

Staying Organized in the **Age of Distractions**



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We have never been so productive, so busy and at the same time so distracted. Throughout history there have always been issues that have prevented us from doing what we set out to do. But, it's never been as hard as it is today. Technology has its benefits and rewards, but it also has its drawbacks.

The very fact that we have so many choices in terms of technology can also cause problems. Having instant access to family, friends, work and the rest of the noise can be overwhelming. Email, smartphones, mobile devices, laptops and other “screens” can get in the way of staying organized, even though the technology was originally created to make you more productive and organized.



The technology can actually cause you to feel pressure to do even more. No matter how amazing you are, you start feeling inadequate that you cannot do more. The technology ends up becoming more of a curse. Take heart, though; you can learn how to wrangle the technology and make it work for you. You can become more organized even if it doesn't come naturally. You can give yourself permission to do things differently.

You can learn to capture what you need to do, break it down into logical steps, prioritize those steps, figure out what's next and then get to work doing what needs to be done – without feeling overworked, stressed out, and out of control. You just need to have a plan of action and an understanding of why you need to do things in a certain way. Then you'll finally really be organized.

Identify Areas of Disorganization

The very first thing to do is take an honest look at your life. Look at your home, work, extra activities and more. Make a list of the areas where you see a lack of organization and then start to tackle them.

There are different types of disorganization to deal with.

- **Life Event** – Circumstances can happen that interrupt your normal way of life, such as a death, a wedding, a birth, or other once-in-a-blue-moon event. This can also happen if you have a special deadline at work or other situation. These things can cause you to lose track of what you planned to do for a short period of time, although usually you can get back on track.
- **Bad Habits** – Many people just develop bad habits over time that get out of hand. For example, you start stacking your mail on the corner of your desk without a plan of action and then before you know it, you have no idea where to find the phone bill and you end up paying it late.

- **Your Upbringing** – Disorder can manifest in various ways. It can be just like your upbringing, or the opposite of your upbringing. Some of this depends on your personality and how rebellious you might be.
- **Your Social Network** – These days, we are all encouraged to have a lot of things and do a lot of things, and the people who you hang out with seem to determine what kind of order you have in your life.
- **Habitual** – If your home or workspace or both are piled high with disorder, there is a possibility that you have a situation called “chronic disorganization” which is a real condition that can require professional help to overcome.

Regardless of your personal situation, the best thing that you can do is to try some of the tips, suggestions, and ideas that will follow. You can get and stay more organized in the age of distraction if you know what to do.

Create Realistic Goals

One of the first things to do for anything in your life that you want to achieve is to sit down and create realistic and doable goals. This involves doing a number of important things.

Write It Down – When you put something down in writing, it makes it more concrete and real.

Break It Down – When you know the goal, take it apart and make it into small steps that are easier to accomplish.

Prioritize – Put the steps in order. There is always a logical way to do something. For example, you can’t run the dishwasher until it’s been loaded. You can’t load the dishes until they’ve been rinsed.

Set Milestones – You want to check up periodically on whether or not you’re on track to reach your goals. If you set deadlines for each milestone, you will have a realistic expectation of when you will reach your goal.

Be Specific – When you write your goals down, be very specific and detailed. You’ll have much better results if there are no gray areas.

Track Actions – Using a spreadsheet or other app on a computer, or even a paper calendar, keep track of the actions you are taking to reach your goals.

Measure Progress – Is your plan, and the steps you’ve set up, working to get you closer to your goal?

One Thing at a Time – When you set up your steps, it’s important to understand that you can only do one thing at a time.



Schedule Actions – Create a schedule that you can stick to. Make it realistic, considering every single thing that might affect the schedule such as other responsibilities and plans.

When you set realistic goals and develop a plan of action to implement those goals, you can achieve anything. You can even become more organized.

Get Everyone on the Same Page

One of the first things to do when you decide to get more organized is to get everyone on the same page. Whether it's your family, your work colleagues, or others that you deal with on a daily basis, you can ensure that everyone works together to create more organization.

At home, one of your first steps could be to set up a family Google Calendar. Google Calendars are wonderful because everyone can have it synced to their mobile devices, and you can even set up reminders that are emailed or pop up. That way it's harder to forget to do something that is scheduled.

At work and within the community, you'll have to implement changes more slowly, and likely you'll have to learn to say the word "no" more often. But, given enough time, you'll be able to get everyone together to become more organized, and stay that way. It just takes some perseverance and patience.

Next, it's important to further develop your plan of action so that you can truly see it through. In this way you can stay organized, avoid distractions, and get more done.

Craft a Plan of Action

To create the best plan of action, you have to start somewhere. And the best place to start is with areas of your life that are already structured, such as work, school, organized sports and truly anything that already has a schedule set around it. Put the things that have set schedules in your calendar first. This will enable you to see the truth about the time you have available for more things to do.

Then, add in your home life around those things. For example, if you know you have to leave the house at precisely 7:30 a.m. to be in your desk at work by 8 a.m. that will dictate when you need to shower, groom, eat breakfast and clean up after yourself.

While you don't have to put every last thing in your calendar forever, it's a good idea to try to do it for at least a month. In this way, you know how long it really takes you to do things

such as clean your kitchen, pay your bills, and get ready for work. Including these things in your timeline will help you realize how much time you really have and how much time you don't have next time someone wants you to add something to your day.

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
2 8 Work	3 9:00 Alexandra Greer 10:00 Plant Basket 8 Work 7p Yoga	4 9:00 Val Selby's Birth 8 Work	5 8 Work 7p Yoga	6 8:00 Corey Bland's b 8 Work
9 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing	10 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 7p Yoga	11 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 12p lunch time	12 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 7p Yoga	13 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing
16 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 8p Map The Floor	17 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 7p Yoga	18 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 8p Map The Floor	19 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 7p Yoga	20 6 Write 500 Words for 8 Work 10 Filing 8p Map The Floor
23	24	25	26	27

Plan Your Meals

One thing that can suck up more time than you may think, and cause you to lose time and get unorganized, is meal time. If you can get this organized, you're on the road to having a more relaxing evening, which will lead to a more organized tomorrow.

- **Create a Menu** – By making a menu for your meals, you'll be able to make a grocery list from the menus, and also you'll know how long it will take you to prepare the meals. Plus, you'll always know what you'll need to buy.
- **Check Your Time** – Decide which meals you'll prepare based on your calendar and the time you have available to make them. Perhaps due to the schedule you'll decide to prepare some meals in advance.
- **Schedule Errands Logically** – Instead of driving to the store every day for last-minute things, why not map out the logical order of things to ensure that you don't waste steps. Keeping a running grocery list, and knowing you'll be near the store when you go to Yoga class, means that you can run by the store after Yoga.
- **Delegate** – Get the whole family together to map out what chores should be done: answer who, when, and how. Put it in writing and make sure that everyone understands. Someone else can start dinner, or set the table. It's not all up to one person.



By planning your meals in advance, and ensuring that you've marked out enough time and delegated what can be delegated, you'll never (well, hardly ever) feel rushed, unorganized and overwhelmed again.

Create Realistic To-Do Lists

Whenever you make your to-do lists, don't make them so long that any sane person would take one look and climb to the highest building for a dive. Instead, set up your to-do lists realistically to take into account the time you have and the importance of the tasks that you need to perform.

A good way to organize things is daily, weekly, monthly and in order of urgency. It can also help to tackle tasks that you dislike first, and then you will feel accomplished getting those things out of the way. To help you create realistic to-do lists, a good planner can really help.

Ensure Your Planner Is Up to Date

If you use a planner of some kind, whether computerized or paper, it's imperative that you keep it up to date. If the system you're using is too difficult to keep up to date or use, then it won't work.

The trick to ensuring a planner really works is to develop the habit of looking at it in regular intervals. Make sure you look at it every morning and every evening at least. If you also look at it

several times during the day, to mark off what you've done and to add to it, you'll be able to keep on track.

There are many different types of planners that you can use. Let's take a look at a few. Each has its own pluses and minuses. Also, what's right for another person might not be right for you. Don't feel pressured to use new technology when old technology works for you just fine. Use what works, and use what you will use.

1. Paper Planners

They've been around for ages and come in all different styles. Paper planners can be carried with you and used very easily.

A good example of a paper planner is the popular [Filofax](#). These have been around a long time, before the First World War even, and come in a variety of sizes and styles. People who use a Filofax swear by it. You can get them in a variety of brands such as Franklin Covey and even Louis Vuitton. You will have a lot of choices if you like using paper.



2. PC Based Planners

More recently coders have developed various online planners that you can use with your PC. Here are two to try.



[WeeklyPlan.net](#) – This is based on the “GTD” (getting things done) method and helps you get your days organized. It works on a week at a time and helps you break down to-do tasks in a logical way.



[DayViewer.com](#) – DayViewer has an online calendar, contact management, online journal, and to-do list; it even has a motivation system and reminder system. It helps you get more organized all in one place.

3. Planning Apps

Besides paper planners and PC based planners, you can also get apps for your mobile device. Here are a couple you can take a look at and try.



Schedule Planner – This app works with an Android system and is available in Google Play. It enables you to map out your tasks and keep them organized. You can even compare what you wanted to do with what you actually do.



Planner Plus – This is a day planner that can be used with the iPhone. It gets you organized with tasks and you can view a day, a week or a month at a time – whatever you prefer.

The important thing to do is to pick something that allows you to have checklists, projects and next actions listed in a way that makes sense. You want to be able to make plans, track the plans, and more with whatever system you use. And remember, you want to pick a system that works for your lifestyle. If you're not big on technology, you might want to stick to paper. But if you enjoy using technology, like most people today, then choose the right technology for you.

Create a Routine

One way to stay organized is to have a regular routine that you stick to. If you don't have routines now, it's time to start creating them. Routines become habits, and habits make it easier to be successful.

Start with Everything – Write down everything you have to do each day. If you're not sure, keep a diary. You can start with tackling questions such as:



- What do you need to do to get off to work?
- What do you need to do to get your kids off to school?
- What do you need to do to ensure your house stays straight in the morning?
- What do you need to do to ensure that you and your family eat each day?
- What do you need to do to ensure that your family stays clean each day?
- What activities do your children have tonight and what tasks do you need to do to make it happen?
- What errands do you have to do today and what do you need to do to make it happen?
- What type of exercise do you need to do today and what do you need to be able to do it?
- What do you need to do in order to keep your home clean today?

With the list you've made, it's important to then create a timetable. It's important to take into consideration everything, including when you have the most energy. If you're not a morning person, don't make a lot of tasks for you to do before work. And if you're not a night person, don't create a timetable that has you doing too much in the evening.

If you don't work within your timetable and during the right energy levels, you won't succeed. You have to work with what you have. Remember to be flexible and be willing to change if the new routine isn't working. It might take a few weeks to get it right.

Everything in Its Home/Place

One thing that can cause serious disorganization is poor organization. Sounds silly, but it's true. When you set up your home, or your office, it's important to figure out where to put things that makes it easy to keep it organized. A good tip to keep things organized is to put like things with like things.

For example, in the kitchen put your coffee mugs, coffee, creamer, sugar and so forth near the coffee maker. Put the dishes close to the dishwasher. Set up your kitchen in stations if you have room, such as the baking station, the chopping station, and so forth. This makes it easier to use, as well as easier to put away when you're done.

Start the Day Right

Doing the smallest thing in the morning can help you get your day off on the right organizational foot. Such things as making your bed as soon as you get up can make a really big difference. Your room will instantly look cleaner and you'll feel positive about your ability to stay organized. Anything else you can do in the mornings to get your day off right will help.

End the Day Right

When the day is coming to a close, be sure to do something from your list that will help close out the day and make you feel relaxed about your state of organization. A few ideas are to set up your coffee maker for the morning, or look at your to-do list for tomorrow so that you'll have a good idea of what is coming up.

Set Deadlines

One of the most important things you have in your arsenal to get organized and stay that way is the ability to set deadlines for tasks that you need to get done. Some deadlines are preset by the nature of the task, such as cooking dinner. Others are not set, such as cleaning out the junk drawer or working on the "great American novel." However, you can still set deadlines, which will automatically make it more likely that you will accomplish whatever goal you've set for yourself.

Set Limits

It's okay to waste time on Facebook once in a while. But, instead of going on there without any limits, set a specific time of day that you can get on, and then set an alarm. In fact, you can do the alarm trick with anything. You can set a timer while checking email, or while cleaning the

house. It's kind of fun to set the alarm for housework and see how much you can do in 15 minutes.

Get the Tools of the Trade

To keep your home and office organized, it's important to get the tools of the trade. Items such as baskets, drawers, dividers, room organizers, apps, spreadsheets, notebooks, calendars and more will help you stay organized. But, you have to avoid the chance that you will over-purchase and overuse too many different tools. Pick the fewest tools that you can to get the job done.

Devote the Time

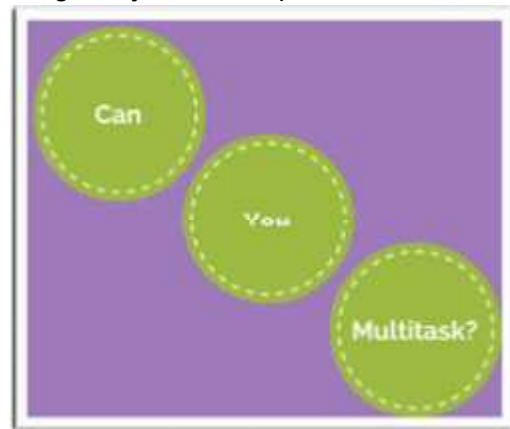
It's important to spend the time necessary to do what needs to be done. For example, it only takes 10 to 15 minutes to run through the house with a basket to place all the items that belong in other rooms. It also takes 10 to 15 minutes to look through your Filofax to determine what needs to be done today and after today.

Give Up Multitasking

One of the worst things that has happened to humans is the pressure to do more. Each time we invent a new technology, instead of making our lives easier it makes our lives harder. Inventing the dishwasher should have made lives better for home makers everywhere, but instead of freeing up time to do something fun like have family game night, it just freed up time to do more work. Is that really what technology is for?

Social media, text messaging, mobile technology, and screens everywhere have turned our lives into a whirlwind. Information is flowing at breakneck speed, and we're barely able to keep it up.

The more technology that is invented, the more we try to multitask and do more than one thing at a time. After all, how many of you have found yourselves texting and walking at the same time, or sending texts during date night with your spouse?



Probably most of us have found ourselves doing all these things. But, is it really working? The answer is no.

Multitasking is actually not working.

No one is a good multitasker. The human brain was not designed to focus in that manner. When you multitask you're really just switching back and forth between tasks. You're not really doing both at the same time. There are actually very few things we can do that way. Perhaps we can chew gum and walk, or walk and talk, but nothing more difficult than that.

In order to do things that require real thought, we really need to focus on the one thing at a time. Writing a report for work, paying bills, spending time with family – these things deserve 100 percent focus.

The more you learn to focus on each task that you're doing at the time, the quicker you'll actually get done, and the more accurate it will be. It doesn't matter what you're trying to accomplish – it will always be higher quality if you give it your full attention.

Keep Life Simple

One way to stay organized is to keep your life simple. Most people buy too much stuff. You've heard the joke about buying bigger and bigger houses to house all your "stuff" – even storage units – for more "stuff". In order to keep a handle on how much stuff you buy and bring into your life, take stock of what you really need.

Buy Less Stuff – How many pairs of jeans do you really need? How many socks, shirts, dresses and so forth? Do you really need another knick-knack? And, honestly, how many kitchen tools do you need that blend? When you start looking at new stuff to bring into your home, including needed items and just wanted items, think hard about whether you really need it or not.



Dispose of Unneeded Stuff – Go through your stuff and get rid of things. If you've not worn something for all four seasons, you don't need it any longer. You have a few choices of how to get rid of things. You can have a garage sale, list things on craigslist.org or donate it to charity. But, get it out of your house and certainly do not take it to your office.

Making things easier for yourself by keeping your life simpler will make a huge difference. It will make your home and office (and car too) less cluttered. This will save lots of time because when things get piled up, important papers and information often gets lost. The value of the time you save not looking for lost items is priceless.

Learn to Say No

One of the most important things you can learn about staying organized is learning your limits and knowing when to say no. If you can start to view time as more valuable than money, you'll be more likely to say no when needed.

It's hard to say no. Everyone around you is asking for more. The PTA wants you to work a fundraiser. Your boss wants something that takes two weeks finished in 24 hours. Your children want every moment of your day. Your spouse isn't much better. Never mind your best friend. The wanting can get out of control.



It will take some time, but start small and practice saying the word No. Say it out loud now. No. Feel how it rolls off your tongue and how you feel when you say the words. Right now, you likely have some anxiety saying it. But, after time, when you realize you're going to be so much more valuable doing each thing you do well, and you're going to feel better being more organized, it will get a lot easier.

One method for saying no is to use your calendar. Take out your Filofax or your mobile device, open your calendar and look at what you have to do. This will give you a chance to think about whether or not you really want to do what you've been asked to do. In addition, it will give you an opportunity to see if you actually have time to do it. If you don't have time, and there is no real way to reorganize things even if you want to do it, you will have to say no.

If you just don't want to do it, you can still use the calendar as the excuse. Opening the calendar and then stating, "I'm so sorry, I cannot do that at this time" is usually enough. Alternatively, you can say, "Let me get back to you by 3 p.m. with an answer." In the case where you really do want to do it but you simply do not have the time, you can say no to the actual request but offer to do something else.

For example, your boss wants you to get some work done in 24 hours that literally takes about 48 hours of straight work. Knowing you are just human and need sleep, it's important to tell your boss the truth. "I cannot have this done by that date, but I will have it done by this date." This is a perfectly good example of how to say no, but still deliver what needs to be done.

Get Professional Help

Finally, if you try all of these things and still cannot seem to get it together, you might fall into the "chronic disorganized" category. Or, you might just have too much on your plate to possibly do it all yourself. If either of these is the case, then you'll need to get some help. You can get help in a number of ways.



- **Hire a Professional Organizer** – This is a person who can organize various aspects of your life. Some professionals organize kitchens; some organize an entire life. It's up to you to figure out what you need help with. Even starting with just one thing can domino into other areas of your life.
- **Outsource** – Another way to get professional help is to outsource certain things in your life. You can outsource housework, even cooking dinner to a professional chef, and potentially even certain aspects of your job if you want to. Anything that you hate doing, that takes too much time, or that you just can't do, can be outsourced.

You can hire a virtual assistant to take care of administrative tasks, or a housekeeper to keep your home clean, or a professional organizer to help you identify what habits you need to break and what habits you need to introduce in order to help you stay organized. All of these can help in this age of extreme distraction.



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