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Conquering clutter

Starting with small projects and learning to let go can help people get organized and reduce stress

By Nancy Arcayna

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Getting rid of clutter and organizing your belongings at home and in the office can increase productivity and reduces stress, so why not?

Although the benefits are well worth the effort, it's not always a New Year's resolution folks tend to keep, according to Karen Simon, productivity consultant for Island Organizers, a business that offers advice and hands-on organizing services to individuals and businesses.

"People don't get started because they are overwhelmed," she said. "Focusing on an entire garage or a whole room is too big. It needs to be broken down into smaller tasks to gain a sense of accomplishment. Organizing is a process, not a one-day project."

Simon, president of the Hawaii Association of Professional Organizers, suggests choosing a corner, a part of a closet or simply a drawer to get started. It's also a good idea to set a timer and work on an area for one hour "so it doesn't seem overwhelming."


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All of the items in the cleanup area should be removed and deposited accordingly in boxes labeled “keep,” “toss” or “donate.”

“If kids leave things where they don’t belong, put their name on a box and have them take care of their own stuff,” Simon added. “It’s important to teach kids to sort and organize.”

Once the boxes are sorted, the “keep” items need a home. Put like things together in a space designated for those types of items.

Simon refers to everything within arm’s reach when sitting or standing as “million-dollar real estate.” Only items most commonly used in that area belong there. The other stuff is clutter than can impede efficiency.

“You don’t want to walk across the kitchen to get a pan, plate or tool,” she said. “If bills are written at the table, they should be put in a portable file box or placed in a container, not just left on the counter. If things are jumbled, it takes time to find what you need. Uniformity creates a sense of calmness.”

Silverware trays and containers are helpful.

The sorting and purging process needs to be done at least

several times a year, she said.

“People have a difficult time, especially in Hawaii, letting go of things,” Simon added. “There is sentimental and cultural value attached to things.”

She suggests taking photos of certain items that may be taking up more space than they’re worth and then letting them go. “People take ‘recycle, reuse and reduce’ seriously, but you don’t need to keep everything in your house,” she said.

Simon also follows the rule: “If you buy something new, something old needs to go.” For example, if you buy new socks, throw away a pair of worn ones.

“Clutter is the result of unmade decisions,” she said. “It’s definitely a distraction.”

Reach Island Organizers at 943-2053 or www.islandorganizers.com.