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Re: CES column for Our Town, Tuesday, March 8, 2011

We just moved the Tanana District office to new quarters at the Fairbanks Community Food Bank after 11 years at the University Park building. It has become painfully apparent to me that I am a packrat. I found three different methods of computer storage (floppy disks, zip drives and thumb drives) and a pile of paper that cannot be described. All these forms of storage show just how much I hate to let go of things. It has been difficult to go through it all and pack up what needs to be moved. I’ve asked myself a million times, “Is this important?”

Organizing is one of those projects that simply gets overlooked in our daily life. As long as we have a place to put something, it will go there. Then when we empty out closets and begin moving, we see what is really there. Maybe a move at your office is not in the future, but the same scenarios may be playing out at home.

Spring is coming and for most of us, a little spring cleaning may be in your future. This year take a few minutes to organize before you clean to make your life easier the rest of the year. For most of us, organizing is not the challenge. Getting motivated to organize is the challenge.

Why do it? If you’ve ever searched for your car keys when you need to be gone, that is a reason. Think about the minor annoyances in your life and how you can change them. Keys can be placed on a hook by the door or in a certain place each time. If you have trouble cooking a meal because of the mess on the counter, take a few minutes to clean it off and find a way to control the chaos. Think about a basket to catch the mail and newspapers as they come in the door or a box for important papers from the kids’ school.

If you are like me, there never seems to be time to organize. The idea of going through the whole house and getting organized is daunting. So here’s a quick suggestion. Break that big task into small ones can be done in a short length of time.

Commit to organizing for just 15 minutes every day. Not only is 15 minutes a day easier to accomplish, it turns organizing into a daily habit, improving the odds that you will stay organized. Each day as you begin the organizing session, use these hints.

Target a specific task, such as sorting a pile of mail or organizing your junk drawer. When my kitchen needs organizing, I start at one cabinet and rotate through the room
until the job is finished. It takes me more than a week to finish, but food preparation goes much smoother when I’m not fighting to get something into or out of a cabinet.

Set a timer. The rush that comes with working against a clock will help you accomplish more. When my kids were small, we would do a “five-minute pickup.” We would set the timer, and they would race around to see how much we could do to make the house presentable in that short amount of time.

Put on music. Choose music you enjoy, but listen to calming songs if organizing makes you anxious or upbeat songs if organizing makes you unhappy, bored or lethargic. Singing along can provide an additional energy boost.

Think about your motivation as you organize. Don’t beat yourself up because everything is such a mess, or even think how much you hate doing this job. Focus on the result — an organized space — and continue to work until the timer goes off.

Consider enlisting an organizing buddy. If you have trouble sticking to your daily organizing schedule, ask a friend who lives nearby to come over to help you. Offer to help this person with one of his/her household chores in exchange. Adding a social element makes organizing more pleasant. Be sure to choose an organizing buddy who has a strong ability to focus and who is not judgmental.

Organizing can help your life run more smoothly. Spend a few minutes each day making that happen. Now, I’ll have to take on my new office.

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