



Strategy for Success Decluttering and Organizing Method

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There are a lot of organizing methods out there. Most, including this one, have the basic concepts in common. You're going to go through your stuff, say goodbye to some of it and rearrange what's left. Hopefully in a more meaningful and beautiful way than it was before. If you're trying decluttering and organizing for the first time you may not know how to start or what the process will look like. If you want to come out on the other end of the organizing process with a satisfying result and some new skills here's my ten-step method for organizing success.

I worked for The Container Store for seven years before starting my own organizing business in 2017. I've worked with a lot of people over the years and I've watched a good portion of them begin decluttering and organizing only to become overwhelmed with the process and the product choices.

I think primarily it's because often we don't look at the big picture ideas of the project first. Most of the time we skip to the fun part of buying gadgets and pretty bins. The problem is unless you have an understanding of what's not working and a vision for what the space could be you will never really change the situation. Even if you go through the process of looking through your stuff and eliminating some of it you won't end up with a different space. Just a less full one.

This is a comprehensive and proven method that covers everything you need to know for the most successful outcome. It will save you time and money because it weeds out solutions and products that won't work for your situation. That allows you to focus your energy on a more detailed and specific goal which is much less stressful and so much more efficient. These concepts work for a single drawer or an entire house.

So here we go!

Steps 1 through 3 are the big picture ideas. They are the most important to set you up for success. Don't skip these! They are the basis for every action and decision you will make moving forward in your organizing.

1. Assess the Problem with the Space
 - a. What's not working?
 - b. Is it a structural issue like everything's on the floor because there's no shelving or hooks?
 - c. Is it a system related issue like the steps involved in an activity such as laundry or paperwork?

Assessing the problem is really important so be super clear about this because you want to bring a solution to the real issue with the space. **Good organizing makes things function better; it's not just tidying up.**

2. Create Your Vision for the Space
 - a. What purpose would you like to assign to the space? Every space whether it's a drawer or a closet or a room works better when it has a designated purpose.
 - b. What would you like the space to feel like? Easy, open, airy, calm, happy?
 - c. What would you like the space to look like? Clean, clear, tidy, pretty, colorful, muted, cozy, sleek?
3. Consider Your Budget
 - a. Do I have a solid max on spending? Set this number **before** you start looking at shelving and organizing products.
 - b. Are you willing to spread out the timeline in order to increase or manage the budget? Sometimes spreading the project out over a couple of months allows you to afford more.
 - c. Would you like to do the project yourself or hire a professional? It's obviously more expensive to hire a pro, but you will definitely save time researching, shopping and setting everything up. For some people that's work it.

This is one of the big picture areas that will guide your project – don't skip it!

Steps 4 through 6 are the heart of the decluttering process.

4. Categorize Your Contents
 - a. Pull everything out of the space and sort into like categories. Depending on your project this could take anywhere from 10 mins (a couple of drawers) to the best part of a day (a room or garage that's completely full).
 - b. Don't make decisions about the items, just categorize. You will make decisions later.
 - c. If it's a large space like a room or the garage you will need a place to stage your categories where they will not be in the way possibly for several days.
 - d. Make sure you look throughout the house for everything that matches the categories so they can be integrated. For instance, if you are working on a closet then shoes will be one of your categories. So, make sure you have located ALL your shoes and brought them to our shoe pile.
5. Cull What is No Longer Wanted or Needed from Each Category
 - a. Set up Donate, Trash/Recycle, Keep, and To Do containers or areas.
 - b. To Do includes repairs, returns, or delivering to someone specific.
 - c. Look through one category at a time starting with the easiest and put each item into one of the four containers or areas.
6. Remove Things that are Leaving the House Quickly
 - a. Set up a place in the house or garage to stage your donations and recycling.
 - b. Take donation within one to two days of culling.

Steps 7 through 10 are design related. This is where you're going to make your plan and finally, shop!

7. Determine the Best Location for Each of Your Categories
 - a. Does the category still make sense in the current space or is there a better location in the house?
 - b. Make sure the volume of each category fits into the space you've designated. You may find that your category is small and taking up valuable space that could

- be better used by something else. Or you may find that the category was larger than you realized and needs a better location.
- c. Each category should be housed intact – don't split a category into separate locations. You invariably forget about the second location and end up buying more stuff because you think you're out.
 - d. Make sure the size of the largest item in your category will fit on the shelf or in the cabinet you've designated. If it doesn't, don't split your category. If you can, find another location for that category so it can all stay together.
8. Design the Best Layout to Organize Your Space
- a. Set up your design so that your most frequently used items are the easiest to get to. A rule of thumb is they should be between knees and shoulder height. Lesser used items can be up higher or towards the floor.
 - b. Utilize walls and doors when possible.
 - c. If you're going to use drawers be sure you have enough clearance to pull the drawer out all the way especially in a closet application.
 - d. In larger projects that involve adding wall mounted shelving or other structures like cabinets or drawers consider getting a professional design. If you go with places like The Container Store or California Closets the design service is free or very little cost.
9. Select the Best Organizational Products for the Space
- a. Measure your shelf depth and width and the distance between shelves if you're going to use bins or containers.
 - b. Measure your wall space and door width if considering hoods or racks.
 - c. If you're using drawers, this seems obvious, but make sure they will actually hold what you want them to – measure!
 - d. Determine what you need and find a product that matches the specs – stick to your plan and only buy what really works.
 - e. Look carefully at material, ease of use, and durability. You may love the way something looks, but if it's a pain to use don't get it.
10. Evaluate the System in a Month and Adjust as Needed
- a. If it doesn't feel intuitive and easy to use within a week or so it needs to be adjusted.
 - b. Life happens and needs change so build in a regular maintenance once a year to reevaluate how the design is working and make adjustments.

This is a proven method that works, but my best advice is don't get lost in the mechanics. Organizing is a wonderfully creative process. Each of these ten steps has the ability to help you tap into your fun, creative, problem solving, alive self. Have fun with this!

Happy Organizing!

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