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Get organized

Start the new year right with these 10 tips



Karen Pope, the owner of 30 Minute Wonders in Champaign, and Stephanie Calahan, founder and CEO of Calahan Solutions Inc. in Bloomington, offered their best tips for finding time to get organized and then doing it.

1) Plan ahead

Both organizers recommend planning ahead. Pope suggests making a mental map before doing errands so there is no need to backtrack or make extra stops. Fill your gas tank all the way every week, get groceries weekly, and keep school supplies on hand to prevent last-minute trips for last-minute school projects.

Calahan said that many people lose track of their focus and goals because of procrastination. Pope recommends doing a task the first time you think of it.

"You won't be sorry," Pope said. If you don't do it right away, it will distract you and take up more time.

2) Have information handy

Pope said having information handy can save time. Make doctor appointments or place orders with the florist while waiting for your children after school. Having information handy in a planner or in your phone will make this easy.

3) Start a family message center

Post schedules and appointments, so everyone knows where everyone needs to be with one glance.

4) It's OK to say "no"

Pope said people often feel guilty for saying no to committees or volunteer events. Ask yourself, "Is it worth it?" Decide if commitments are worth the time away from your family, home, job or free time. If it isn't, don't do it.

5) Delegate

"Don't be a martyr; share the workload," Pope said. "Don't leave it all for yourself."

Calahan said to get help if you need it, from a friend or professional organizer.

6) Understand your organizing style

Calahan said there are two types of organizers, "innies" and "outties." Innies function better when everything is shut away behind closed doors. Outties forget it's there if it's out of site. Organize accordingly, using cabinets if you're an innie and open shelving with clear containers if you're an outtie.

7) Sort through papers

"Procrastination can hinder even the smartest people. Make a conscious choice to make decisions and then stick to that choice," Calahan said. Sort backlogged papers into three piles, "act," "reference" and "toss," she said.

To keep things like mail from piling up, Pope recommends opening mail over a recycle bin or trash can and opening online bank accounts to keep paper clutter down. Start a hanging file system to control what needs to be kept.

8) Sort by use, not category

Calahan tells her clients to sort things for how they are used. For example, all the scissors in the house don't need to be in one drawer. Put garden scissors in the garage, food prep scissors in the kitchen and a pair of scissors with the wrapping paper and craft supplies.

9) Put things away, even when you're rushed

"This pays off big time," Pope said. "There's never a better time than right now. When you're doing laundry, complete it, put it away, don't just throw a load in and then come back to it in two days. Finish each task at hand. It just saves so much time in the long run."

10) Label everything

Both Calahan and Pope recommend labels for everything. Pope said she likes to use color-coordinated containers for some things, like red and green totes for Christmas decorations and black and orange for Halloween. For everything else, she uses clear containers.

Calahan said people should not buy containers for storage until they have sorted through what they have. If they haven't sorted, they don't really know what they need.

Calahan recommends labeling things for the whole family's benefit.

"When you label your files, containers, cabinets, etc., you also make it easier to delegate to others in your household," Calahan said. Her pantry is labeled, so when she's busy, her family can easily put groceries in their proper place. ☀