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Begin at the Beginning

Here's a radical idea for you: *There is no such thing as clutter.* Your belongings carry significance; they are more than just *things* that litter your house or apartment.

And the contents of your to-do list are more than just the items not completed by the end of the day. They're extensions of you—representations of what has had some sort of value in your life. Nothing is separate. Evidence of your personal style, your needs, your idiosyncrasies, your priorities, and your passions surround you. Have you ever thought about what they're saying?

In the twenty-five years that I've been a professional organizer and personal coach, the most frequent (and actually amazing) comment that I hear is this: "You give me permission to be *me!*" In my first book, *How to Be Organized in Spite of Yourself* (NAL Inc., NY 1989; Penguin-Putnam Inc., NY 1999), I identified ten different styles of managing time and space that determine which organizational products and systems are best for each individual. I don't believe

that getting organized is simply a matter of solving a series of problems; it's learning how to make personal, individual choices that will bring you closer to who you are and who you'd like to be.

Organizing for the Spirit is about sustaining an environment that supports you and helps balance the demands of everyday living with the pursuit of your dreams. It's about taking care of yourself so you can take care of others, and about understanding how this process contributes to the development of peace and integrity in your everyday life.

CONNECTING TO LIFE'S "STUFF"

So how do you connect to the "stuff" of life in a way that energizes and empowers you, and enables you to live your own life to the fullest? It begins with an analysis of where you are today—an analysis, mind you, not a judgment, because no judgment is being made here. What we're doing is taking inventory of where you are to see if the way you spend your time and energy is the way you *want* to be spending it.

Discovery

We start by playing detective—imagining that *you* don't live in your house and *you* are not the author of your to-do list but that you've been given the assignment of finding out everything you can about the person who does live there and making out that person's list. You'll be taking a tour of each room and determining what the décor says about its owner's style and interests.

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And you'll be examining this person's day planner or to-do list to see what she or he is busy doing each day. Are many hours spent in the office? What happens on the weekends? How about on days off and holidays? Are there appointments to go to the gym? Lunches with friends? Book Club meetings or volunteer activities? How much time is devoted to the care and feeding of others? Is there time blocked off for relaxation or personal interests?

Analysis

After discovery comes analysis. This is where you resume your normal identity and ask yourself these questions: Does what you discovered in your "detective tour" ring true? Is the person who is living in your home today accurately reflected in what was found? Are your current values mirrored by what you see? For example, do your tapes or CDs represent your *current* musical tastes, or are they a nostalgic collection of what you enjoyed years ago? Do you still add to your collections, or are they simply collecting cobwebs in the corner? What about pets? Is their upkeep too much work these days? And how about your reading? Are you staying abreast of the things that interest you, or are your shelves too clogged with titles from other periods of your life? And what about your time expenditures? Are you doing the things you say are important to you?

There is nothing wrong with saving reminders and mementos of pleasant times past, nor is it wrong to devote the majority of your hours to either family or work, *if* that feels right for you now. But if your time or space is primarily taken up with items that don't support you in who you are

today, your spirit may feel stifled and dusty. It's important to remember that you are a combination of the person you were, the person you are today, and the person you aspire to be in the future. Nothing is as constant as change, and few of us are the people we were five years ago. Our environment and activities should be growing with us, but because of time constraints, work, and family demands, we often don't devote the time we should to staying current with our needs.

This is why we must organize for the spirit. We need to feel at home in our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls. We need to know what makes us happy and synthesize the inward and outward expressions of who we are. And to do this, we have to understand where we are in our lives, that is, what our current obligations, priorities, and preferred lifestyles are.

BEGINNING WITH OURSELVES

Too often, our attempts at organization work backwards. We buy a day planner and bring it home, set it down on the table, and wait for *it* to organize *us*. Or we purchase a book, place it on the shelf, and prepare to somehow become better organized through osmosis. It's a decent effort but ultimately not very practical.

We have to begin at the beginning, with ourselves, asking what our own beliefs and values are. Everything we possess and do is related to these concepts; therefore, if we want the details of our lives to lift us higher, infusing and enriching our spirits, we have to understand the connections.

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The purpose of this approach is to keep yourself abreast of *who* you are, *where* you are, how you can *enjoy* your life, and how you can *give something back* (make your personal contribution to the world). I believe that these are the cornerstones of a successful life and that *Organizing for the Spirit* will help you build a strong personal foundation.

Organizing for the Spirit is about achieving harmony between our inner and outer selves. When we're living a life of wholeness and integrity, we instinctively know what's right for us. We know when our energy is healthy and moving and when it's stuck. We know which activities build us up and which drag us down. We know how to share our gifts with those we love and those we want to help.



Let's begin with the first step: discovering who you are today.