

ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE IN 1 SINGLE AFTERNOON

expanded version



OMGoodness! Are you so overwhelmed sometimes that you just want to throw your hands up? Do you not even know where to begin? I know the feeling.

Everyday is a battle to keep on top of work things and home things- which is a little complicated since I work from home. My office (fancy word for room above the garage) is my haven. I have casually and quietly decorated it. It's a work in progress, but it's mine nonetheless.

And then my girls come in and the room explodes with markers and coloring pages and food everywhere!

Then in a heartbeat, they take off and run to the next thing! Sometimes- *most of the time*- with me running after them! What happened to my office? It was so nice before....

Honestly, this was a metaphor for my life: It's clean, it's messy, it's clean, then messy again. Total mom life!

I wish I could block out the messiness on command, but when I try to get back to work, I know I won't be able to focus until I tidy up the room again. Which soon turns into me getting distracted by the little messes that have cropped up in other rooms throughout my home... and doing a quick load of laundry... and then the phone rings. Then it becomes 8pm and I've gotten nowhere on the projects that actually, you know, make money for said household.

So frustrating!

But from frustration bloomed a solution. That's how I came up with this guide. A messy house is inevitable, but manageable with the right attitude and strategies. Instead of getting so stressed out that you don't know where to begin, commit to getting organized in one single afternoon. Yup, that's right. In the time that you could distract yourself from your problems with a few episodes of *SVU* or *Sex and the City*, you can actually solve those problems.

I use Sunday afternoons to prepare for the week ahead, and this is how it goes:

1. Get Caffeinated

Yep, I said it. My motivation to get my life in order isn't magically there when I wake up in the morning. It needs a nudge sometimes, via some coffee black, iced, or au lait.

I am an absolute zombie some afternoons, especially after cheering on my kids at an 8am soccer game, but I don't have the desire or ability to crash on the sofa like a 22 year old with all the time in the world and no responsibilities. I like my responsibilities and the life I worked hard for! I just need some help getting ready to tackle them at times! So Starbucks here I come. Tejava - set me straight.

If coffee isn't your thing, there's of course black tea and green tea, but have you heard of yerba mate? Like green tea, it's cheap and tastes fine without adding dairy or sweeteners. If sweet and flavorful is more your thing, however, you might want to try the Mamma Chia Energy Beverage (naturally caffeinated with organic guayusa tea), or GT's Synergy Kombucha.

Maybe for you it's more about harnessing the power of endorphins and waking yourself up with a brisk walk or jog. Skip the caffeine. Skip the sugar (and I really mean that) and go for a walk. Do some jumping jacks or try a quick, 15-minute Youtube workout video (here's [a personal favorite!](#)) Whatever it is you enjoy doing, the goal isn't to tire yourself out. Use that time to mentally set your intentions for the rest of the afternoon. This is just the warm-up!

2. Avoid All Distractions

You ever notice how *just* when you plan to start a project, 500 other options pop up? Don't let yourself get off track. If it wasn't a pressing matter before you had something less-than-exciting to do (read: cleaning), it can wait. Your afternoon has to be reserved solely for organization, or it'll never get done. That means not running out to the store after straightening up one room, or calling up your chattiest friend to see how her day is going.

Warning: not all distractions are as obvious as they appear. Sometimes I'll be putting things away in the master bathroom, and next thing you know I'm cleaning the grout in the shower and haven't done anything else. Stay focused on the bigger picture! You don't need to re-organize the soups in the pantry; you need to make your living space more, well, livable. If you come across a more in-depth, time-consuming project, add it to your list of things to take on later (see #5 below).

Commit yourself to a productive afternoon.

3. Let the Kids Watch Cartoons

Yep, I said that, too. I know who I'm talking to. You're the mom who wants to do the right thing for her kids. The mom that wants to have a neat house and dinners on the table. She wants to have her side gig, her *successful* side gig. She wants it all, or at least a little bit more.

And yet here I am saying that it is okay to put the TV on and let your kids hang out in front of it for a little while. (Now, I can't guarantee how long they will stay there, but the point is to get a few minutes where their attention is elsewhere.) Get your kids in a position where they are focused on something besides you. Something that you will not have to sweep up or scrub from the walls later, because, ahem, your goal is less work.

4. Straighten Your House. Don't Clean It. Straighten It.

My mother would fall flat on the floor hearing that advice come from me. (You'll understand more with [my most popular blog post about my relationship with my mom.](#))

I'm a modern woman and a modern mom. I can't believe I am actually telling you to tidy up your home, but I promise it has nothing to do with antiquated gender roles and *everything* to do with helping you feel centered enough to reach your potential!

Here's the thing about cleaning up: it clears out the clutter of your mind, too. Whether it's feng shui or lack of dust or what, you just feel better with a neat, organized room. This is an investment in your happiness.

A deep clean of your house takes time, though, so the goal here is to focus on the tasks that get the most noticeable result in the least amount of time. What messes annoy you the most?

Here's what I do to power through and straighten up as quickly as I can without just moving piles from one place to another:

- Start with the kitchen. **Clean out the sinks, load the dishwasher, and clear the counters.** Throw out the fruit that's starting to go bad- you know you're not going to eat it and it will just attract flies- or put it in Ziplocs in the freezer to use for smoothies when you have more time. Stack the mail and notices together in a pile where you can go through them later (and more quickly since you'll be able to find them all). Phew!
- Clear out the toys and random items in your family and dining rooms. **Move anything that doesn't belong in these rooms out.** Place them on the stairs to go up later if that's where they belong.

Don't actually bring everything upstairs- that's a distraction trap waiting to happen. Focus on the room you're in, one room at a time. Make a pile for the garage, if need be.

- Fluff pillows. Fold throw blankets. Wipe tables clean. Shoes in the closet.
- Once the family room and dining rooms are straight, put away the piles you made earlier for other downstairs rooms. If you had a garage pile, bring that out to the garage and get those items back where they belong and so on until your downstairs floor is free and clear.
- Now it's time to move upstairs. **Here's where I recruit my kids to help me.** All they need to do is find what belongs to them in the pile by the stairs and bring it upstairs to put it away.
- Now that we're upstairs, the **dirty clothes go in the hampers.**
- The **beds get made** if they aren't already. (I love to make my bed in the morning. It instantly improves the aesthetics of my room and makes me feel productive within minutes of waking!)
- The rest of my **piles get distributed to the places they belong.**
- As a bonus, I light a seasonal or aromatherapeutic candle in the entryway or kitchen to sort of hit 'reset' and freshen up whatever smells have lingered from past dinners or my husband's running shoes!

You did it! You should be proud and happy to have a neat, comfortable home again! To feel even more productive while I straighten everything up, I throw my headphones in and **listen to a book on Audible or a great [Podcast!](#)** (Ummm hellooo of course!)

5. Make Your Lists

I love lists. Do you love lists? If you're not a convert, I firmly believe it's because you haven't witnessed firsthand how crazy useful they are for EVERYTHING. They help you look back on what needs to be done, removing the stress of relying on memorization alone, and the process of

writing everything down is almost cathartic. It forces you to thoughtfully consider things and organize them mentally, which is half the battle. Plus it is so satisfying to be able to cross things off as you accomplish them.

Try a few of these:

- **Meals** - what and where are you and your family going to eat. Use a week as your timeframe to begin. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but my oh my how helpful it will be to know what you're going to have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner instead of trying to decide on something once the hangriness has set in. Plus it will help you with your next list:
- **Groceries** - Planning meals out ahead of time forces you to take stock of what food items you have plenty of, which are expiring soon and need to be used, and what you're in need of. You can spend less on groceries because you won't be shopping with your stomach, but with your list. And that list will consist of what you know you will need for the week, so you don't have to guess at what you might need... at some point... eventually.
- **Follow Up** - Who is waiting on a response, either by email, phone, or messenger app? Who needs what from you? On the other hand, who hasn't responded to you and needs to be followed up with again? As nice as it would be to have a personal assistant keeping a detailed call sheet for me, that's not reality. Sometimes I miss a call and completely forget about it, so this is my way of making sure nothing falls through the cracks.
- **Preparation for Tomorrow** - Easily one of my most useful lists, this has proven to be a lifesaver time and time again. I write out what I need to remember for tomorrow. I am constantly forgetting different things that need to be packed up for the girls, whether it be homework or flip flops or money for the book fair. It's always something, but when I plan it out ahead of time, I have a better shot of getting it right.

- **To-Do for This Week** - And this week only! Star or highlight the most important ones, but keep it to what is manageable for the next 7 days. It's an obvious one as far as lists go, but I like to go a step further in organizing my life and break it down into:
 - **To-do Business** - What I have to accomplish this week in my work life. Deadlines. Meetings.
 - **To-do Personal** - What needs to get done around the house, involving my family, or just in general. Doctor's appointments. Bills. Errands.
- **To - Do Long Term** - These are the things I'd like to tackle, but with no set deadline, such as home improvement projects or goals I have for myself, my family, and business. Basically, I write down anything I don't want to forget, but that I don't have time for right this minute or this week. Then, when I happen to be feeling motivated and have some free time (so rare!) I have this list to pull a project from!
- **Grievances** - Not to get too sentimental on you, but I have found value in making a list of things that are bothering me at the moment. When I get completely overwhelmed, annoyed, or stressed out and anxious, I try to take a couple minutes and write down the worries and conflicts that are making me feel this way. A lot of the time, they're so far in the background of my mind that I didn't even realize why I was feeling grumpy or bogged down. It's a little like journaling, since I don't expect myself to fix every little thing that's bothering me. The point is to identify them. Besides, usually once they're on paper, they're not half as terrible as they felt when confined to my mind!

Now you're probably feeling a mix of accomplishment and overwhelmedness. Don't let the latter overpower the former. You are nearing the end of my steps, and already so much further than you were before!

6. Calendar Blocking

Calendar blocking is a funny beast. There's not an exact science to it but there are some real benefits of taking a look at your calendar and filling in your To-Do list items where there is open space. Yes, you have a list of commitments and deadlines, but being able to spatially see where they line up in relation to one another on a calendar is its own separate organizational tactic. Whether it's a monthly Yoga Cat calendar hanging on your refrigerator, a large desk calendar in your office, or the digital one in Microsoft Outlook, choose what works best for you (i.e. what you will actually use and reference daily).

1. First, add in all of your appointments and activities that are non-negotiable. Do the kids have basketball practice? Do you have work meetings? Or a Moms Night Out? All of that goes into your calendar first and foremost.
2. The space leftover is your "free" time. There's not a lot of it I'm sure! Use your to-do lists to fill in the open spots, down to the follow-up calls and grocery shopping days. If you need to make a reservation with yourself to get something done, then so be it!

7. Forward Thinking

Now that the bulk of your organization is completed, sit back on your tidy couch and do some planning for the future. You accomplished so much today, but there are a few items to look into that can minimize the effort needed to straighten your home. Think of these as organizing investments.

P.S. You're welcome for making online shopping an important activity for cleaning your home.

- **Memory Boxes** - It's so unbelievably hard to throw away anything from my kids' childhood, but it's also impossible not to have clutter

if you don't. Purchasing a memory box for each child can be the answer to storing the most important memories, without letting them take over your entire house. Choose a sturdy, opaque material (steel works great) to protect the contents from sunlight and time. Decide with your child what arts and crafts, science projects, recital programs, etc. are most important and store them for years to come inside. (What doesn't make the cut can be photographed and kept online, where they won't be forgotten.) Decorate the outside with your child's name and cute stickers or paint, and then put it away until it's needed again.

- **Dry-Erase Weekly Calendar** - Make your good habits part of your family's routine as well. I got my girls started with a dry-erase weekly calendar so that they can see what their week looks like every night when they go to bed. I got them fun-colored markers and encourage them to use their assignment pads to jot down when they have tests, quizzes, playdates, and practices.
- **A really good planner** - Because where else will you keep all of those lists? I prefer one without the dates already put in for you, because some of my days need a whole page, but go with whatever works for you. Pick one with a sassy phrase on the front to remind yourself that you're a bad ass, and then take that thing with you everywhere! It's your second brain, if you use it right.
- **Money Management Apps** - There is an app for everything, so of course there's one for keeping tabs on where your funds are going. This is a matter of personal preference, so do some research on which app has the benefits you're interested in. Having a visual depiction of your spending habits can be a complete game-changer. Need a suggestion? Look into [Mint](#).

Now you are set for the rest of the week. You have a solid idea what is going to happen and what needs to happen the rest of the week.

Your life is organized to point where you are starting off on the right foot. Clean, ready to go, knowledgeable.

Be kind to yourself, allow that things are going to change and work your schedule.

Good luck!! Let me know how it goes!

XXOO,

Ashleigh