



Neat Freak News

Bimonthly organizational tips for home, work and life.

www.neat-freak.com

NEAT FREAK NEWS: Winter 2008

As 2008 starts to wind down, my wish for you is that you find time to relax and truly treasure all that is important to you. I think one of the great lessons to come out of the good, bad and ugly of 2008 is that “less truly is more” (well...maybe with the exception of the stock market). I hope the holiday season allows you to look around and appreciate what you have, rid yourself of the things that get in the way of living, and look forward to 2009 with a sense of hope. Happy Holidays!

This month I'm wrapping up my year-long series on organizing your home, top to bottom. You can buy books that will tell you how to do this, but hey...why not read it here for free! Check out my newsletter every other month, follow my advice (as much as you can stand), and by the end of 2008, I guarantee you'll be living with less and have more room to breathe. Enjoy.

HOME OFFICE

Whether you have a built-in-bookshelf beauty of a home office or just a simple table next to your front door, we all need an “office away from the office” to manage our lives. You know, the mail, the bills, the important papers, the invitations...you get the picture. Here are my favorite hard and fast rules for keeping your home office, be it elfin or enormous, running like a well-oiled machine.

**Horizontal is a no-no. Whenever possible, avoid putting paper in a horizontal position (or you'll quickly have a pile on your hands). Use vertical tools such as hanging files, wall mounted magazine sorters or simple bill sorters to keep paper on the up and up.

**Establish a routine, and stick with it! Some very organized people I know only open their mail once a week...and that's just fine. Find a schedule for dealing with the paper and to-do items in your life and make it a habit. Immediately get rid of what you don't need, and then take action on the rest.

**Don't be a junk mail junkie. Check out my recipe for a Junk Mail diet at <http://neatfreak.wordpress.com> (search for junk mail) and get back eight months of your life!

**Categorize the paper in your life and give it a home. Most paper falls into one of the following categories (and it's only worth keeping if you know where it is):

Sentimental paper includes special cards and letters, photos, important family documents, and memorabilia. Consider acid free boxes to store the truly special stuff in your life so it will still be around for the next generation to enjoy.

Legal documents include wills, social security cards, birth certificates, paper related to your marital status, passports, tax, real estate and property documents. Store in a fire safe box in your home, or better yet, consider storing it in a safe deposit box offsite.

Action items include bills, documents to be signed, and important papers to read. Best kept in a spot where you'll see them and remember to take action! Schedule time on your calendar at least once a week to look through action items and take care of them. A red folder marked IMPORTANT might catch your eye.

Calendar items include invitations, tasks with a deadline and appointments. Copy this info into your calendar and then let the paper go.

****Clear it.** Make it a habit to clear your work surface at the end of each workday. Starting your day with a clear surface can do wonders for your attitude, focus and productivity.

****Tools:** Consider the tools that you need on a regular basis in your home office space (stamps, envelopes, sticky notes, paper clips, scissors, staplers, etc.). Then containerize, containerize, containerize. Whether you keep items in a desk drawer or a shoebox, just find a way to store the tools you use most so you don't waste precious time searching for them when you need them.

****Tech Tools** can quickly become clutter if gadgets, cords and chargers are filling your workspace. Consider a charging station to keep these items under control. And while you're at it, tame your computer cords with Velcro strips so the back of your desk doesn't become a jungle.

****That "other" desktop:** treat your computer desktop just like you would your actual desktop. Have a place for everything and everything in its place. Get rid of unwanted/unnecessary documents so your computer doesn't become just another place for clutter.

One of my favorite blogs, www.unclutterer.com, offers a peek at some amazing home offices each Friday on their "Workspace of the Week" Flickr pool. Check it out for a voyeuristic glimpse at the home offices of people around the world. Maybe you'll find an image that inspires you!

FREAKIE FREEBIES

Get a jumpstart on your organizational new years resolutions with some of these tips:

**My junk mail diet includes favorites such as Greendimes.com and CatalogChoice.org and now there's a new kid on the block called ProQuo.com. It's FREE...so what are you waiting for? Sign up now to opt out of credit-card solicitations, catalogs, Valpak coupons, sweepstakes and more.

**If that big honkin' phone book is doing no more for you than propping up furniture or acting as a make-shift booster seat, recycle it and then say "no more!" Let your fingers do the walking to yellowpagesgoesgreen.org and tell them "thanks, but no thanks" for that tree wasting paper hog.

**Want to go high-tech when it comes to tracking your resolutions? Check out LifeTick (www.lifetick.com). LifeTick is web-based software that allows you to enter your goals, set up reminders, check your progress, and stay motivated...all for FREE (an upgraded version is available for \$20/year).

'TIS THE SEASON...

...for gift giving. As you may recall from last year, I'm a huge fan of alternative, clutter-free gifts. Some dear friends and I have started a tradition we call the "Giving Party" where we encourage friends to give to charities and then pass that donation along as an alternative gift in honor of loved ones. You can read more about this year's success at: <http://www.newsobserver.com/102/story/1324489.html>

Other great alternative, clutter-free gifts include:

**NEAT FREAK Gift Certificates: Give the gift that keeps on giving...an organized home and/or office! Email me at perri@neat-freak.com to order gift certificates for this holiday season. What better way to say "Happy Holidays...I love you...now will you kindly clean up your mess."

**Movie cards, iTunes, Zoo/Museum passes, or Netflix memberships provide entertainment without creating clutter.

**The Gift of Time: Give someone you care about an entire afternoon of your undivided attention. No Blackberry, no email, no cell phone, no TV...just you and someone you enjoy--sitting, talking, drinking tea, solving the problems of the world, or just watching the birds fly by.