



## NEAT FREAK NEWS: February 2010

Happy almost Ground Hog Day. I decided to celebrate a little *January in February* this year. I figured you'd had enough of new years resolution/goal setting/"get 'er done" talk in January to last you all 31 days. So I held off. Here I am, almost in February, checking in to see how you're doing. Organized yet? Meeting those goals? On the road to clutter-recovery? Hope so! But if not, no worries...getting organized is a marathon, not a sprint. Indulge me while I take this running metaphor a little further...

I recently trained for and ran a half-marathon. For me, this was a significant accomplishment. Just nine months ago I was quick to claim I would only run if someone (and that "someone" probably looked mean and scary) was chasing me. So to go from that statement to running 13.1 miles was huge! Throughout the training process, I often thought how distance running is much like getting organized. Starting is easy, but continuing is hard. Many times I would start a run with great expectations, but half way in, I'd just want to give up. Organizing can be so similar. We have good intentions. We're motivated, ready to change, get rid of the clutter and live a different life. But somewhere along the way we get tired, unmotivated, overwhelmed, or just plain over it. Sometimes you have to just keep putting one foot in front of the other...

- Remind yourself that delayed gratification is hard, but oh-so-worth it! There are short-term goals (running around the block, clearing your dining room table so you can eat) and long-term goals (running a distance race, having an organized home that reflects who you are and how you want to live). To keep marching in the right direction, you have to keep both short-term and long-term goals in mind. Frequently remind yourself why you want to live a different life today and tomorrow.
- Falling off the wagon for a while doesn't mean you've failed. Life happens, we all have set backs. But if your goal is to change your life and shovel out from under the stuff that is getting in the way of living, it's worth it to get back on that horse and get going again. Beating yourself up about an organizing setback takes up valuable energy you could be using to do something worthwhile. The "why did I fall back into my old ways?" question is important. But the "what am I going to do today to get back on track?" question is even more so.
- What is your carrot? Why do you want to get organized now? Why do you want to change the way your home or office or car or corner of the world makes you feel? Running a half marathon for me was all about accomplishing a major goal. 40 is about to slap me in the crows feet and I figured no one was going to make me get up every morning and put on my running shoes but me. I wanted to run to feel good, prove to myself I could do something remarkable, and have more energy for my family. Digging out from underneath clutter that is holding you

back, suffocating you, or just keeping you from living the remarkable life you want to live is reason enough to get started today. Determine what your carrot is and dangle away.

- Starting is easy, but continuing is hard. Crossing the finish line is amazing... celebrate it! But to maintain change, our work is never done. I decided not to hang up my running shoes after my November race because I realized I actually love running. Or, more honestly, I love how I feel after a run. And that's enough to keep me going. Organization is the same—once you get there, you've got to maintain it. Daily, weekly, annually—you've got to keep reminding yourself why you want to be organized and how it makes your life more extraordinary. And really...that's what its all about!

*\*\*hint, hint...these things work for ALL goals (better money management, weight loss, kick-butt career moves, or just being sillier and having more fun every day. Now get to it!).*

### **ASK THE NEAT FREAK**

*Q:* Dear Neat Freak,

One of my many issues is that I'm always starting something and leaving it incomplete. If I'm folding laundry I'll get distracted and before you know it, I'm in the kitchen loading the dishwasher. Of course the laundry is still there and knowing me, I probably didn't even finish the kitchen because I went into my bedroom to get something and ended up tidying up in there. Help me stay on track!

Signed,  
Driven to Distraction

*A:* Dear Distracted,

To cure your distraction blues, set small alarms for yourself throughout the day. Set a kitchen timer, or, even better, get a small stopwatch you can wear around your neck. Set the timer for 5 minutes (or as long as it typically takes you to complete the task you're working on). When the timer goes off, stop and ask yourself if you're doing what you set out to do. Is the laundry folded and put away? Is the dishwasher empty? If you've strayed, just simply return to the initial task and set the timer again.

If you're a visual person, you might benefit from a timer such as this:

<http://www.timetimer.com> (and of course, there's an App for that!) that shows you how much time you've used and how much time you have left. You can even download free timers online to use while you work at your computer. If you find yourself straying to email or web searches while trying to complete a project, set a timer. Every time it goes off, ask yourself if you're doing the task you set out to do, then redirect yourself if not.

Mac users, check out: <http://www.robbehanson.com/alarmclock/index.html>

PC users, visit: <http://www.xnotestopwatch.com/>

No need to beat yourself up...multitasking has ruined even the most organized of us...it's so easy to stray! Just get back to it.

Signed,  
The Neat Freak