



BY
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Getting It Together

"I need to sort my life out," we moan, "I just gotta clean up my act." There are countless other ways to say it, but what it boils down to is, simply, DISORGANIZATION. The word alone intimidates, and the images it conjures up--cluttered closets, paper-strewn desks, scrawled-on schedule books--may drive many people to despair in the recognition of their own lives.

But who are these people? Does disorganization run only to the "Odd Couple" Oscars and White Rabbits of the world, those who are perpetually sloppy or late?

Not necessarily, says Monica Thompson, president of Chaos to Order.

"Everyone has a need or interest in how to get organized, from people who are messy to people who are already meticulous." In either case, this "need or interest" may stem from a self-perception of disorganization--whether that is actually true or not--and may lead to feelings of stress. "People by nature want to be in control," explains Help! Unlimited's Beverly Steinberg. "As adults we all feel we should be that way...Also, we feel frustration over not being able to find anything."

Such frustration has proven to be a goldmine for entrepreneurs. The public's interest in giving some temporal or spatial order to their lives is reflected in

the growing number of time and space management businesses founded in the last decade, and in the establishment of Packrats International and Messies Anonymous. In addition,

there is NAPO (National Association of Professional Organizers), formed in 1984. That NAPO itself has bloomed to some 350 members in seven years is proof positive of the demand for organization. By this token, the organization phenomenon is more than just a fad. John Welnack, president of Spaces, notes that the concern of his business is one which reflects modern society and

economics. "I think our society over the last 15 to 20 years has found a lot of things to spend money on. We've acquired more

goods than in the 50s--

and '60s--clothes especially,"

he says. "It becomes a

battle of attrition; you

want to find a way to fit

everything in."

And, Welnack adds, given the

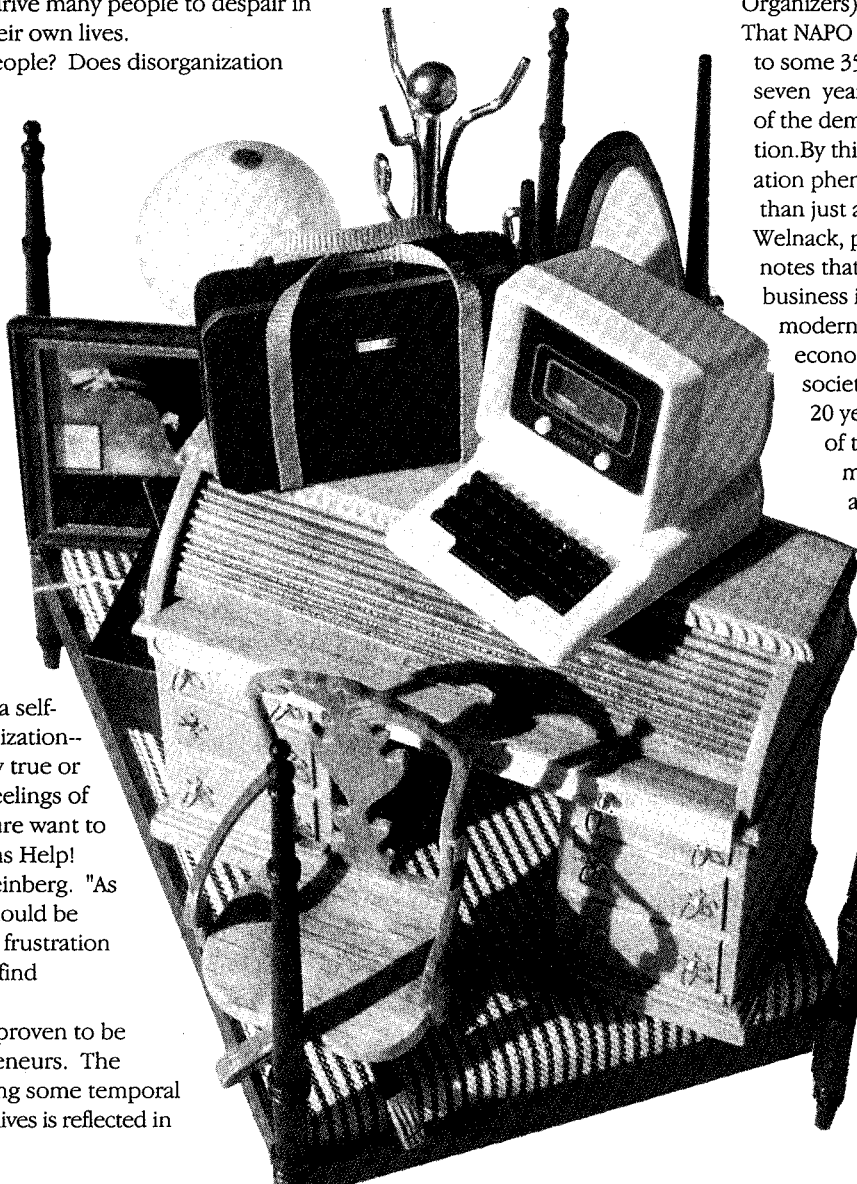
current recession, some think

"it's more cost-effective to stay

where you are." And in that

point lies one of

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the greater advantages to organization. "It doesn't require any great investment," Steinberg emphasizes. "You don't have to spend gobs of money." Many of the simple tools used by professional organizers, such as colored pens or files, can easily be found in the home or office. Of course, an additional investment of time is also necessary in putting your affairs in order. But in comparison to the amount of time wasted in searching for lost items, it's an investment which will pay off in efficiency at work--and increased leisure time. Thalia Poulos, president of Time Planners and NAPO's Chicago chapter, notes that the latter advantage is one which is especially valuable to people today. Alluding to Time magazine's recent assertion that "leisure will be to the 90's what money was to the 80's," she explains that "people who have worked their brains out are suddenly saying, 'All we have is time...What can I do so that I have more time for myself [and] my personal life?'"

Part of the answer lies in the term "organization."

Commitment to Change

Organization, however, is a very broad term; some, knowing only that they wish to "get organized," may not know where to begin. Such people might start by identifying their current behavior which leads to disorganization--like continued procrastination--and examining what advantages they derive from it. Psychology professor Irwin Alloff, who teaches life-management seminars at the Discovery Center, urges people to question such self-defeating actions before committing to change. "In order to change something," he explains, "you must see what you'll be giving up." By indulging in the habit of procrastination, for example, people may get some "positive energy" by rushing about at the last minute to achieve their tasks, or by the thought that such behavior is a sort of "rebellion" against their parents' standards. These "advantages," once noted, may be seen in the proper light as *disadvantages*, and thus enable people to work on new behavior patterns for a more ordered lifestyle.

Just Do It!

Establishing new patterns of organization *are* more easily desired than done, it is true. But, as Thompson says, "although it takes some people more time than others, anybody can be organized if there's a desire." That said, here are a few tips for finding that extra bit of time or space:

- Make better use of vertical space. "What we find is that in a lot of spaces," Welack says, "people don't make good use of [it]." Installing wall units, racks, and shelves in your closets and pantries may free up more room for items which must be stored horizontally.

- Identify superfluous objects by a test: Box your belongings, date the boxes and store them away for a year. "If you don't look for anything in a box during that year," Steinberg advises, "throw it away."

- Work with accessibility. "The things you use the most should be right there for you up front," Thompson says. "For example, you put your drinking glasses near the dishwasher. People think they have to have everything at their fingertips, [but] it depends on how often you use something."

- Control your paper flow by setting limitations. "A lot of people like to save paper, like articles, magazines, catalogs..." Thompson notes. Such packratting can lead to an overwhelming accumulation of paper, if none of it is thrown away. Consider reducing your "paper" by getting rid of everything older than three months.

- Keep a master appointment or "to-do" book, a sort of personalized "Filofax." Through such a book, Poulos says, "you can write down your daily goals in one place to help make them seem more meaningful, and to check back to see if you've accomplished them...Instead of moving something to a pile, [where it might be lost,] put it on a to-do list."

- Don't be afraid to delegate. "It's difficult for some people to delegate," Poulos notes. "They feel that no one else can do a job like they can. True...but others might even do it better!" Delegation of tasks allows people to give more time and attention to more pressing matters. □



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