

This is an excerpt of an article quoting Keeping Order's Lee Ann Kleinfelter. It appeared in the *Contra Costa Times* on March 29, 2008, written by *Times* staff writer Ann Tatko-Peterson.

## File Your Home Office Under "O" for Organized *Get rid of the clutter and restore order to your life*

**T**hree weeks. About 72 total hours. That's how long it took Karin Winslow to do her 2006 taxes.

Walnut Creek resident juggled the chores of raising three kids working part-time as a tutor and keeping up with household chores keeping the home office organized didn't rank as a priority until she spent a major chunk of March 2007 trying to sort through receipts and documents that her tax preparer needed.

"What a nightmare," she says, "I couldn't find certain receipts. So I had to go online to get copies of the canceled checks. A week later I find the receipt stuck in some obscure file. I even lost our W-2 forms."

Winslow's den served as the family's home office, complete with a large computer desk and to overflowing file cabinets.

"I like things very neat and ordered" she adds. "The den was the exception. I stuck papers in drawers and boxes— you know; out of sight, out of mind. It got so bad sometimes it took me 10 minutes to find a pair of scissors or the stapler."

Determined to make her office and life more efficient, Winslow turned to the Internet where she found the book *Neat and Simple Guide to Organizing Your Home Office* by New Jersey professional organizer Ariane Benefit. "It's the bible of home office organization," Winslow says.

The book helped with assessing her needs and provided practical guidelines for setting up a home office that everyone in the family could use. Now it's where the family completes homework, pays bills, organizes paperwork and communicates with each other.

Winslow needed about 20 hours to get the office in working order. But she has more than recouped that time.

"Bills get paid in half the time. There's no more searching for misplaced phone messages," she says. "And this year's taxes were a breeze. I had everything ready to go in less than four hours."

Winslow is hardly alone. In her first year as a professional organizer, Benefit says about 75 percent of her calls were about organizing home offices and paperwork.

She wrote her *Neat and Simple* guide to fill a void. "Most books were geared toward executives and people with a high budget, with money to decorate," she says. "They didn't cover the full spectrum of

needs. Even a busy mom has a need for an organized home office space to run the household."

### An office plan

**S**o, where do you start?

Katherine Korlacki, a professional organizer based in Albany, suggests assessing your needs for the office's use.

"How paper-oriented are you? Some people pay bills online, so you may not need a lot of room for filing," she says. "How much work space do you need? The size depends on what you plan to do there — crafts or laying out drawings may require a lot of space. Do you need a computer and printer? These are the questions you need to ask first."

Next, select your big pieces. Decide on a desk or work space first, advises Monica Ricci, professional organizer for Office Depot and author of *Organize Your Office ... in No Time*.

"Don't build your office around one file box or a shelf," she says. "Find the desk that offers enough space, then trickle down to the details. You're better off spending more money for the right thing than going the bargain-basement way. Oftentimes when you do that, you end up buying something else to fix what wasn't right the first time."

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Splurging should have limits, however. Most organizers encourage their clients to keep it simple with furniture, accessories and supplies.

"You can invest in great tools, containers and furniture, but if they're too complicated, you likely won't use them," says Deborah Dobin Robinson, a professional organizer based in Lafayette. "You're better off with a shoe box than a fancy container with labeled compartments if you won't take time to figure out what compartment something belongs in."

Sound a little unorthodox in the realm of organizing? Then try this: Piles are not necessarily a sign of a clutter-bug.

Lee Ann Kleinfelter, a professional organizer based in Lafayette, encourages her clients to find a system that works for them – even if that means piles of paperwork.

"You're not going to change certain habits in people," she explains. "What's important is creating a system where you can find something in five seconds or less. If you're a piler, keep all of your to-do papers in one pile, your calls to return in another, and so forth. Then label the piles so you can quickly see what each one is."

## Clutter removal

**N**ext, it's time to declutter.

To make the task less daunting, start with essentially a blank page.

"Clear off the whole desk top space," Korlacki suggests. "Put

everything in one box, then go through it one item at a time. That's the best way to determine what to keep and where it belongs."

Not everything belongs. Decluttering is largely about getting rid of papers and unused supplies.

To do that, Kleinfelter asks her clients to consider three questions: "Does my life or business depend on it; did I use it in the last six months or will I use it in the next six months; and can I get it somewhere else? The trick is to try to make them paperless from the get-go."

Kleinfelter notes that a lot of resource material, especially travel information, is available on the Internet. So books, such as outdated travel guides, just take up space.

When reorganizing your office, Kleinfelter says, remember to keep the supplies you use most within reach.

"I tell people to stick their arms at 180 degree angles, then turn. Everything that's within 360 degrees should be something they use every day or at least once a week" she says. "One picture of your family is enough. Five just takes up needed space. You want to keep your work area free for work."

Because organizing can be overwhelming for some people, Korlacki sometimes encourages her clients to start small. She has them completely clear one space, such as a mantel or very visible table. Their goal is then to keep that

space clean and clear of any clutter.

"This becomes their affirmation space," she says. "When they keep it clear, it's affirmation that they can do it. They stay focused on their goal, and eventually, they can move on to a bigger space."

Maybe even an entire home office.

## Need help?

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Information about the books referenced in this story:

- *Neat and Simple Guide to Organizing Your Home Office* by Arianne Benefit—order e-book at [www.neatandsimple.com](http://www.neatandsimple.com) or print version at <http://stores.lulu.com/neatandsimple>.
- *Organizing Your Office... in No Time* by Monica Ricci—available at [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)