

Interiors

BY CATHERINE MURRELL



Name: Melanie Stokes

Position: Owner and organizing/feng shui consultant, Intuitive Living, www.intuitiveliving.net. Stokes lives in Jeffersonsontown.

Resume: Stokes began working as an organizing and feng shui consultant three years ago when she lived in Richmond, Va. She moved her business to Louisville 1½ years ago.

Quote: "If your home is a reflection of who you are, then a cluttered home is a reflection of a cluttered mind."

Clean out the clutter to energize your home

Q: Can you offer some guidelines for effective spring cleaning?

A: Now that the weather is getting nice and things are starting to bloom and blossom, we want to open up our windows and air out the house. The weather just enlivens our enthusiasm to clear out stuff and start fresh. Spring cleaning presents a wonderful opportunity to clear out clutter, change out your winter clothes for your summer clothes and bring some new energy into your house.

A lot of people get totally overwhelmed. The solution is to start with baby steps — do one bit at a time. If you feel overwhelmed and don't even know where to start, start with the space that is bothering you the most. Attack that area.

Look around your home and identify the area where you want to begin. Then I recommend taking the ap-

proach outlined by Julie Morgenstern — I consider her the goddess of all organizing. She uses an acronym, SPACE, for the steps to organizing.

The "S" stands for sorting. That's where you start. If you're going through your closet, you have to pull everything out and, as you're pulling things out, start sorting them. Put like with like, shoes together, purses together and so forth. I recommend having bags or boxes set up. Label them "keep," "toss," "donate" or "sell." I also think it's good to get a little box for unknowns — the things you don't have any clue what to do with or what it goes to.

When you're sorting, don't leave the space in which you're working. Otherwise you can lapse into yo-yo organizing. That's when you find scissors in the bedroom and they belong in the office so you take them to the office and find something there that belongs in another room and you get hopelessly sidetracked.

Once you've sorted, you can move on to the "P," which is purge. You purge yourself of the things you don't need and don't use. If you discover you have 60 white blouses, then you go through and pick the ones you're likely to wear and give away the rest.

The "A" stands for assigning. ... You pick or make a place for your things. Decide whether you want your shoes hanging off the back of your closet door or on the closet floor.

Once you've assigned everything a home, you get to the "C" — picking the appropriate container. One of the biggest mistakes people make when they decide to get organized is to rush out and buy these containers before they know what they're going to be used for.

You need to sort and purge and decide where you want to store the items that you're keeping before you know what kind of container you'll need. You also need to measure the space and make sure you're getting something that is the right size.

Aesthetics is another consideration. Do you want baskets or plastic containers? If your organizational system looks nice, you're more likely to maintain it.

The last step, "E," is equalizing or evaluating your organizing system. That's the process of maintaining your system and adjusting it to meet your needs. You might decide that one way of storing your shoes worked for a while but that it's not working anymore.

Q: What advice do you have for the chronically disorganized?

A: If you want to begin getting organized and you really don't know how, just take baby steps. Decide that you're just going to spend an hour organizing your home office and start with just one drawer. You can set a timer. When the buzzer goes off, you stop. You really have to schedule the time. It's like any other appointment in your calendar. You really have to honor that appointment.

There are guidelines you can follow. I'd say you'd want to give yourself at least eight hours to clear out and organize your home office, especially if you're going to be going through files. Whatever task you're approaching, estimate how much time you think it will take and then multiply it by two. That generally is more realistic.

If getting organized is a struggle for you, consider getting help from a professional organizer. There's nothing wrong with having an organizer come in once a month or once every couple of months, or setting up an organizing maintenance plan. You visit your dentist every six months for maintenance. Sometimes you need a checkup.

Q: What are the benefits of clearing clutter and getting organized?

A: You reduce your stress level by being organized. You also enhance your living environment. Clutter just depletes the energy in a space. If you want to feel more active and more energetic, then being organized can really help.

You'll also save time and money. You can lose an hour a day looking for something and another hour procrastinating because you don't want to deal with the clutter. We waste so much time. Being organized gives you more time to spend with family, more time to read, more time to do the things you want to do.

Being organized also keeps you from spending more to mail things overnight because you waited until the last minute. You also won't buy duplicates of items you already have but can't locate — or items you already have but you don't remember you have.

A lot of people decide to move into bigger houses because they don't have enough room for all their stuff — but they don't consider the added costs. When you buy a bigger house, you've got a larger mortgage, higher heating and cooling costs and higher taxes. On top of that, there's the increased cost of maintaining your house.

Q: What wisdom does feng shui offer on the subject of getting organized?

A: Feng shui is all about making your space feel good. The first thing you've got to do is clear the clutter and the chaos. We have a tendency toward overconsumption, and the result is that our homes are often cluttered with things we don't necessarily even like. The goal is to create your own personal paradise by surrounding yourself with the things that you love, the things you need, the things you use.

Sometimes people are uncomfortable with the Chinese words, but they are already practicing feng shui in their own way. It's all about what feels good in your space. If you notice that you don't particularly like a picture you have hanging in your home, you remove it, sell it or give it to someone.

It's all about keeping energy or chi flowing through your space. If you have a dead plant or wilted flowers in a room, that brings down the energy. Replace wilted flowers or a dead plant with something alive and vibrant, and your space immediately becomes warmer and more inviting.