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Once your organize your belonging into groups, it's easier to determine what you want to keep. (Pixel-Shot/Shutterstock)

FAMILY & HOME

Getting Organized: Making the Most of Life at Home

A conversation with professional organizer Darla DeMorrow

BY BARBARA DANZA | October 2, 2020 Updated: October 3, 2020 Print

These days, we're asking a lot of our homes—we need them to support us in our work life, school life, and our regular, everyday life. They've become our gyms, our schools, our offices, and our places for rest and rejuvenation.

With so much activity and time spent at home, things can get messy. Whether you've been wanting to organize certain parts of your home for a while or need better systems now to support the increased demands on your home, now's a good

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support the increased demands on your home, now's a good time to get organized.

I asked Darla DeMorrow, a certified professional organizer and founder of HeartWork Organizing for her advice. Here's what she said.

The Epoch Times: The demands on our spaces have increased significantly during this very unique year. How can organizing our homes help us get through these difficult times?

Darla DeMorrow is a certified professional organizer and founder of HeartWork Organizing. (Courtesy of Darla DeMorrow)

Darla DeMorrow: Home is everything right now, and we don't have an inch to spare. Being organized means that we can find room for school at home, hobbies that we no longer go out for, and breathing room so everyone can be together or alone when they need to be. Organizing a corner that always looks presentable and makes you look good on Zoom reduces the stress of having to be on camera much of the day, which is new for many of us.

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The Epoch Times: Families are trying to balance work, school, and leisure time all from home. What organizational strategies do you recommend to make things run smoothly?

Ms. DeMorrow: Everyone deserves their own "home office," even if it's not a room. Designate a place for papers and electronics, where you won't be distracted by other people. Most people work best at a desk, and that includes a kid-sized desk for the little ones. But kids also need to move around during the day, so let them hang out on their bed, in a cozy closet, or even a pup tent or a blanket fort. Everyone needs to have a comfortable set of earphones to keep the noise level down at home.

It's a new kind of insanity for working parents to have to keep track of multiple school schedules, so having a shared calendar and a daily check-in is crucial. Organized people may not realize that the obvious ways to stay organized may not be at all obvious to someone else, so go ahead and explain where things belong at home.

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If organizing your home seems like a daunting task, try taking on a smaller project. (New Africa/Shutterstock)

Most of all, make time to put things away at least once a day. Just like brushing your teeth, daily maintenance goes a long way in keeping everyone and everything mostly organized. Most of all, relax your expectations for just about everything, especially staying organized.

The Epoch Times: Some have found this time to be an opportunity to tackle projects they've been meaning to get to for a long time. When it comes to taking on a large organizational task, what steps do you recommend to get it done?

Ms. DeMorrow: First decide if you are planning a DIY project or a pro project. Do you really have the time right now? Would a pro get better results in less time? Find pros in your area or worldwide who can coach you virtually.

If you are doing it yourself, find a structure that will guide you without retracing your steps over and over. The "SORT and Succeed" system (Amazon.com/dp/B082J5SVYT) is a simple

five-step system that you can use on every small and large organizing project.

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Even if you don't have a room that serves as a home office, you can still organize part of a room, or a corner, to serve this purpose. (New Africa/Shutterstock)

Step 1 is to start with a written goal that is five words or less. This helps you focus on your project and eliminates

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distractions.

Step 2 is to organize into groups. This gets results fast, helping you figure out what you have without adding emotional stress with an artificial keep-or-toss decision.

Step 3 is reduce, release, and reset. Once you see what and how much of each group you have, it's much easier to part with things you no longer need or want. With your collections sorted and pared down, reset your cabinets, closets, and shelves, which will no longer be overstuffed.

Step 4 is tweak the space. This is when you can upgrade your storage containers and make sure that your most-used items are in easy-to-reach spots.

Step 5 is succeed by celebrating. A reward that you choose helps to train your brain to have fun organizing. Your reward can be a healthy walk or call to a friend. Once you've gotten through one small project like a closet, you can use the same system to get through any other project. You can use the same system to maintain your home in short 15-minute projects.

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These days, our homes play multiple roles; they serve as places to relax, play, and work. (Makistock/Shutterstock)

The Epoch Times: One organizational project that commonly gets put off is organizing photos. How can we finally tackle the thousands of photos that live on our digital devices—organizing them and printing those that we want to display and enjoy?

Ms. DeMorrow: If you have everything else organized, it's time to tackle the ultimate pandemic project: organizing your photos. Start by gathering all of your digital photos together in one place from old computers, USB drives, disks, your phone, and cloud services. Bringing all of these files together in one place is an important step in the process because you can back them up immediately, protecting them from loss and accidental damage.

Once they are on a single drive, you can use software to de-duplicate, rename, and move photos around in batches to get them organized. You can then review your physical photos,

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toss the duds (we all have them), and send the best ones out to be digitally scanned so they can be added to your digital collection. Scanning at home often yields poor results that have to be re-done, so it's worth paying once to get great results.

Once you've organized your photos, creating a photo book is a nice way of capturing your memories. (Courtesy of Darla DeMorrow)

Learn how to use the photo maintenance software that you

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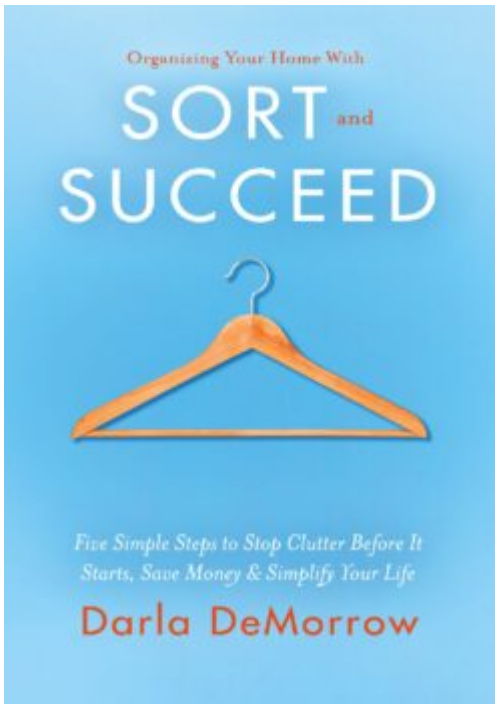
Learn how to use the photo maintenance software that you already have. Mac owners will usually use iCloud Photos. Android users have a few more options. You'll know you've arrived when you can scroll through your family's entire history on your cellphone, create a photo book, or share a fun project with important people in your life.

Why not create a photo book of all the strange and wonderful things that happened to you this year? Give a customized slideshow as a present for a birthday or anniversary this year. If this all seems overwhelming, contact a professional photo organizer who can coach you through the entire photo organizing process or do it for you.

The Epoch Times: The prospect of getting organized can be quite daunting at times. What are some small organizational tasks that can have a big impact and increase motivation to keep going?

Ms. DeMorrow: Where we live and work has a big impact on how we feel. That's why retailers spend big money making their spaces bright, open, and organized. We respond to organized things and spaces, and we feel good in them.



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"Organizing Your Home with SORT and Succeed: Five simple steps to stop clutter before it starts, save money and simplify your life" by Darla DeMorrow.

High-impact projects are ones that you use every day, like your medicine cabinet, the floor of your closet, a single shelf on a bookcase, or a single kitchen drawer or cabinet. The refrigerator can be a great small project to start with because it's self-contained.

Instead of trying to organize the whole house, set a timer on your phone for 15 minutes and just organize the shoes at the door. Instead of trying to organize the playroom, just spend 15 minutes putting toys away one day, and labeling for 15 minutes the next day. Better yet, get the family into the action for just a few minutes each day and teach them to "SORT and Succeed," too.

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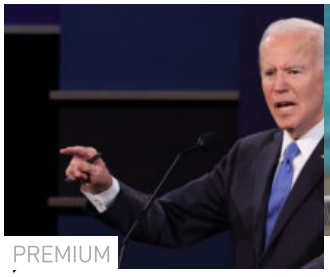

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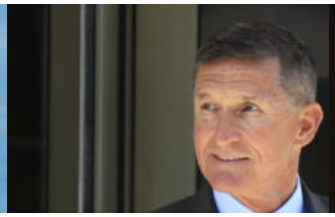

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