

A CLEAR PATH'S
TIMELESS TOP TEN TIPS TO STAY ORGANIZED



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Introduction

Clutter seems to be a ubiquitous part of nearly everyone's life. Our homes and offices become crowded and overwhelmed with stuff and we cannot figure out how to begin clearing the chaos of our clutter. We have great intentions to move forward on de-cluttering and organizing projects but lose momentum when visual results seem slow to materialize. We run out of time, feel thwarted in our efforts, and end up with a house filled with stuff we no longer need, want, or desire.

Timeless Top 10 Tips is designed for people who simply want solutions to move from chaos to clarity in their personal and professional spaces. Tips on time management, spring clearing, taming the paper tiger, and reminders for why we want an un-cluttered life are among the topics you'll find in this easy to read monthly guide to clearing the past, organizing the present, and moving forward with a greater sense of calm.

January Top Ten Tips: Organize Your Books Shelves and Entertainment Area



Many homes in which I've de-cluttered include areas of the house commonly known as the "entertainment center" where the stereo, TV, cable and DVR boxes (and the occasional record-player), are surrounded by CDs, DVDs, albums, videos, cassette tapes (and the occasional box of 8-tracks). These are often accompanied by jam-packed bookcases with stacked and dusty shelves. De-cluttering and organizing your entertainment area – big or small – is a great way to begin a new year. Why? Because you will probably find more pleasure listening to music or watching a great TV show when clutter isn't overtaking your space.

1. **As with any de-clutter project, calendar the time** to do this work. If you have many video and audio tapes without labels, and you plan to listen to the recordings to determine what they are, be sure to add that time into your de-clutter day.
2. **Toss out** all video and audio cassettes that are broken or old.

3. **Cross check** video and DVD recordings. Keep one copy and donate the other one (or the rest!)
4. **To help you find** a music selection quickly, color-code your music library - jazz in blue, rock in red, classical in green, etc.
5. **If you don't have a turn-table**, it is now time to decide what you are going to do with your albums. You can determine their value: www.gocontinental.com/pgde.htm. Amoeba Records will buy used albums www.amoeba.com
6. **You can trade** CDs, DVDs and books at www.abundatrade.com
7. **If you still have** your undergrad textbooks, it's time to let those go. Donating or recycling will greatly depend on the date you finished school!
8. **Create a pile** of books that you borrowed and have been planning to return.
9. **Organize** your books thematically, then alpha by author. Your friends will be envious.
10. **I donate** all books to one of three places: Goodwill www.goodwill.org, Out of the Closet www.outofthecloset.org or the local public library.

February Top Ten Tips:
Reasons Why We Love to De-Clutter



Love is the theme for the month of February, representing yet another opportunity to reflect on all the love you have in your life. Between my circle of sweet friends and wonderful family, and the work I get to do with interesting people every day, I feel I'm in a continuous flow of love. My life as a professional organizer is truly satisfying. I love helping people lighten their loads of frustration and anxiety when clutter and chaos seem to rule their lives. And I feel especially full when clients tell me how much they love their newly uncluttered spaces. So, in the spirit of the month of love, here are the Top 10 reasons why people say they love becoming organized and living without clutter!

1. **They love** their homes again.
2. **They feel** more productive.
3. **They meet** the opportunities that arrive on their doorsteps.

4. **They don't pay late-fees** because they keep track of bills and pay them on time.
5. **Work at home** or in the office is more efficient way.
6. **They feel** so much better about themselves.
7. **They can now find** what they need when they need it.
8. **The garage** is once again a place to park their cars.
9. **They display** the beautiful things they value.
10. **The weight of the clutter** is no longer hanging on their shoulders.

Share the love. Love yourself. Love your home. Love your space. Give yourself the love of de-clutter!

March Top Ten Tips: De-cluttering Your Desk and Organizing Your Work Hours



Many of us work long hours at our desk. Whether we work for ourselves, or for someone else, our desks seems to be the receptacle for things we don't have time to put away, or that simply do not have a home of its own in our workspace. Here are the Top Ten Tips to staying organized at your desk.

1. **Stop the work day** 30 minutes before clocking out to put away supplies, file loose papers, clear the desk
2. **Instead of lined notepads** use a spiral notebook for all meeting notes, phone messages, notes to self, "to do" lists, etc.
3. **Keep only essential desk items** on the desk (e.g., tape, stapler, pens, spiral notebook)
4. **Do not start the work day** by answering email. Instead prioritize the day with a "to do"

list and start to work on taking care of most important tasks.

5. **Pre-sort mail** (read, file, toss, give to boss)

6. **At the end of each project**, file all project related materials in a drawer or box

7. **Block out time** to return calls in batches. Be sure to leave the best time/number for person to return your call.

8. **Do not take back to your office** every handout from every meeting unless it is pertinent to your job.

9. **Keep only enough office supplies** in your desk that you will need for only a month. You can always restock.

10. **De-clutter “sent” folders and “delete” folders** at least once per week. Alphabetize the emails to see at a glance what can be quickly deleted or filed.

**April Top Ten Tips:
Manage Time or Time Management? You Can Control One but Not the
Other**



The term “time management” is a misnomer. We cannot manage time; it is a fixed entity. There will never be an additional hour added to the day. Time cannot be controlled no matter what we do nor how much we try. What we can control, however, is how we respond to time. Since it takes about three weeks of repeated behavior to create a new habit, the following tips may be a good start toward changing your relationship with time.

1. **Use your telephone head-set** at home when talking on the phone. It’ll free up your hands to multi-task.
2. **Lay out your clothes** the night before.
3. **Set time limits.** Use a timer to pull yourself away from the computer for breaks.
4. **Prioritize** your tasks. Begin the day with a plan.
5. **Always have something to do** when waiting for an appointment to start. Bring along that magazine you saved to read, balance your checkbook, etc.

6. **Instead of using any available piece of paper** when you need to make notes, use a spiral notebook. Use it for your to-do lists, meeting notes, notes to self, and phone call reminders. Scraps of paper all over your desk, house, and car do not serve you well. Use your spiral notebook!

7. **Wake up** 30 minutes earlier.

8. **Delegate**, delegate, delegate.

9. **Learn how** to say “no.”

10. **Begin each day** by looking at your calendar, not your inbox.

**May Top Ten Tips:
May Springtime Clearing**



Spring is a good time to donate your un-used and unwanted items that take up valuable space in your home. You will lighten your load, reduce your carbon footprint, and feel better about your surroundings, and your donation is tax deductible! Others will benefit from your desire to clear your path of unwanted stuff! At the end of the Top 10 Springtime List below you will find a link for suggestions about where to donate darned near everything you no longer need or want. Here's the Top 10 Springtime List of where many people store or stash and what is in those places, the stuff they probably no longer need:

1. **Hall closets:** empty hangers, suitcases and backpacks may go to thrift stores. Unused linen and towels to animal shelters.
2. **Kitchen:** donate duplicate appliances, gadgets, pots, pans, coffee mugs and glasses to women's shelters or thrift stores.
3. **Bathroom:** women's shelters need unused soaps and shampoo (travel size from hotel stays, etc).
4. **Living room:** Pack up those videos, DVDs, or CDs that no longer suit your listening or viewing tastes. Your multi-media boxes may be donated to thrift stores or www.greendisc.com
5. **Bedroom:** in a word, clothes. Go through your closet and dresser drawers. Donate what you haven't worn for a year or more, or what no longer fits, or you never really liked. Thrift stores will take your unwanted clothing. On the donation list below you will find places that want women's business attire for poor women entering the job market.
6. **Kids' rooms:** Toys! Ask your children for input about toys and books they have outgrown, never played with, or otherwise will never use and donate to local shelters, churches, or thrift stores.
7. **Dining room:** napkins and tablecloths; wine glasses, decanters, water pitchers, salt and pepper shakers, platters and serving bowls. Unless these items are seasonal, choose your best and donate the rest to your local thrift store.
8. **Backyard:** planters and pots, gardening hand tools, lawn ornaments gathering cobwebs near overgrown plants to Goodwill or similar place.
9. **Garage:** sports equipment, sneakers, dust-collecting household items that you will never use again. Board games like Monopoly, Scrabble, checkers and Backgammon remain popular thrift store items (just be sure you have all the pieces). These things may be donated to a thrift store.
10. **Book shelves:** clear your bookcase of novels, "how to" books, or any book that you are certain you will never read again. Public libraries appreciate your donations.

DONATION PLACES AND RECYCLING SPACES: A BUNCH OF WAYS TO PAY IT FORWARD: www.aclearpath.net/donate_recycle.htm

June Top Ten Tips: The Cluttered Linen Closet



The place where we live is where we keep most of our “stuff.” Closets, drawers, and rooms can become crowded and disorderly without a plan to keep these areas clutter free and organized.

1. **Calendar the time** to do the work (for each hour you de-clutter, count on an hour to organize what you will keep);
2. **Supplies needed:** boxes or bags for donations, trash, etc.
3. **Clear any clutter** away from the area around or near the closet (this is your sorting staging area);
4. **Take everything out** of closet and don't forget the top most shelf;
5. **As you remove things, sort** into likely piles: keep, donate, trash, belongs elsewhere, etc.
6. **Decide which shelves** will be used for particular items (upper and back of shelves for least used items, lower shelves/front for most used). Label the shelves if you prefer;
7. **Re-fold** all towels and linens in similar ways. Return the items to their proper shelf with the rounded edge of the fold facing outward;

8. **Return sheet-sets** (fitted and top sheets, pillowcases) to the closet together;
9. **Keep together** bath towels and wash cloths; beach towels can go to separate shelf;
10. **Donate** used blankets, sheets, and towels to your local animal rescue organization.

July Top Ten Tips: De-cluttering and Organizing Email



Cluttered email folders like any cluttered areas, are generally the result of delaying the decision about what to do with a particular email. Organizing and managing email folders is made easier once you have completely de-cluttered your Inbox, Sent, and Delete folders. Using an email system like Microsoft Outlook, and actively using folders and sub-folders, will keep your emails orderly and clutter-free!

1. **Alphabetize** your Inbox, Sent, and Delete folders;
2. **1st purge (part 1):** From these alpha batches delete all the “obvious” trash.
3. **1st purge (part 2):** Now do the same with all the other folders in your email program.
4. **1st purge (part 3):** Delete all emails from the 1st purge.
5. **Now, scroll through the alpha lists** from Inbox, Sent, and Delete folders and identify folder categories for those emails you are likely to save for whatever reason. You’ll use

these folders in the 2nd purge. Be concise in your naming. Be sure to include folders named, “Urgent,” “Follow-up” and “Appointments.”

6. **Create the new folders and sub-folders.** E.g., your “Follow-up” folder may have sub-folders for when to follow-up (next week? next year?). To REALLY organize, email folders may be similarly named to correspond to your Word folders.

7. **2nd purge:** Alpha order Inbox, Sent, and Draft folders. This time, look at/read each email (or email category) and drag each email to its new folder or sub-folder.

8. **Make a commitment to keep a few** (less than 50) emails at any given time in each Main folder (In, Sent, Delete). To maintain this, you have to file/purge emails each time you work with your emails.

9. **As with your paper subscriptions, consider keeping E-newsletters** only until the next edition hits your mailbox. If you haven’t read by the time the next one appears do yourself a favor and delete!

10. **Most important:** take action on every single item that reaches your Inbox. Do not delay! Read it, then delete, respond, or file each one.

**August Top Ten Tips:
De-cluttering and Organizing Your Bathroom**



A reader in West Hollywood wrote to express frustration over her bathroom clutter. It seems that she has “too much of everything!” Since the bathroom is one of the most-used rooms in the house, it has a tendency to be a catch-all for everything related to the body and one’s health.

1. **As with any de-clutter project calendar the date** for your bathroom organizing project.
2. **Clear the area** just outside the bathroom to use as the staging area for sorting. Depending on the size of the bathroom, the floor can also be used as a staging area.
3. **Lay an old sheet or towel on the staging area** to catch leaking substances.
4. **Empty all drawers and cabinets** onto the staging area. From your bird’s eye view gather like items (brushes, combs, clippers, tweezers, lotions, etc). Throw out rusted or broken appliances. Clean and then donate extra hair dryers, curling irons, shaving devices.
5. **Take everything out** of the shower/tub area and place on staging area. Throw out

nearly-empty containers, tiny bars of soap, scrubbers, and razors.

6. **Practically everything has a shelf life.** Check for in-date/out-of-date medicines and health-care liquids such as rubbing alcohol and peroxide. Check with your local pharmacy about disposing of unused medication; flushing it down the toilet is an environmental no-no.

7. **Throw out extra** brushes, combs, and seldom-used items such as nail polish and old make-up.

8. **For hotel soaps, lotions, etc:** First, toss out the old stuff. Then create your own “travel pack” with those items (shampoo, razors, band-aids, Q-tips, etc.). Finally donate unopened items to local women’s and men’s shelters.

9. **To maintain order in the bathroom** consider purchasing inexpensive organizing products. Lotions, sprays, bottles - anything that should be in an upright position - can be stored in plastic tubs beneath the sink. Other products can be found at the Clever Container through my [website](#).

10. **Utilize wall space** to hang jewelry. Purchase hooks to hang bracelets or a wooden rack www.foryouforhome.com/AntiquedBox.html for earrings and necklaces.

September Top Ten Tips: De-cluttering and Organizing Your Kitchen



I once had a houseguest who woke before I did and wanted to start a pot of coffee. Unfamiliar with my kitchen and knowing I'm an organized person, she surveyed the countertop and spotted my coffee pot next to the sink, then opened the cupboard door above the pot and found the filters, and located the coffee in the freezer door where she could grab it easily. Thus, the key to an organized kitchen is to group like items, and to create zones of function for ease of use.

1. **Calendar, assistance, supplies:** As with any organizing project, calendar the time to do the work, ask a family member or good friend to help you, and make sure that you have plenty of trash and donation receptacles available to begin your project. In your planning, decide if you will use the time to defrost and clear out the freezer. If this is the

case, add an ice chest and old towels to your supplies list.

2. **Zoning the kitchen:** Pre-plan how the kitchen will function upon completion of the project. Professional Organizer Julie Morgenstern

www.juliemorgenstern.com/Products_Books.php suggests dividing the kitchen into zones: food prep, cooking, dish washing, dish storage, food storage, and utility.

3. **Purge from the refrigerator** all condiments, and bottles and jars in the door that you have had a long time but only used once and may not cook with again. Toss all scary looking food, rotting vegetables, leftovers older than a week, anything that has expired. Then take everything else out and clean the shelves, doors and glass.

4. **If you plan to defrost your freezer at this time**, turn off the entire unit, place towels all around the bottom of the unit, and open the freezer door. If the freezer is filled with frost and ice it may take a little while for things to melt before you can begin purging. Toss anything with freezer burn, and look for expiration dates on meats, vegetables, ice cream, etc. Ask yourself how many ice-trays and ice-packs you really need.

5. **Food storage areas:** toss expired cans, boxes of noodles, oatmeal, spices, anything and everything that is out- of-date (you'll be surprised by how much you find!). Gather all food items that are in-date but may have been purchased on impulse, or that you know you won't eat or use. Consider donating these food items to local shelters.

6. **Cupboards, drawers, and under the sink:** Sort, sort, sort. How many can openers, garlic presses, orange juicers, cheese graters, glasses, plates, coffee cups do you need? Make sure all pots and plastic storage containers have their corresponding lids. Pick the best of what you have and donate the rest. Toss rusted or chipped bowls, cups, pots, pans, old sponges, cleansing pads, and unrecognizable rags.

7. **Return items to refrigerator and freezer:** [group like items](#) together as space allows. Ex: condiments on one shelf, soft drinks in one section, and leftovers in another area. Tip: label the leftovers by date. Also, don't wrap with foil unless you plan to clearly label what is the items is. Date labeling is also important on freezer items as these are not accessed as quickly as the stuff you store in the refrigerator. Attach a little note pad to the refrigerator to write down anything you run out of.

8. **Return food items to storage areas:** Consider [spice racks](#) for easy access and sort spices by sweet or savory. Group like items - canned goods, cereal, pasta, etc. Consider [bins and turntables](#).

9. **Return items to cupboards and drawers:** place heavier items (blender, food processor) on bottom shelves and lighter items (hand mixer, coffee grinder) to top shelves. Instead of grouping glassware by size (taller in back, shorter in front), group in columns: one row contains tall glasses, another juice glasses, etc. You should store seasonal items out of the way and in the very back of cupboards or drawers. Place items used more frequently near the front of your storage areas. Pan lids are stored together in the areas by the pans, and all plastic lids stored together near the plastic storage containers. Consider the purchase of a [bakeware holder](#) for your cooking sheets and muffin tins. Store cleaning supplies in a [caddy](#).

10. **As you have the space,** all cooking items should be stored above and below cabinets near the stove, all tableware items near the dishwasher, etc. Also, label each pantry and cupboard shelf so returning items to these areas become no-brainers after a while.

BONUS:

a) A smart way to shop for groceries: Store on your computer a main list of all the items you shop for most frequently and which store these are purchased from. The list can either be in alpha order or in order of which aisle you find the items in the grocery store. Before you shop, print the list and just check off what you intend to purchase on this trip. You will save a lot of time and money.

b) The so-called “junk drawer:” You will not need a junk drawer when you find a ‘home’ for everything in it. However if you do need a drawer for a lot of little items, purchase a couple of drawer organizers.

October Top Ten Tips:
Get Organized and Prepare for Disaster



Two weeks ago, one of the first things I did when I moved into my new, but very old, apartment was to purchase earthquake insurance. Right after that, I organized the supplies in my earthquake kit that I keep near my front door, and a smaller kit for my car. Being organized at home means being prepared for a probable earthquake. Yes folks, the big one is coming.

Here are your top ten tips to prepare your home and car for a disaster:

1. **Find your gas and water shut-off valves.** Be sure to have the proper tools to turn the gas and water to the OFF position. Use the metal tools for these functions as plastic or fiberglass become brittle with time.
2. **Create an escape route** at home, or become familiar with the emergency route in your apartment building.
3. **Develop a plan** so that all family members will try to meet in one spot within 12 hours

after a disaster strikes.

4. **Organize an earthquake kit** for each member of the family. The kit should be able to hold you for three days and include such items as: water, a flashlight, change of clothes, small denominations of cash, medication, canned goods and a can opener, first aid kit, AM radio and batteries, fire extinguisher, and pet supplies/food as appropriate.
5. **Secure heavy furniture** with braided metal cable, chain, or angle brackets.
6. Use [museum gel](#) (or museum glue) to secure delicate and breakable items.
7. **Stoves, refrigerators, washers/dryers** should also be secured to the wall.
8. **Scan, then email to yourself**, important documents such as birth, marriage, and death certificates, financial papers, social security cards, mortgage papers, etc.
9. **The disaster kit in your car** should consist of water, flashlight, flares, change of clothes, canned goods/can opener, small denominations of cash, etc.
10. **A word about water supplies and [fire extinguishers](#):** Water is the most important item to store and we should store about 5 gallons per person, per day (and also water for your pets!!!). Sealed water bottles should be rotated every six months. Disaster experts recommend using general purpose dry chemical fire extinguishers. Available in different sizes, these have a range of between 8 and 12 feet and will empty in 10-20 seconds.

For more information see: <http://tinyurl.com/aau5gko>

**November Top Ten Tips:
Dealing with PAPER CLUTTER!**



When I'm networking and telling people about my work, I hear people describe the nightmare of their paper clutter. Corporate professionals are embarrassed by the piles of paper on every flat surface in their office. Home-based office files bulge with papers no one seems to know what to do with or how long to keep. School papers are everywhere, grocery and ATM receipts litter dining tables, and bills are late because the statements are lost in what one person called, "the scary bucket of papers next to the phone."

1. **Open your postal mail in the same place** of the house every day. At that place keep a shredder, a recycle bin, and a letter opener. Recycle junk mail first.
2. **Sort the keeper mail into categories:** requires immediate action, requires action within the month (bills, invitations), requires filing (receipts for tax deductions, etc.).

3. **For mail and other paper that requires action** during the month or at a particular time of the year, consider purchasing (or making) a Tickler File www.byebyeclutter.com/tickler_file.htm By using this system with folders labeled January through December, and 1-31 (to cover the longest month), you can keep better track of due dates, important events, RSVPs, etc.
4. **Children's drawings and papers:** At the end of each school year (or term) ask your child to choose their 5 favorite or best projects and help them to discard the rest.
5. **Tax documents:** Click on this handy 10-page IRS publication, Recordkeeping for Individuals. www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p552.pdf It's worth reading and then... you'll know!
6. **Go paperless in your bill paying:** Opt out of paper bills and sign-up for bill-paying prompts to know when your bills are due.
7. **Develop a new relationship with your checkbook register:** once a week, enter your ATM/debit-credit card purchases into your check register. Unless you need the receipt for tax purposes, **THROW THE RECEIPT AWAY.**
8. **Donate your magazines** to schools, hospital waiting rooms, and similar places. Unsubscribe from publications that no longer serve your higher good.
9. **Calendar a date** (or dates) to unclutter your filing cabinet for once and for all! As long as you reconcile month-to-month, you only need to keep the latest statement from your cable, water, power, and similar utilities. Shred the bank checks from the 90s and this past decade (unless the account is long closed, then throw them out). Keep only the current premium notices from your insurance company. Call or email me with questions and more tips about this are of the house.
10. **My favorite paper de-clutter tool:** The [Spiral Notebook](#) write everything in my spiral notebook: grocery lists, meeting notes, client conversations, ideas, affirmations, goals. I add the date to the top of the page and my spiral notebook corresponds to my paper calendar. I may tape a colleague's business card to a page as a big reminder to call day. To-do lists and errand lists and guest lists can be found on the pages of my spiral notebook. I average four (9x6) notebooks per year, and hold on to them for an average of 1-2 years.

December Top Ten Tips:
Organize Decorations for Next Year's Holidays



People celebrate many things throughout the month of December. It's a time of year when decorations, special plates, time-honored recipes are pulled from garages, closets, storage units, and from beneath the bed. Since everything is now out and visible, this is a great time to de-clutter, perhaps downsize, and take better care of all of your holiday supplies!

1. **This year, bring out ALL of your holiday decorations and supplies:** table clothes, lights, lawn ornaments, baking dishes, sweaters, candles, wrapping paper, and platters. All of it. Everything. Even the stuff that has nothing to do with December festivities. If you celebrate a variety of holidays throughout the year, bring out all the decorations. Every single one.
2. **Go through everything and throw away** the obvious trash - broken bulbs, worn hand towels, stubby candles, etc.

3. **Take stock of what you've got.** If you can identify items that you no longer use, want, or desire, box them up and take them to your local donation center today.
4. **Everything you want to keep** should have a nice snug home to spend the long months ahead. Wrapping your things in cardboard boxes is okay, but the boxes should fit into a large plastic bin or another [sturdy container](#).
5. **Tape, scissors, ribbons, paper, and bows** can be stored easily in an inexpensive [gift-wrap caddy](#). Extra-tall rolls of paper may stand in a tall trash bin with the lid removed.
6. **For people who celebrate holidays throughout the year:** if space allows, containerize each holiday separately but store everything together.
7. **File seasonal recipes** in a single box, book, or [binder](#).
8. **Store decorations in plastic bins** that correspond to the typical [colors](#) of that particular holiday: red/green (Christmas), blue/white (Chanukah), black/red/green (Kwanza).
9. Holiday lights: at the end of the season store lights properly using inexpensive [reels](#) or [bags](#).
10. [Label](#) all storage containers: there may be some years when you want to do less decorating. Having everything labeled takes the guess work out of what may be inside each container.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Regina Lark is founder and president of *A Clear Path: Professional Organizing for Home, Work, Life*. As a Certified Professional Organizer (CPO®) she specializes in working with people with chronic disorganization, ADHD, and hoarding disorders as well as folks who simply have way too much stuff.

Dr. Lark is the chair of the Education Committee for the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and serves as Professional Development Director for NAPO-Los Angeles. She is the author of *Psychic Debris and Crowded Closets: The Relationship Between the Stuff in Your Head and What's Under Your Bed* (Purple Books Publishing, 2013).

Dr. Lark is a nationally recognized speaker and trainer on issues ranging from hoarding to time management, and sings her way through whatever clutter she encounters. No dumpster is strong enough to keep her from her appointed tasks of helping you de-clutter!

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