



*“Forget perfect. Perfect should not be the goal.”  
— Donna Smallin Kuper*



# Organizing 101

*Taking steps to clear clutter and be organized can bring efficiency — and more time for enjoyment.*

*by Kindra Gordon, field editor*

Why do some people outperform others? Is it talent, effort or luck?

Perhaps, but it's also likely tied to their ability to be organized. Minimizing clutter and distractions — whether that's in an office, a workshop or within your brain — can often lead to getting more accomplished and standing out from the crowd.

Donna Smallin Kuper bills herself as an organizing expert and admits to being organized since she was a kid. Smallin Kuper has written more than a dozen books on the topic of clearing out clutter. Having lived in an RV traveling the country with her husband since 2013, she has truly learned to live with less stuff.

Kuper suggests benefits of being organized may include restoring time in your day, fine-tuning your attention and boosting your energy.

“When you clear clutter, you enjoy what you have,” she says.

## Declutter first

In the quest to become more organized, many people say they need more storage space. However, Kuper says the first step is to declutter.

“It's easier to get organized when you have less stuff,” she explains. “Clearing clutter is not rocket science. It's just sorting into three categories: keep, donate/sell and trash/recycle.”

She advises breaking big projects into smaller steps. Tackle one room or one drawer at a time, if needed.

“Forget perfect,” she adds. “Perfect should not be the goal.”

To downsize what you already have, Kuper offers these guidelines.

For items that you haven't used within a year, let it go. Kuper says, “Clutter is physical proof of our abundance. Be grateful for the abundance, but then let some items go and allow them to serve a purpose for someone else.”

Kuper's rule of thumb is if you can get something again in under 20 minutes for less than \$20, get rid of it. Then borrow or buy the item when you need it.

To get rid of items with value, you might donate to charity or recapture some of their value by reselling the item using Craigslist, Facebook, garage sales, consignment stores or the OfferUp app. [Freecycle.org](http://Freecycle.org) and [donationtown.org](http://donationtown.org) are websites that help locate donation options.

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Don't let guilt stop you. Even if you believe you paid a lot of money for something, if you no longer like it or it no longer has a useful purpose to you, Kuper encourages donating or selling the item.

## Know what's important

During the purging process, Kuper suggests utilizing a simple exercise: Imagine you only had 20 minutes to get out of your home (or office). What are the "keepers" or favorite items you would take with you? Or, if you have 24 hours to move out, what would be important to take with you? This can also help in realizing what's not needed.

Another organizing tip: Gather all of your like items together. When you see a dozen scissors or calculators all gathered together, you might realize you have more than you thought. This makes it easier to downsize some of the extras.

Regarding inherited items, Kuper suggests asking yourself, "Would you buy me today?" If you wouldn't, she says, "You don't have to be the keeper of it. Recognize the initial owner bought this item for themselves, and they couldn't take it with them." Especially if the item gives you a sad memory, let it go, she says. She notes that taking a photo of sentimental items or journaling about them can also be a means of keeping memories without keeping the actual object.

## Get organized

Once the clutter has been reduced, Kuper offers several steps for getting — and staying — organized. Foremost she suggests devoting 15 minutes each day to organizing. Multiply that by seven days per week, and you will spend 1 hour and 45 minutes

weekly on organizing, which adds up to 7 hours per month.

"That's a lot of time to get organized, especially when you build on it day after day," says Kuper.

Also important: Create a schedule.

"Whatever gets scheduled gets done," Kuper says. Thus, she advocates prioritizing one or two projects each day. As an example, your schedule might identify a certain day of the week that you do bookwork, or a certain day of the week that you assess inventory, etc. Additionally, she suggests more and more apps are available to make office duties easier.

To ensure your 15 minutes of organizing doesn't get overlooked, she advises making an appointment on your calendar to include it as part of your daily schedule.

Additionally, Kuper advises the 2-Do Rule: "If it takes 2 minutes or less to do something, do it right now and get it done."

Her final tip: Have a "home" for everything. Kuper points out that if an item — be it a book, a tool, or a stack of bills — doesn't have

a "home," it can never truly be put away. If you can't find a home for something, you likely don't need it.

As a last piece of encouragement, Kuper says, "Anyone can learn to get organized. You are not born an athlete or musician. You practice. The same goes for organizing. If you act more organized, you will be."

Donna Smallin Kuper spoke at the 2018 American National Cattlewomen Convention in Phoenix, Ariz. She says her favorite quote is by Louise Smith: "You can't reach for anything new if your hands are still full of yesterday's junk." Learn more about Kuper at her website and blog [www.unclutter.com](http://www.unclutter.com). **AJ**

