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It Doesn't Have to Be Magic

Local professional organizers help clients find inner peace through outer order.

When it comes to tackling clutter, starting is often the hardest part—and a growing number of Americans are calling for backup. Professional organizers can help lighten the load considerably, providing a dose of perspective, practicality, and, let's face it, much-needed accountability to the entire process.

Marie Kondo may have introduced us to the psychological benefits of decluttering with *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, but she's not the only organizational guru in town. Since 1995, the membership of the National Association of Productivity & Organizing Professionals has skyrocketed from 834 to more than 4,000. Professional organizers are a rising force in Frederick, too: A quick Google search will turn up a number of locals for hire, available for projects both big and small.

So, what exactly is a professional organizer, and how do they work their magic? We talked to a few Frederick-based pros about the services they offer, the most common trouble spots they come across, and what they really think about the KonMari method.

From Overwhelmed to Orderly

Carolyn West, the sole owner and operator of Frederick-based Organize Me!, says that clients should never feel embarrassed about their clutter—she's seen it all, and is far from fazed. A lifelong neatnik, West was the go-to

friend for helping with home projects before she realized that “professional organizer” was even a job title.

She launched her business in 2016 and has since helped hundreds of clients with all kinds of projects, from organizing the kitchen pantry to downsizing entire estates. West says her approach depends entirely on each client's wishes; some want to be intimately involved in the process, while others prefer to let West handle the heavy lifting. Either way, her goal—to help people help themselves and take control of their mess—remains the same.

Hands-on Help Organizing, Vicki Senires' one-woman business, has a similar origin story. Senires, known for her organizing skills, helped numerous friends of her aging mother downsize their homes as a courtesy; now, she feels fortunate to get paid to do what she loves.

“The truth is, stuff isn't just stuff—it's charged with emotional ties. As Americans, we have more stuff than most, and it can get completely overwhelming,” she says. “It's always easier to get projects done with hands-on help, which is what inspired the name of my business.”

Common Organizational Hurdles

Despite the diversity of projects they work on, both West and Senires say that a few common themes pop up with their clients.

“Almost every home has a dumping area,” West says. “Whether it's a table, a chair, or an



Carolyn West, owner of Organize Me!, declutters a closet using baskets and shelves.



**Vicki Senires of
Hands-on Help
Organizing**

try it yourself

Tips for Downsizing

- Consider the essentials: the items you actually use the most. Start by packing the non-negotiables.
- Evaluate the items that bring you comfort: These need to be accessible and visible in the new environment. Figuring out what those items are, of course, also filters out things that are causing you stress.
- Take care of the outdated gadgets you've accumulated once and for all; many stores, such as Staples, will actually dispose of them for free. E-End is a local electronic-recycling center that West often recommends to clients.
- If you have children, use their input as motivation. Chances are that they don't have the same attachment to the sentimental items you're hanging on to, and can help you be realistic with what to keep or discard.
- Designate a specific box or tote for mementos to avoid going overboard, like when an entire room is used for storage.

entire room, clutter starts to snowball and becomes an enormous source of stress that feels too daunting to tackle.”

Staying on top of the little things makes a massive difference—that is, shredding junk mail once it arrives, or filing bills in a folder instead of letting them stack up. Everything should have a home and a place it belongs, even seemingly harmless items such as your keys and wallet, West says.

Another hang-up, unsurprisingly, is parsing through the sentimental, which emphasizes the importance of bringing in an objective third party to act as the voice of reason. Senires has seen clients cling to items such as old wedding dresses or broken china out of guilt, and says that a big part of her job is simply giving people the permission to let go.

“When you reach a point where you're moving things from place to place because you don't know what purpose they serve, it's time to reexamine your reasons,” Senires says. “It will give you peace of mind to let it go—and more space in your home, on a practical note.”

Often, Senires says there's a family historian who ends up saddled with the majority of heirlooms and mementos; she suggests dispersing items more evenly among relatives to relieve this burden. Plus, “If it's been in storage forever and you haven't looked at it, the truth is that

it may as well be gone. Getting rid of it isn't the end of the world.”

Though West and Senires value certain aspects of Marie Kondo's philosophy, both organizers agree that the KonMari method of tidying and minimizing isn't necessarily realistic for most American families.

“I think she has some great ideas for helping people get their lives in order, but peace and order can definitely be achieved at a less extreme level,” Senires says.

In Pursuit Of Peace, Not Perfection

It's important to realize that professional organizers are neither fairy godmothers nor maids—the power ultimately lies within you to maintain harmony in the home with good habits.

“What's unique about this profession is that there's nothing better than someone saying, ‘I don't need your services anymore,’” West says.

Both West and Senires also emphasize that the goal isn't a picture-perfect, Instagram-ready home: It's to help you enjoy your life more.

“The bottom line is, it's stressful to be disorganized,” Senires says. “Minimizing the mess of clutter is freeing; it creates a sense of relief, rather than additional stress.” **sm**

Organize Me!

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