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Ellen Faye
Organizing Coach and
Certified Professional Organizer®



In 2009 Straighten-UP! Professional Organizing Services became Ellen Faye Organization.



Professional organizer **Ellen Faye** of Cherry Hill believes life is too important to spend time looking for lost things. 'Find a place for it or move it out,' she advises.



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For Women on the Run: Order in the house and in life

By KIM MULFORD

Courier-Post Staff

Imagine a garage so neat, there is space to park two cars, a handful of bikes, golf bags, camping equipment, yard tools, and extra groceries.

Imagine a home so ordered that bills, warranties, invitations, clipped recipes, coupons and a year's worth of receipts are easy to find.

That's how professional organizer Ellen Faye lives. It's possible to organize your home, says Faye, who lives in Cherry Hill. You just need the know-how, the desire, and the right tools.

The benefits are boundless.

"To me, life is way too precious to be spent looking for lost things, cleaning up, and being burdened by clutter," Faye says.

Getting organized reduces stress, frustration and "the overwhelming feeling that there's not enough time to do it all," says Stephanie Denton, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers.

People have more information coming into the home than ever before, Denton adds, and there are more families with two working parents than there were 40 years ago. They don't have time to look for things.

"We have seen just continual growth in the interest in getting organized and people hiring professional organizers and people looking for organizing products in the last several years," Denton says. "It has not slowed down."

Faye left a successful career in hotel management to raise her two sons, 10-year-old Alex and 6-year-old Max. With both boys in school, she wanted to find more balance.

A new career

After her interior decorator marveled over her organized closets, cabinets and drawers, Faye found her next calling. Her part-time business has grown in the last year and a half, mostly through word of mouth.

Faye believes a home should be an oasis.

"Nobody feels good being surrounded by so much junk," she says. When they clear it out, she adds, "then they feel the relief. Throw it away, put it away, or move it out."

Merle Steinberg and her husband wanted to simplify. So just before the empty-nesters moved from their three-bedroom Colonial to a two-bedroom condo in Cherry Hill, they hired Faye.

"We wanted `simple,'" says Steinberg, who has two grown daughters. "We wanted everything less cluttered. It made sense."

With the help of Ellen Faye, they reduced their belongings by two-thirds, either by throwing things out, selling them or donating them.

"Some of it was like going down memory lane," says Steinberg, 51. Other things were easy to chuck.

There were pieces of broken toys; a silver bowl given to them 25 years ago that was never used; frayed, 20-year-old towels she saved to wash the car with; old pots and pans. All of it went out the door.

Faye set up an organization system for what was left, filling closets with extra shelves and racks, and buying dividers and plastic storage bins.

"It made our life very, very comfortable," Steinberg says. "There's less to clean, less to maintain."

Marci Shapiro-Goldman admits she's a saver. The Cherry Hill mother saved the boxes her wedding gifts came in (circa 1991). She collected every piece of artwork her two youngsters crafted. She hung on to souvenir plastic cups and mugs that seemed to accumulate on their own.

Last spring, the clutter got to her. She called her friend Ellen for help. So far, they have worked on the laundry room, kitchen, and basement.

"Things pile up, I don't know where they come from," Shapiro-Goldman says. I needed someone to tell me, 'Are you really going to use that?'"

Out with it

After months of sorting, chucking, and reorganizing, Shapiro-Goldman is now able to find things she hasn't seen in years. Like the pictures from her fifth high school reunion she couldn't put her hands on for the 10th and 15th reunions.

Shapiro-Goldman still has a lot of things, though she recently threw out the 12-year-old gift boxes. Though her home is still a work in progress, she has a place for much of what's left.

"I don't think I'll ever change," Shapiro-Goldman says. "I just think finding it is key." Shapiro-Goldman works part-time with her husband's accounting business, and says organizing has saved the family money.

"If you keep organized, you don't keep buying things that get thrown out and wasted," she says.

Ali Stevenson wanted clutter control. The 39-year-old stay-at-home mom has four children and a baby on the way. The family recently moved from a four-bedroom house in Annapolis, Md., to a small apartment at the private boarding school in Princeton where her husband works.

Space became a critical issue. Faye reorganized her closets and found extra storage space under beds. She bought storage systems for the kids' school papers. She labeled everything, so the family could remember where things went.

After two months of work, Stevenson says, "everything makes sense."

"I find it extremely easy to maintain," she says. "I can clean this place up in 20 minutes. Literally, everything has somewhere to go. I used to step over piles and pretend not to see them."

Stevenson's husband loved the results so much, he bought gift certificates offering one hour of Faye's time for his faculty colleagues, who are required to live on campus.

"It's such a universal issue," Stevenson says. "People ran up and hugged him."

Women shouldn't be ashamed to call in a professional to help them sift through their things and reorganize, Faye believes. Not everyone has the skills to do it on their own.

"It's kind of like therapy," she adds. "You have to really want to better yourself."

Pajamas in the living room? Do whatever works

The secret to organizing is simple, according to Ellen Faye, a professional organizer in Cherry Hill.

"Create a place for everything," she says. "Then, it's really easy to maintain it."

In her home, incoming mail, newspapers, and other odds- and-ends go into a custom-made "paper management center." There are spaces for her kids' book bags, a bin for every family member and two bins for the mail.

Mail is separated into the things that need attention within the next two weeks and the things she wants to look at every month.

In the hall closet, the family's coats are hung on double racks. In the kitchen pantry, cookie sheets, lids and other flat items are stored upright in office file dividers.

In the kitchen, Faye attached small storage units on the inside of her cabinet doors. One holds coffee filters, another holds plastic lids.

People use 20 percent of their things 80 percent of the time, Faye says. The only things that should be stored in their valuable work space are the things they use a lot.

To get started on organization, Faye suggests breaking the job into small, manageable pieces.

- Start with the areas that cause the most stress, such as an overloaded linen closet.

"Take everything out and only put back in the things you use 80 percent of the time," Faye says. Give away, throw away, or pack away everything else. Think hard before you keep something.

- Think creatively about the uses of your space, she advises. Think about how your family lives. She stores her sons' pajamas in the living room entertainment center, because her boys like to change there at night.

- Use vertical space. Put an extra shelf in at the top of cabinets or closets.

- Remind the family to put things away when they are done with them. Use labels to help them remember where things go.

- Paper needs a home, too.

- Try not to go back into the past. Instead, start organizing today, says Stephanie Denton, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers.

"Don't start with the old boxes in the basement," Denton adds. "Work from today forward and gradually incorporate the old stuff."

- Don't feel obligated to read junk mail.

- If you can find information on the Internet or anywhere else, throw that piece of paper out.

"If you keep every piece of paper you get, you'll never find what you need," Faye maintains.

- Maintain a drawer for the kids' school projects. At the end of the year, sit down with the children and decide what to keep and what to throw out.

- Spend five minutes a day purging something, a small cabinet, a drawer.

- Once you start to organize and have cleared out the junk, then set up a system for storing what's left, says Denton. Then decide what storage items you need, like filing cabinets.

Denton is also the spokeswoman for Organized Living, a national chain of 21 stores. The company sells nearly 8,000 tools and products to help people get organized, including closet systems, shelving, three-drawer bins, and plastic dividers. (The chain opened a store in Marlton in 2001.)

- Finally, just do it.

"It really can create less stress in one's life," Faye says. "With the investment of time, you can make great strides pretty quickly."

Rules for better living

Ellen Faye's Five Rules

- Less mess is less stress: By clearing the clutter in your home, you will clear the clutter in your mind. You will feel better and have more time to manage the things that are important to you.

- A place for everything: When you have a place for things to go, your house stays neater longer and is much easier to maintain.

- The 90 percent rule: You do 90 percent in an hour and 10 percent in nine hours. Don't get lost in the minutia. Move at a fast pace and see results quickly.

- Schedule the time: It will get done if you schedule the time to do it.

- If it seems overwhelming, break it down into small, manageable pieces.

Junk vs. mementoes

Something is junk if:

- It is broken or obsolete and fixing it is unrealistic.

- You have outgrown it physically or emotionally.

- You have always hated it.

- Using it is more bother than it's worth.

An item is not junk if:

- it generates love and good feelings.
- It helps you make a living.
- It will do something you need done.
- It has significant cash value.
- It gives more than it takes.
- It will enrich or delight the coming generation.



Ellen Faye, CPO® is founder and Principal of Ellen Faye Organization™ (formerly Straighten-UP!), a Professional Organizing, Coaching, and Consulting firm located in Southern New Jersey since 2001. She is a Certified Professional Organizer and has trained under Denslow Brown in the highly acclaimed Certified Coach Organizer Program. Her passion is helping clients identify their goals and find the balance and skills to reach them through organization.

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