



Neat Freak News

Bimonthly organizational tips for home, work and life.

www.neat-freak.com

NEAT FREAK NEWS: February 2009

Happy 2009! Last year I covered home organization, top to bottom, room by room (archives coming to neat-freak.com soon, I promise!). This year I thought it would be interesting to take a more personal look at organization—how it impacts our relationships, our time, our work and our lives.

Also, I'll be addressing your most pressing organizational questions this year in Neat Freak News. If there is a problem you want solved or an organizational challenge you just can't quite work out, "Ask the Neat Freak" and I'll answer it here (names will be spared to protect the cluttered!).

Enjoy. And I hope 2009 is your neatest year yet!

LIVING WITH A "MESSY"...A Survival Guide

After four years in business, I've lost count of the number of times I've been called in by a client and asked to "please make my husband/wife/significant other clean up their crap!" This usually results in my need to clarify my role as an organizer, not a marriage therapist. But I do have faith that "Oscars" and "Felixes" can peacefully co-exist—with a little work from both sides. If you're neat and live with a "messy" (or vice-versa) and it doesn't bother you one bit, you can stop reading and skim to the bottom. But if there is growing animosity over your conflicting organizational styles, I encourage you to read on.

As with all relationship issues, expecting someone to change can be dangerous territory. If your significant other has been living in chaos most of their lives, don't expect them to go all "Martha" on you just because you decide to share an address. Prior to moving in together, it's always helpful to discuss your expectations for financial responsibilities, cooking, cleaning and general de-cluttering. Have this conversation first so expectations aren't dashed from the get go.

If you're months or years or even decades into an Oscar/Felix living arrangement and the tension is mounting, it's time to take action. Here are a few ways to get the conversation going:

****Decide which hill you want to die on.** Expecting to walk into a spotless home everyday is incredibly unrealistic for most of us (although I do waste a few minutes each day

fantasizing about such a life). Set priorities, discuss them, and get on the same team. Perhaps your partner can agree to change his/her behavior surrounding the ONE thing that most gets your dander up (e.g. clothes on the floor, always misplacing a cell phone, three weeks of newspaper strewn about) and in exchange, you agree to lighten up on something he/she really doesn't care to change.

****Agree on systems that make it easier for a "messy" to keep their things in order. That could be hanging a hook next to the door for keys, keeping a laundry basket in the bathroom, or setting up a charging station for gadgets that often get misplaced or have dead batteries when needed.**

****Give your "messy" a room to mess up! Perhaps you want your public spaces to stay relatively uncluttered, but your family room or garage can be a little less "Sleeping with the Enemy." Pick your battles and let the other areas slide.**

****Raise your hand if you enjoy being nagged. Hmmmm...that's what I thought. Put on your therapist's hat, use your "I feel..." language, and come to a common understanding about why living a more organized life is important to you. Point out the benefits that help your relationship and life overall (e.g. more relaxed time together on the weekends, no late fees for bills left unpaid, exposing your children to organizational life skills that will help them in school and work). But, for the love of all things tidy, try not to nag!**

****And don't forget to reward yourselves for meeting in the middle! Go out to dinner to celebrate your success, indulge in an overnight vacation, or simply take an afternoon walk in the sunshine. Work without reward is just that...work! The ultimate prize is a respectful relationship filled with understanding...and a little less mess.**

FREAKY FREEBIES:

Perhaps you've noticed, but, um, our economy is looking a little ragged these days. Here are my four favorite reasons why NOW is an excellent time to get organized!

****You're probably buying less. Use this time to really determine what items are most important to you, and let the rest go!**

****An organized bill paying system will help you avoid pesky late fees. Have a place to pay bills, keep it stocked with stamps and checks, or better yet, set up automatic bill pay through your bank so you'll never miss a payment again.**

****Dwelling on bad choices or regrets can lead to depression (and really, there's enough bad news out there already!). Use this time as an opportunity to rid your life of things from the past, freeing up your space and time for the things that truly matter to you and will bring you the brighter future you long for.**

****Save money by swapping with friends. If you have a shelf full of books you loved but won't re-read, trade with a friend. Same goes for clothes, toys, home décor. Your "trash" may be someone else's treasure...and swapping will save you money AND space. If you**

want to make the trade temporary, check out www.lendaround.com for a way to track what you lend and borrow.

ASK THE NEAT FREAK

Q: With new consumer protection legislation recently passed, my tried and true donation spots are no longer accepting toys. What's an overloaded mom to do with all of this plastic I want to part with?

A: I feel your pain! My regular donation trips to our local Thrift Shop came to a sudden halt last week. But if your toys are in good condition and you know they were not involved in any recalls, you can still pass them along to friends, FREECycle them (freecycle.com) or consider hosting a toy swap night at your preschool, church or child's school. You might also call your local Ronald McDonald House to see if they'll take them, or other local charities that serve children. Finally, check your local landfill. Ours has a FREE shed where you can leave things that are still perfectly good for others to pick up. While you won't enjoy the tax benefits of donating items, you can still feel good that another child will enjoy playing with them.