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# CLEAN SWEEP

By Kerrie Kennedy

Contributing writer

When it comes to the disorganized home, professional organizer Monica Friel has seen it all.

"We've seen lots of horrible messes," says Friel, owner of Chicago-based Chaos to Order. "The worst are when people actually have to create paths in their home in order to walk, because there's junk everywhere."

Just four years ago Monica Cilley had that kind of home. "You couldn't even walk in our house," Cilley recalls. Things were so bad, she says, visitors had to sit on the front porch because sitting down in the house was impossible.

So Cilley decided to turn over a new leaf.

"I woke up on New Year's Day...and said to myself, 'This is the year I'm going to get organized,'" Cilley says.

And she kept her promise.

Not only did she get organized Cilley started a website about the subject, Flylady.com. Sort of a combination inspiration/common sense approach to taking control of your house, Flylady.com gets 3,000-4,000 hits per hour.

Pretty good for someone who once couldn't manage to empty her dishwasher. "I never dreamed this would happen," says Cilley, who employs 21 people to manage the website.

Cilley, Friel and other organization experts offer these tips to people whose homes are beginning to resemble mazes:

- **Throw things out.** "The biggest problem people have with trying to get organized is they think they can organize clutter," Cilley says. "They get these nice plastic containers and silk-lined boxes and when they're finished, their houses are in worse shape than when they started. They need to learn to get rid of clutter."

"We tell clients ahead of time that they have to be willing to get rid of stuff, otherwise it's a waste of our time and their money," says Friel, who charges \$60 an hour with a three-hour minimum per job. "If you save too many things it's very difficult to find what's really important. We often tell clients to try and live in their home as if they're moving next month."

- **Start small.** Cilley calls it taking "baby steps," but whatever you call it, it's important to break down any organization project, so it doesn't become overwhelming. "If it took 80 years to get that way it's not gonna happen in three hours," Friel says. For people who are having a hard time starting at all she recommends hiring a professional organizer for a few hours. "It's a lot less painful that way," she says.

- **Create a system.** Although it might sound complicated a system can be as simple as finding a spot for hats and gloves and a place for mail and bills. Whatever system you create, says professional organizer Barbara Schmidt, make sure it's visually appealing. "It's easier for your brain to process things if they look good," says Schmidt, owner of Room By Room organizers. Consistency is important, she says. "All the hangers in your closet should be the same, labels should all be the same too," she recommends.

- **Establish routines.** The difference between organized and disorganized people often boils down to one simple thing: routine. Organized folks know that without good maintenance routines it's only a matter of time before their homes get out of control again. Cilley is downright emotional about the subject. "I recommend that as soon as your feet hit the floor in the morning you should make your bed as fast as possible and then it's done," she says. Other important routines? Dressing completely in the morning even if you're working from home. Keeping your sink clean and dish-free. Creating regular laundry days. "We sang it as children, 'This is the way we wash our clothes every Monday morning,'" Cilley says. "We need a basic weekly plan."

- **Prioritize.** Even though Cilley is adamant about doing laundry the

right way ("it's a five-step process-sort, wash, dry, fold and put away"), don't get the wrong idea. She's no Martha Stewart. Perfectionism, she says, is the reason many of us are so disorganized in the first place. "Perfectionism makes us feel guilty and causes us to procrastinate," she says. Her solution? Prioritize. Taking care of oneself should be at the top of the list, she says. Dusting may be a little further down, but Cilley says most of us can squeeze in 15 minutes of cleaning here and there. After all it's not just about having a clean, organized home. "It's all about turning housekeeping from a form of drudgery into a joy," she says. "Everybody deserves a house that blesses them."