



CLEAR YOUR WAY!

Ellen Faye  
Organizing Coach and  
Certified Professional Organizer®



## Home Biz Notes

### Professional Organizing as a Business - An Interview with Ellen Faye, CPO

by JEAN MURRAY on January 23rd, 2009

In recognition of [“Getting Things Done”](#) and [professional organization](#) this month, I interviewed Ellen Faye. Ellen is the owner of [Ellen Faye Organization](#) and she’s a Certified Professional Organizer. She’s been working in the professional organization business since 2001, and she is active in the [National Association of Professional Organizers \(NAPO\)](#). Here’s the interview:

#### 1. How did you get into the professional organization business?

When my youngest child went to school full-time, I decided I needed to get back to work. I had been in the hotel business, learned about service businesses, but I knew I didn’t want to work for someone else again. I looked around for different kinds of businesses, and a designer told me, “You’re so organized, you should be a professional.” I did some research and realized it was a perfect match - it included my people skills, my gift for organization, and my business skills.

I love what I do and I make a good living, and my business continues to grow.

#### 2. What kind of advertising did you do or do you do now?

I do no advertising; I never have. I do giveaways at school (school auctions, for example). I get new clients from the website and from referrals.

### **3. How far do you travel to work with people?**

I will travel 30 minutes each way with no travel charge; over that, I charge. I usually refer out business which is more than 45 minutes away. I belong to a network of professional organizers and I can refer business to them (and vice versa).

### **4. Do you have a certain type of client you work with?**

I work with a variety of people and I like being well-rounded. My biggest criterion is working with people I feel connected to and people I want to work with. Most of my clients are women who run businesses from their homes, who are trying to integrate home and business.

Every person is different, so my work is diverse. I do an initial needs assessment which takes two hours, to determine the scope of work and the initial action steps. Some people just use that and that's all they want.

### **5. How long is a typical assignment?**

Each assignment length is different. Some people start out with one area they need help with, and we keep finding more things to work on. Once someone sees how successful the first project is, they want to keep going on and on. There are so many aspects we can look at - from email to financial papers and paper management and more.

Assignment length runs from just the two-hour initial session to my longest assignment of over 400 hours. People make decisions at different rates; some can make split second decisions on whether to throw things out; others are more emotionally connected to their stuff and might take longer to make a decision about it.

### **6. Are there people you just can't work with?**

Some people are chronically disorganized. These people have emotional issues and find it difficult to let go. Sometimes it's pretty evident that they are not ready to be organized; this is usually a mutual decision to end the relationship.

### **7. How do you deal with "backsliding"? That is, people who get organized and then can't stay that way.**

Many people backslide. Think about Weight Watchers, for example. A person might lose weight and put it back on again and again. Sometimes it's three steps forward and one step back. As with losing weight, people don't get organized until the reason for the change outweighs the reason not to change.

If you are interested in knowing more about Chronic Disorganization and Hoarding, read the book [Buried in Treasures](#) by Tolin, Frost, and Steketee.

In trying to change any habit, we don't do it until it feels worse not to change. If you decide to change, you start seeing the value in changing. You feel much more in control, and so much more at peace.

### **8. What are your rates?**

Understand that rates in different parts of the country are different. Also, I'm a Certified Professional Organizer, so I charge more. I charge \$250 for a 3-hour session, then \$450 for a six-hour session. Organizers starting out usually charge less.

By the way, I tend to work with my business clients every other week for three hours at a time. That seems about right to me; too much too fast is disruptive to their already busy lives.

### **9. If I wanted to become a professional organizer, what should I do?**

Go to the National Organization of Professional Organizers website ([napo.net](http://napo.net))

If you live near a chapter, go to a meeting. You might want to look at the NAPO-Philadelphia chapter site and the [FAQ's](#) I wrote, to learn more about what it takes to be a professional organizer.

Read books, talk to other organizers. Consider attending the [national conference](#) - this year it's at the beginning of May in Orlando. I'm doing a session on The Magic of Motivating. (I'm also the chair of the 2010 convention in Columbus, Ohio.)

When you are first starting, practice for free on people you know, then get them to give you a testimonial. Or trade work with someone and write testimonials for each other.

Get a good solid business structure in place! Find someone you can work with on that business structure. Talk to the [Small Business Administration](#) in your area, go to programs to learn how to put that structure in place. Get a coach who can help you get a business structure set up.

### **10. Who becomes a professional organizer?**

It's really not a "mom" driven industry. About half the people who are professional organizers are professional women who have been in other fields and who choose to do this. It's not just a bunch of moms who are not serious about it.

For me, it works. As my children got older, I've added more hours. When they were younger, I fit in my client hours when they were in school or on evenings and weekends. I could choose when I wanted to work.

### **11. What tips would you give someone who wants to become a professional organizer?**

Here is what I would tell someone who wants to become a professional organizer:

1. Keep the balance between just being a good organizer and your relationship skills.
2. Have a good solid business structure.
3. Keep it simple.

*Thanks, Ellen, for your good advice. Tomorrow, I have an interview with a new organizer, and she will talk about getting organized in your home business*



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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