

As seen in the "Ask the Organizing Expert" Column in the Lake Oswego Review and the West Linn Tidings

Debunking Some Organizing Myths

Question: Is it true I should only touch my mail and paperwork one time? That seems impossible!

The **OHIO rule** (Only Handle It Once) is a lofty goal, but a common organizing myth. For perfectionists in particular (I'm guilty), we'd rather do it right or not at all. This and other organizing myths can actually *hinder* more than *help*. Let's take this OHIO rule, for example. If we believe it to be true, we might let our mail stack up for a week or more because we didn't have time to "handle it just once." As a result, we have a huge pile that grows more daunting every day. Conversely, if we apply the rule only to junk mail, for which it's appropriate, then our piles remain manageable and we can tend to them when we have adequate time.

There are other organizing "rules" that simply don't work for me – so I'm calling them myths. Much like fashion, they may be popular, but they don't fit my type. How about you? Have you fell prey to these trendy myths? Here's your chance to break free and create your own style!

Myth - Multi-Tasking Saves Time: Most time management experts now agree we can't multi-task two cognitive tasks – like composing an email and answering a coworker's question. It doesn't save time, and neither task gets completed. You can, however, multi-task by pairing one thinking activity – like talking on the phone – with a tedious one – like folding laundry. If you've got a really busy day, try completing one task at a time. You might be surprised how efficient you are!

Myth - Clear Bins are Best for Storage: Clear bins are fine, but the visual clutter drives me crazy. I prefer a solid color with a neat label. Go with the clear if you're an "out of sight, out of mind" kind of person. The same goes for color-coded files. Some people rely on them for categories (green for financial, red for urgent, etc.), while others find the multi-tones distracting. There's nothing wrong with those vintage manila folders for a tidy desk!

Myth - Toss Anything Not Used in a Year: Purging your house of excess is a necessary maintenance routine, but there's no magic in the one year marker. In fact, we should probably do it more often. Consider how often you bring new things *into* your house – are you taking things *out* at the same rate? Are you surrounded by things you love and use?

Myth - Order Stifles Creativity: I've met the mad scientist who thrives on chaos, but that's not me. When I'm elbow deep in a creative project, like writing, I need minimal distractions. That means ship shape surroundings. Strangely, the opposite is true with time – I produce best on a crazy-busy schedule. Which one works for you?

Myth - Organized Equals Clean: Your space can be one, both or neither. My house is organized; that is, I know where things belong, it functions efficiently, and the clutter is minimal. But it's frequently messy and certainly not always clean (is a house with kids ever really clean?)

Myth - There's One Way to Organize: Of course not - that's the point! Organizing styles are like a good pair of jeans, one size does not fit all.

So why are these “myths” so popular? Because for some people, they are truths; just not so much for me. How about you? Ever tried to squeeze yourself into a system that simply wasn’t your style? Successfully organized people tinker with ideas and products until they find something that really fits. Be yourself – in fashion, in organizing, and in life!

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