some cleaning out and challenge yourself to get rid of more stuff than feels comfortable.

Take an hour during the afternoon to pull out a filing cabinet drawer and weed out old files. Tackle a closet that's been driving you nuts. Clean off the hard drive on your computer or, attack that junk drawer you've been meaning to get to.

The benefit of creating space

Think of this exercise as developing a new 21st Century life skill. Letting go of more than you feel comfortable with, is less about clearing the clutter and more about training yourself to develop a *when in doubt, throw it out* mentality. This mentality deals with the source of the problem of storing clutter.

When you're done, sit in front of the cleared space for at least five minutes and notice how you feel. The combination of feeling relaxed and energized at the same time is what creating space is all about.

Get rid of the excess stuff in your life
so you can live your life!