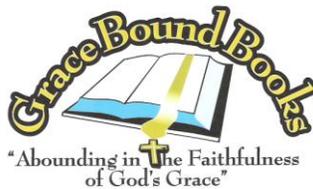




Taking the "Un" Out of Unorganized

*Practical Steps to Reclaiming Your Time, Your
Home, Your Life*



By Tara Bertic

Why Organize?

Well, if you are reading this now, then chances are, you already have your own reasons for why you need to organize. I have come up with four reasons of my own:

- **Being organized makes you feel good.** Simply put, it's easier to relax, no matter what time of the day, if you are organized. The chaos of clutter can affect your levels of stress, patience, and emotional mood. It can be quite depressing to have to step over stacks of books, laundry, papers that need to be filed, and toys just to get to the bathroom. It is also quite frustrating and anxiety-producing to be late for work while you search frantically for misplaced car keys, a diaper bag, or that letter you just had to get in today's mail. Nothing is more stressful than those nagging unfinished tasks ("N.U.T.'s" for short). And that's exactly what they do...drive you nuts!
- **Being organized saves you time.** Are you always late...for everything. 90% of the time, we run late doing last minute things, agonizing over details, or looking for things we've misplaced.
- **You'll never lose anything again!** Hard to believe? Well, believe it! In an organized home, you can be asked to retrieve something you haven't used in months and not sweat over it. You'll know exactly where you put it because everything in an organized home has its place.
- **You'll have more time for the priorities in your life...**Bible study, family, friends, your spouse, your children. When your life and home are organized, you'll find that, no matter how many balls you're juggling between work, home, and extracurricular activities, you'll even have time for a hobby! Sound too good to be true? It's not. I promise!
- **And lastly, why not organize?** And no, I don't buy that excuse that you just work better with your laundry all over the floor and your bills and bank statements spread out all over your desk. No one does. You've just trained yourself to look past the clutter, ignore the chaos, and accept your tardiness as a way of life. "It's just who I am." If you're honest with yourself, however, it's not who you want to be.

Eliminate & Consolidate!

The first place to start in organizing is to eliminate and consolidate. Why? Because it makes no sense to organize trash!

- **First, place a laundry basket on the floor in front of each room's doorway.** You can use an empty box if you like. It really doesn't matter. Now walk around the house, going from room to room, and pick up those things that do not belong in the rooms you found them in. Instead, drop them into the baskets in front of the doors that represent the rooms they do belong in. Once finished, go back to each room, pick up the basket, and place it inside the room to be gone through as you organize that room. Just put the basket in a corner where it won't be in the way for now.
- **Next, go through each room in your house with a box and a garbage bag.** In the garbage bag, put...trash. In the box, put items that you can yard sale or donate to a Goodwill or consignment center. Try not to get snagged on where to donate your items, thinking some can go to one charity and some to another. This will become overwhelming. Just pick one organization and fill the box. If you end up with boxes of stuff to donate, call your local Kidney Foundation to find out when their next pick-up date will be in your area. Then, if you have a garage or other place to store the boxes until they can be picked up, put them there. Just try and keep them out of sight. This will keep you from feeling like you've gotten nowhere or save you from the temptation to re-think some of your giveaway choices. If the thought of undertaking a yard sale is overwhelming to you, remember, it doesn't have to be your yard sale just because it's your "stuff". If you know of a local church that is having a yard sale fundraiser, donate your items there. Maybe you have a friend who's having a yard sale to make some extra money. Ask her if she can include your stuff in her sale and then she can keep the profits.
- **Don't let this task overwhelm you.** If you have a big house or each room is going to be a multiple garbage bag and box task, then just do one room a day, or even week until you have accomplished the chore. Start with smaller rooms, or rooms you are certain will be easier. This will motivate and encourage you for the bigger and more difficult rooms to come. Start a task calendar. Put on it those things you would like to see accomplished on a weekly or monthly basis. Don't overload the calendar. Remember, there are 52 weeks in a year.

Chances are, it took you at least that long to become totally disorganized. Give yourself a break in determining how long it should take you to get organized.

- **This part of organizing is where you let go of being a “pack rat”.**

Is it really necessary to save every greeting card you've ever received? Do you really need four boxes of mementos to remember your high school glory days by? Now I'm not saying get rid of it all, but be reasonable. Consolidate those four bins into one, saving only the most memorable of items, the ones that may be useful in telling your great grandkids a little bit about you someday.

Do you have three toasters just because you got them all as wedding gifts and felt bad returning them? Return them, re-gift them, yard sale them, or eBay them!

- **When eliminating and consolidating, consider how often you use or look at what it is you are trying to determine whether you should get rid of or not.**

My rule is generally six months. If I have not looked at the item in that long, and it is not because it is a seasonal item, it's gone. Don't save something just because it's "like new". You only used it once or twice, really don't like it because it wasn't what you expected it to be or didn't work the way you expected it to work, and now you can't justify getting rid of it because you paid a lot of money for it and should at least let it sit on that shelf a while longer! Get rid of it! Remember, one person's junk is another person's treasure. Your unwanted item could be the answer to prayer for a stay-at-home homeschool mom who shops at Goodwill. Trust me!

- **Finish what you started.**

Don't get distracted by other tasks that need to be completed when you are consolidating and eliminating. "Oh there's that empty photo album I bought last month for our vacation pictures. Now where did I put those pictures? I'd better find them before I forget about it again. Besides, it'll only take a few minutes to slide the pictures into the album. Then that will be one less thing I have to do later." NO! Stick to the task at hand. Instead, take a notebook and pen with you into each room you are "cleaning". If you see something that reminds you of something else you needed to get done, take thirty seconds to jot it down and then get back to the task at hand. At the end of the day, you can refer back to your list and add the things you wrote down to do to your task calendar or Day-Timer.

- **Now you are ready to begin actually organizing!**

Again, set yourself goals on your task calendar and don't be unreasonable about your expectations. You won't get your entire house organized in one day, one weekend, or possibly even one week, unless of course you take vacation from work, unplug your phone and computer, order take-out everyday, and send your family to live with your in-laws!

Again, let's be reasonable! As you go through the list of ways to organize each room in your house, if there are tasks that are more time consuming than others, add them to your task calendar and simply plan a time you can work on them. Maybe in the evening while watching your favorite television show, or while you're waiting for those potatoes to boil on the stove. Use each section of this book as a checklist. If you plan on organizing one room a week, figure out how many of the tasks you need to complete each day to accomplish that goal...and then complete them, day by day.

**Most importantly, DO NOT COMPARE YOURSELF WITH OTHERS.
WHAT WORKS FOR SOMEONE MAY NOT WORK FOR YOU. THERE
ARE DEGREES OF ORGANIZATION.**

Tools of the Trade

Organizing doesn't mean having to go into great debt for those fancy rolling storage shelves or bins. It doesn't mean you need to run out and spend hundreds of dollars on an electronic organizer to keep all of your appointments in either. Here are some other options to make organizing your time, your home, and your life affordable.

- **You need calendars.** The number of calendars you decide you need really depends on you. I have one on my wall in my office and I have an organizer/calendar notebook out on the kitchen counter next to the refrigerator. (I keep it there because I'm in the refrigerator often enough that I know I'll check my calendar AT LEAST once a day!) Again, you can custom design and print your own calendar from your word processing software on your computer to save you time and money as well.
- **You need boxes.** Here's the part most people stress over, the thought of having to buy all of those fancy storage bins. I will tell you that the best kind are the clear storage totes that come in all different gallon sizes. It's always best to be able to see in each bin after you have stored them to remember what is in them, but it's not necessary. About a dollar or so cheaper per bin are the bins you cannot see through. If you're just beginning to organize, don't run out and buy twenty of these to get you started. You don't know how many you'll end up needing and then you'll have to find a place to store the bins until you're actually organized enough to start using them.

Start out with some cardboard boxes. You can get them free from any grocery or retail store, usually at the beginning of each week, or from your new neighbor's trash as they unpack. Remember, these are just temporary. Get different sizes too. Visit shoe stores for shoeboxes. At the beginning of each school year, when school supplies go on sale, pick up a bunch of those plastic pencil boxes. I was able to purchase these one year after school began for only ten cents a box! I bought fifty-six and have found just as many uses for them. They're small and easy enough to store and stack on a floor or shelf in the closet.

Tin cans with lids and baskets are also valuable organizing tools. You can use coffee cans, nut cans, or those holiday tins with assorted popcorn in them. The baskets can be found at thrift stores or yard sales. You can even use the old plastic milk crates most convenient stores throw out every week. These are great for stacking with the opening facing you.

Then you secure them together using twine or other adhesive and now you have a homemade shelving unit separated into squared-off sections.

Then once, you are organized, if you wish, you may begin to purchase the clear or non-clear plastic storage bins to replace the cardboard boxes with. Clear bins make it easier to see what you've stored in them, but are typically more expensive. Don't overwhelm your pocketbook. Simply make a mental note to purchase one or two bins every time you visit your favorite retail store. Then simply transfer what you put into a cardboard box into the new bin, a few at a time if you wish. I do recommend you start in storage areas, such as the shed, garage, attic, or basement. Items in these areas are more prone to mildew, moths, and other creepy crawlies. The cardboard boxes will be fine for short-term, but you will want the plastic storage bins before long to protect your belongings. Most of the plastic bins' lids seal air and bug tight.

Under the bed boxes are excellent too. They save your precious closet, shelf, and floor space while not taking up any floor room you are ever going to use anyway.

- **You need a labeling system.** Now don't freak out. I know that sounds high-tech and complicated, but it's really not. You simply need a labeler of some kind. Remember those ancient ones that had the wheel on the top with the alphabet on it? You would click the wheel to the letter you wanted and then squeeze the trigger handle together and it would make an imprint of that letter on the colorful dispenser tape. I don't think they make those anymore, but technology has improved on them just the same. I use a Brother PT-65. It cost me roughly \$30 at an office supply store. It runs on six batteries and a roll of tape. It has what looks exactly like a keyboard on its surface. I simply type what I want on my label and hit the print button. It's that simple. Labels are great ways to mark your storage boxes and lots of other things in your home.

Yes, you can use a permanent marker, but I recommend this only on the cardboard boxes. Over time, what you put into your plastic storage bins may change, but what you wrote on the outside of the box in permanent marker will not change. The neat thing about the labels from an electronic labeler is that they stick and re-stick so that they can be moved from one box to another easily.

Another way to label your boxes, either temporarily or permanently without any added expense is with a camera. After packing an organized box, simply take a picture of the contents before securing the lid. Then tape the picture to the front of the box. If you do a bunch of boxes all at once, you can use an entire roll of film and then just get it developed and begin attaching. You can also use a digital camera and print the pictures right from your computer and printer. This is great for kids who can't read yet. They may not know what L-e-g-o-s spells on the front of that box, but they certainly know what Legos look like.

I still recommend the electronic labeler however. Again, the pictures will get bent and warped over time, especially if they are removed and moved from one box to another. Developing film and printing digital pictures can get expensive as well, especially when you consider the cost of color ink cartridges for printers. Digital photos often don't hold their color either. If they get wet at all, the colors run to the degree that you can no longer tell what the picture was originally of.



Brother Labeler

- **You may need more shelving.** This is hard to determine until you've eliminated, consolidated, and done the bulk of your organizing. You may find in the end, however, that you have more boxes to store than you have shelves to store them on. If that's the case, I recommend visiting your local building supplies store. They have an aisle dedicated solely to organizing supplies. There you will find these great build-it-yourself PVC shelves. They're just PVC tubes that snap and lock into plastic shelves. You can stack them in however many you wish. They're around \$20 and give you five extra shelves of storage space. You can then put the shelving unit in your shed, garage, the back of your closet, wherever you wish. There's always that useless corner of your house that nothing looks good in and you have made no use of the space in. There's really no need to spend hundreds on those fancy closet organizers or get out the drill and ladder to hang more wire racks in your closets. These shelving units work just fine, especially if you have a deeper closet.
- If you rely on your computer for organizing lists, documents, files, dates, and other important information, I also recommend a small USB storage device. They are about the size of a key chain and plug right into your computer's USB port where you can then download all of the information you wish to have saved should your computer crash. And in this day in age, it's not a matter of "if" your computer crashes, but "when".

And that's it. Some calendars, boxes, and a labeler and you're ready to begin.

In the Kitchen

I start your organizing journey in the kitchen. Why? I like to start in the kitchen because it's one of the rooms in the house that you use everyday and I have found that an organized kitchen just makes the food taste better. No, really! If you're not having to hunt down recipes and utensils, you're going to enjoy the task of cooking and baking much more and dinnertime will always be ON time. Enjoying cooking and eating when you're hungry, not an hour and a half later, will make the food taste better. I promise!

- Put your favorite recipes in the computer. Create a folder for them in Word. I actually have recipe software called *MasterCook*. It comes with hundreds of its own recipes, allows me to build my own cookbook and print it, and much more. If I'm missing an ingredient for a recipe, the program gives me substitutes. The software also creates a shopping list for me when I tell it what meals I would like to prepare from my trip to the grocery store. At the click of a button, I can also e-mail my recipes to friends and family. I didn't make this task too time-consuming. I set a goal of entering just three recipes a day into the program until I had entered them all.

Recipe software is not necessary. You can simply use Word. Create a folder called recipes and then subfolders in that one breaking down your recipes into categories (i.e. breads, appetizers, soups & stews, beef, slow cooker, etc...). Then, after printing your recipes, arrange them behind category tabs in a 3-ring binder. This is much simpler than rifling through a recipe box of folded paper, index cards, and magazine clippings.

- Hang a basket somewhere in the kitchen for take-out menus and coupons. Use paper clips to attach the coupons to their respective restaurants. Each time you attach another coupon, check to make sure that the previously attached ones have not yet expired. Throw them out if they have.



Coupon & Menu Holder

You can use a drawer for these menus and coupons, but if your kitchen is like mine, drawer and cabinet space is quite valuable.

- Organize your food pantry shelves by food groups or types. Have a specific shelf or area for pastas and rice. Have another shelf or space for canned goods, sauces and gravies, baking goods, and so on. This will make preparing a grocery list easier, as you won't have to shuffle through cabinets or shelves to figure out whether or not you need an ingredient.



Food Pantry

While we're on the subject of food pantries, here's another tip. Use recycled plastic coffee creamer containers for powdered sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon sugar, etc... Just peel the creamer label off the front and label the container with its new ingredient's name. The snap-close lid on top of the container is just the right size for dispensing such toppings, and so much easier than using a spoon or scoop inside a bag or box. The creamer containers are space savers too. You could buy such containers from Tupperware or Pampered Chef, or even a mall retailer that specializes in kitchen products, but these creamer containers work just as well and are a lot cheaper, especially if you're a coffee drinker already.



Recycled Creamer Container For Powdered Sugar

- Organize your freezer the same way. This will be more difficult if you have just the freezer attached to your refrigerator, but you can be more creative with a stand-alone freezer. In a smaller freezer, you can simply divide the area you have to work with into sections. In a larger freezer, actually assign shelves and door racks to different types of frozen goods. I actually have labels on my freezer that outline what is inside. My top shelf is for already prepared meals (i.e. frozen leftover dishes, TV dinners, etc...). The next shelf is for beef items. The next is for poultry and pork. Then I have a shelf for seafood. The bottom one is for frozen desserts to make it easier for my children to get a Popsicle or other frozen treat at snack time.

My freezer door shelves are organized too. The top two shelves are for frozen potatoes (i.e. tater tots, French fries, hash browns. I have several shelves for frozen vegetables and then one for frozen fruit as well.

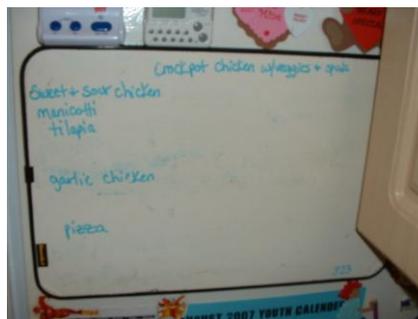
I know labeling your freezer sounds a tad anal, and it probably is, but being able to open the door and simply grab out what you need beats spending five minutes with the freezer door open while you get frost bite shifting goods and searching for one thing. It also makes it easier to send your kids or husband to the freezer to retrieve something for you.

- Stack your Tupperware bowls without their lids on inside one another to save cabinet space. Stack all of the round bowls in one and all of the square bowls in another, each from biggest to smallest. Then, next to your two or more stacks of bowls, stack the lids in the same manner, round with round and square with square and from biggest to smallest.



Tupperware & Lids

- Create a generic list of items you frequently purchase at the grocery store in your computer. Break the list down into categories (i.e. frozen, breads, canned, breakfast, meats, produce, dairy, etc...). Put a small line in front of each item. Print this list out and put it on your refrigerator. As you discover you need an item, put a small check or "x" on the line in front of the item. Then, when you're reading to go to the grocery store, simply take the list off the refrigerator and your ready to shop. Print out a new blank list and replace your old one on the refrigerator and start over. I actually found a website where you can print a checklist for free or even save it to your computer to revise to meet your family's needs. It is <http://www.printablechecklists.com>. Do a search for grocery lists and it will show you your options. You can print one by aisle number to fill in or one by products and their categories.
- Keep a small magnetic dry erase board with pen attached on your refrigerator or freezer. On it, put a list of meals you have the ingredients for. After making a meal, wipe it's name from the board. This will let you know when you'll need to be visiting the grocery store again.



Dry Erase Board Meal List

- Keep rarely used kitchen appliances and/or dishes in or on a remotely accessed closet or shelf. I'm talking about punch bowls or other entertaining dishes that are rather large and, unless you are an avid entertainer, only get used on holidays.

Appliances of this type include steamers, food processors, slow cookers, juicers, etc...

- Organize a list of frequently used phone numbers in your computer. Categorize the list into friends, family, work, Spouse's family, church, doctors, etc... Keep the list updated and on the side of your refrigerator for easy access.
- Keep a small shallow dish (an ashtray, or small Tupperware bowl, recycled small plastic butter or yogurt container) in the drawer where you keep your corncob holders. Put these in the bowl so you're not shuffling through knives and other sharp utensils when searching for them. Keep a baggie of small container for wire baggie ties too. I also have a small container in one of my drawers where I keep chip clips and clothespins for the same.
- Use a wooden knife block. It keeps you're knives high on the counter and out of the reach of little hands and also makes them more easily accessible. It's safer than reaching into a drawer for them too.
- Instead of using drawer space for kitchen towels, dishcloths, and hot pads or potholders, use baskets that either sit on top of your counter or even on top of your refrigerator. You can use one bigger basket for all of these, or one for each. I have one for each. My dishcloths sit in a basket next to the sink. My potholders sit in a basket next to the stove. My kitchen towels sit in a basket next to the refrigerator, as that is often where I hang them from (the door handles). If you're low on counter space, they make magnetic hooks that you can hang on your refrigerator door. From these hooks, you can hang your oven mitts and potholders that have loops for hanging them on their tops.



Dish Towel & Pot Holder Basket

- Keep a can, vase, or small bucket of frequently used utensils next to the stove for easy access when cooking. I also have a hanging rack for my measuring spoons and cups and keep them tacked there from smallest to largest.



Frequently Used Utensils

- If you know you need to leave early in the morning, set your coffee pot's timer to make the coffee just before you are scheduled to get up. Lay your coffee mugs next to the pot, along with a spoon and napkin. Also lay out your medications and vitamins for that morning.
- If you plan on being gone most of the day and know your evening will be just as busy and tiring as your day was, plan on a slow cooker meal. These can be prepared the night before and left in the refrigerator until the next morning, or, if you have time, they can be prepared before you leave the house. Then, when you get home, tired from your long day, dinner is ready. If your meal does not need to cook all day, but only a few hours, I recommend getting a slow cooker timer. You simply plug it into your electrical outlet and then plug the slow cooker into it. Then you set the start and end time on the timer and you're good to go. The timer will turn the slow cooker on at the designated time and then turn it off at the same. A great cookbook for slow cooker recipes is *Fix-It and Forget-It Cookbook - Feasting with your Slow Cooker* by Dawn J. Ranck and Phyllis Pellman Good.

Another time saver is to make double of a meal that freezes well. Do this on a day when you have the time, a stay-at-home day or weekend day. Then, when a crazy schedule day arises, you can pull that meal out of the freezer and still serve a home-cooked meal for your family. Don't forget to label the dish in the freezer so you remember what it is you were saving for that crazy day.

- Keep a manila file folder under your silverware drawer or wherever you have space in your kitchen that contains the user manuals and warranties for kitchen appliances. Then when you pull out that bread maker you haven't used in over a year, you'll know exactly where to look for a refresher course on how to use it properly.

In the Bathroom

- Organize your medicines by type (i.e. pain killers, fever reducers, eye meds, ear meds, upset stomach, etc...) Label the shelves in your medicine cabinet so that you can keep better track of what you have and for what. Then, when you need it most (often in the middle of the night when you can barely open your eyes to look for it to begin with), you won't have to search for it. This also helps in being better able to check expiration dates.

If your medicine cabinet is not big enough, you may have a dining room or kitchen cabinet that is not already being used. You only need a few shelves. I currently use a lazy susan under the bathroom counter. It is labeled and I just spin to the type of medicine I am looking for and there it is. As always, if you use this method and have children, be sure to put a childproof cabinet lock on the cabinet door to ensure that little ones do not have access to any of the medications.



Medicine Lazy Susan

- I don't know about you, but I loathe searching for matching pillowcases to fitted sheets, top sheets, etc... Take your fitted sheet, top sheet, pillow shams, bed skirts, and extra pillow cases for a matching set, fold them and fit them inside one of the sets pillow cases. Keep the entire "pocket" of bed linens with the matching comforter if there is one.



Pillow Case Pocket of Bed Linens

In the Bedroom

- Keep your clothes hung in your closet by type (i.e. shirts, pants, skirts, dresses, ties, belts, etc...). If you want to be real anal about it, you could then sort them by color also, or at least darks versus lights.
- Also, keep your empty hangers in one place in your closet so that you don't have to dig for them on laundry day.
- Keep your winter clothes in a storage bin that fits under your bed so that it doesn't take up any extra space in your closet. Rotate them for your shorts and tank tops during the winter. Why take up extra drawer and closet space with clothes you may only wear during a particular time of the year.
- Commercial closet organizers are wonderful too, if you can afford one.
- If you have the room to hang your purses or other carry duffels in your closet, do so by fitting the smaller ones into the larger ones and then hanging the few large ones from hangers in the back of the closet.



Hanging Duffels & Purses

- Organize your shoes by color and/or occasion (i.e. work shoes, dress shoes, gardening shoes, etc...). I use a shoe rack in the back of my closet, but the shoe organizers that hang on the backs of closet doors take up even less precious floor space.
- Organize your jewelry box. If you can, ask for one of those fancy tall ones with legs from your significant other for Christmas, your birthday, or Valentine's Day. They are fabulous and have lots of cabinets, drawers, and dividers to sort all of your jewelry.

You can either sort your jewelry by sets or by type, such as earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc...

To keep your necklaces from getting tangled, hang an expandable plastic hat/coat rack with five or six posts on it on a wall in your closet or bathroom or anywhere near your vanity. Now you have a way to hang your necklaces and not have to worry about them tangling. You can hang your bangle bracelets on these too. These expandable hat/coat racks are great for hair accessories too. I have one that holds my scrunchies, headbands, and ponytails.

I have also used one of those tall tackle/small tool organizers with the clear bins. You can see inside the front of the clear drawers to know what's in each one. There are usually 50-100 bins in these nifty little organizers. The drawers are in rows. Each row can be designated for a different type of jewelry, such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc... You can still organize your jewelry in sets in these bins also.

In Your Quiet Place

- I am a Christian. I have found that I need a place separate from anything else that might distract me to meet with God each day. If I do it at my desk where my computer is, I am tempted to check e-mails or wonder what bills need to be paid that week. If I have my quiet time at the kitchen table, I begin to think about what I want for breakfast, what I'll cook for dinner, etc... I can't help it. My mind just wanders!

So, I find a place away from distractions. Right now, that's on the couch in front of our living room window so I can let just enough light in through the blinds to help me read by. Under my end table next to the couch, I have a basket. In it are my Bible, a notebook, highlighter, and pen, any devotionals I am reading, a list of prayer requests from family/friends, and a Bible study I am currently working on. I keep my journal in here too. Everything is right there where I need it, ready to be pulled out when it's quiet time. I love this system. Sometimes, I put some fresh flowers in a vase on the end table or light a scented candle on it just to "set the mood".



Bible Study Tools

Your Personal Notebook

- I use a Day-Timer. I like it because it comes with lots of tabs, paper, and a cool zipper protector so I can take it with me wherever I go and not have to worry about things falling out of it. Here are some things I keep in my personal notebook:
 - Calendar that records:
 - Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays
 - Bible studies, church obligations (i.e. work in nursery, covered dish, etc...)
 - Dates with friends/spouse
 - Paydays and days off
 - Special occasions
 - Personal obligations (i.e. watch neighbor's dog, reminder of phone calls, meetings, etc...)
 - Doctor's appointments
 - Children's school happenings
- I also have a tab for prayer requests in my notebook. Since I carry it with me wherever I go, I can jot down prayer requests from friends and family as I receive them. It's so easy to tell someone you'll pray for them, but if you write it down somewhere you look everyday, you'll actually remember to pray for them.

I keep my own personal prayer requests written in my notebook too so that, if I am sitting in a waiting room or in between obligations, I can pull out my notebook and use the notes as a guide to pray by.

- A notebook wouldn't be a true notebook without a section for lists. These can be grocery lists, chore lists, wish lists, Christmas lists, whatever you like.
- I also have a section for book notes. I carry books around that I am reading and don't often like to highlight in my books, unless they were meant to be written in. With some notepaper in my Day-Timer, I can jot down interesting quotes, facts, and revelations as I read them.
- My last tabbed section is for my Scripture verses I am currently trying to memorize, again for when I have time in between appointments to meditate on them.
- Most Day-Timer binders have pockets in them as well. In these, I keep tracts, business cards for our church, as well as for doctors and restaurants. A small address/phone number list or book can be kept here too.

In the Office

- Throw away old phone and electric bills as long as the new bill reflects that the previous one was paid. If you're keeping track of how much electricity you use from month to month, copy the usage from your bill onto your calendar and then throw the bill away. I actually keep one year's worth of paid bills' receipts. Then, at the end of the year, I go through each file and throw away the previous years' bills. I even throw out old insurance policies (auto, health, etc...), as long as no outstanding charges or claims are pending. Bank statements from the previous year can be thrown out as well, as long as there are no outstanding checks on them and they have been reconciled to your personal checkbook.

There are a few things I save, regardless of the passage of time:

- At the end of each year, I go through our health files and pull out those items I believe to be pertinent to our health history. There could be x-rays, copies of test results, evaluations, etc... I put each family members important health records from the previous year into a large clasp envelope and then write their name and the year on the outside of the envelope. Then I store the records in a file box.
- I also save every year's tax return information. Again, I put it into a large clasp envelope and mark the year on the front and store it in a file box.

Remember, anything that has your personal identification information on it should really be shredded to avoid identity theft.

- Keep your office files in an accordion file or file cabinet and by category. Some categories I use include:
 - Auto - behind which I keep separate manila folders for each vehicle, AAA, and auto insurance
 - Banking - separate folder for each accounts' statements, 401 (k) information, safe deposit information
 - Education - files for my husband and I to keep our certificates in, student loan information
 - Employment - folders for each job to keep check stubs and memorandums in
 - Health - folder for each member of the family (including pets) to keep receipts and explanation of benefits letters in

- Home - folder for rent/mortgage information; also a folder for each room in the house...in it keep decorating ideas you've found and saved from various magazines. Then, when you have time, you can go through these files one by one and begin working on some of the decorating projects.
 - Life - folder for each person containing pertinent information about life insurance policies
 - Credit Cards - folder for each card containing statements
 - Taxes - folder for each of last two years' tax return information
 - Utilities - folder for water/sewer, trash, phone, cellular, electric
 - Miscellaneous - folder for memberships and other miscellaneous items you have information for; also keep a holiday ideas folder for recipes, crafts, entertaining tips, etc... You can keep just one folder for all of the holidays or use a different folder for each one.
 - Warranties/User Guides - I just use one file folder for all of these. I find it easier to keep them all in one place rather than all over the house next to the electronics they belong to. There are a few exceptions of course.
 - I keep user manuals to the kids' toys under their socks or underwear in that respective child's dresser drawer. Then the kids know where to find the instructions or user guides for each of their toys.
 - Kitchen appliance user manuals I keep in a file folder in a drawer in the kitchen.
 - All others I keep in a file in my file cabinet.
- I find it too stressful to pay bills every week. Some people actually pay them daily as they arrive in the mail. My husband gets paid twice a month. So we have two payables files. One marked the 1st of the month and one marked the 15th. We file our bills as they arrive in one of those two folders, depending on where their due date falls. Then, when he gets paid, he simply pulls out the folder for that pay period and pays the bills inside.
 - Keep your addresses and phone numbers updated in Word or some other database storage software on your computer. Include birthdays and anniversaries so that you can sort these files by this information and also print yourself a list of such important dates. Hang the list next to your calendar so you can check it each month to see what cards or gifts need to be purchased and when. This is easier than writing everyone's special dates on your calendar, only to have to be recopied onto a new calendar the next year.

I do know that there are some free programs available online or even through your Internet Service Provider or e-mail provider that will allow you to create an on-line calendar that will notify you electronically of important dates. One of them is called People Tracker and can be downloaded for free at <http://www.newfreedownloads.com/find/birthday-tracker.html>.

- Being a Christian, I take notes on the sermon each Sunday at church. I keep the notes in file folders in a file box or accordion file based on topic or even what book of the Bible the message was preached from (i.e. faithlessness, works, parables, Isaiah, Matthew, etc...).
- Buy a few boxes of blank greeting cards. Sort them by occasion, rubber band them together, and put a sticky note with the occasion's name on the top of the pile. Put all of the cards into a small plastic bin labeled "Greeting Cards". Now you have cards handy for those "almost forgotten" occasions. You can also use one of those small file boxes that hold extra large note cards. Just be sure to use dividers in the box to separate the occasions from each other.

In the Shed, Attic, Basement, or Other Storage Facility

- The key to remember here is to consolidate as much as you can. Think of nesting dolls and how the smaller ones fit inside the bigger ones and so on until only one doll is left standing, but it houses nine others. It's the same concept. For example, put smaller carry-ons or suitcases inside larger ones for storage.
- Stack bins, putting the ones accessed most frequently on top for easier access. Label everything in bins in storage, as they are not accessed frequently and it will help you remember what is in which bin when the time comes that you need to find something quickly.
- Remember to use mothballs in your bins to deter moths, silverfish, and other creepy crawlies and pests from invading your valuables.
- Also remember to use plastic storage bins over cardboard boxes to protect your valuables from water damage, bugs, and other weather-related elements. Clear bins would be ideal for storage areas so that you can see at a glance what each bin holds since you probably will not be accessing them often.
- Storage areas are a great place to store holiday decorations as well. Keep them in separate bins according to their holiday and clearly labeled.
- Keep a bin just for beach stuff stored here as well. Include deflated rafts, beach balls, goggles, sand toys, etc... Then you can just tote the bin to the beach and save your trunk from all that sand afterwards.

In General

- To start organizing boxes of photos, find some empty shoeboxes or manila clasp envelopes. Sort your pictures by events (i.e. vacations, birthdays, anniversaries, etc...) or groups of people (i.e. friends, family, children, siblings, ancestors, etc...). You can decide how broken down you wish to group your photos. Then label the shoebox or envelope. Now, one at a time, you can pull out an envelope or shoebox and begin to put your pictures into albums or scrapbook them. Just work on one group at a time so that you do not get overwhelmed. Set a deadline for yourself, like going through one group of photos per month. It sounds like it would take forever, but in reality, you can have all of your pictures in albums or scrapbooks in a year or less if you follow this example.
- Keep your cleaning supplies organized in rows according to their type (i.e. glass cleaners, furniture polish, bathroom cleaners, floor cleaners, auto cleaners, etc...).
- Organize your bookshelf into categories (i.e. religious, educational, self-help, studies, literature, fiction, non-fiction, etc...). Organize your videos and DVD's in the same manner. CD's can be organized according to their music style (i.e. Christian, pop, rap, country, jazz, classical, etc...).
- If you are a crafty person, keep a craft cabinet. I use a five-drawer file cabinet. I label the outside of each cabinet drawer with what the drawer's contents are. For example, I keep sewing supplies in the top drawer and so my label says, "fabric, lace, ribbon, needles, felt, thread". I have children's craft supplies in the second drawer and so my label reads, "sand art, paint, paint brushes, smocks, modeling clay". In one of the drawers I also keep any craft idea magazine or books I have collected. To save space, instead of saving entire magazines, I clip the craft projects out and keep them in a file folder in the drawer instead.



Craft File Cabinet with
Labeled Drawers

- When doing the laundry, put clean and folded clothes into separate laundry baskets for each family member. There are six of us and so I put mine and my husband's clothes in one basket, my daughters in one, and my three boys in another. I simply put the boys into separate stacks in the basket from oldest to youngest so they know which pile in the basket is theirs to put away.
- Keep an under the bed bin full of gift wrapping supplies (i.e. ribbon, tape, wrapping paper, bows, etc...) If a bin will not fit under your bed, a tall laundry basket in the corner of a closet works as well.



Tall Laundry Basket of
Gift Wrapping Supplies

- Keep a shelf or small table near the front door to put things on that need to be returned to people. You have enough of your own stuff lying around. You don't need everyone else's. When you walk by the table on your way out the door, you will be reminded to take something along with you to return to someone you may be seeing later that day. You could also just use a coat rack and put the items in plastic grocery bags and hang the bags from the rack. I like the small shelf or table idea best because it looks nicer.
- Organize your wallet. Separate bankcards from video cards, discount cards, membership cards, insurance cards, etc... This will minimize the amount of time you spend thumbing through your wallet in public and be safer for you.

With Kids

- Use plastic storage bins for smaller toys or toys with lots of pieces. I use a bin for fast food kids' meal toys. Every now and then, as it fills, I go through the bin and get rid of duplicates or older toys. I donate them to a local migrant worker farm for the workers' children or sometimes send them to missionaries to give out to the children that live where they work. I also use a bin for Mr. Potato Head because we have so many pieces to him that I wouldn't want to fall to the bottom of the toy box.



Small Compartment Storage
Bin for Tiny Toys



Toy Bin with Picture on Front
As Label to What's Inside

- If you plan on saving toys and clothes for future siblings, put them in storage containers for the shed, attic, or garage and label them according to size and/or age. Don't forget the mothballs!

- Keep games with small pieces and puzzles on a high shelf out of the reach of the kids. Tell them that you will take them down one at a time whenever they want to play with them. They must clean up each game for you to put back on the shelf before requesting a new one. You can also label the shelves these items are on.
- Use an old large popcorn tin or something similar to store crayons, markers, and colored pencils in. Just don't store them all in the same one! Label each can or bin.
- Take a five-gallon bucket and buy a bucket apron (available at hardware stores). The apron fits inside the bucket, as well as around the outside of the bucket and is full of pockets, all different sizes. In each pocket organize your hole punch, markers, colored pencils, pens, pencils, crayons, rulers, bookmarks, erasers, etc... Then, when the kids want to draw or color, just put the bucket in the middle of the table and the kids can just turn it around to search for what they need and grab it out.



5-Gallon Bucket Organizer

- Start a memorabilia bin for each child. I use a basic 5-gallon bin with a label of the child's name on it. I keep the bin in his/her closet. In it, I store newspaper articles, awards, special craft projects, baby books and records, etc...
- We homeschool and so have a bookshelf for such materials. I keep the shelves labeled and organized by grade and subject level. For record keeping I use a program called Homeschool Tracker. It can be found at <https://www.homeschooltracker.com/>. There is a free version that can be downloaded, as well as versions with added features. It keeps track of assignments, attendance, goals, resources, curriculum, etc... It even prints report cards and schedules for upcoming school weeks. It's the greatest software and I use it for all four of my children's record keeping.

At the end of each school year, I can even print out a report of their entire year's work and grades to keep in a portfolio with that year's test scores.

- Print a chore chart for each child. A great website is <http://www.kidspot.com.au/discoverycentre/Development-Rewards-charts-Printable-reward-and-chore-charts+5663+554+article.htm>. You can make your own as well. Keep each chart on the refrigerator along with some sheets of stickers for reinforcement.