27 Great Tips to Keep Your Life Organized

It's a rare person among us who doesn't feel the need to get more organized. I consider myself fairly organized, for example, but there are times when I get a little lax about my organizational rules, and there's always room for improvement.

And if you're already organized (read: you're an organizational freak), chances are, you like to read about others' organizational systems.

As such, there should be something for everyone on this list.

A couple of weeks ago, I asked all of you for your best organizational tips and tools. And you responded in force, with some great stuff. What follows are some of the best of the tips (tools will be in another post), edited for brevity and consistency.

I must emphasize: these are not my tips, but yours, and when you see the word "I" it refers to the reader writing the tip, not me. Names have been removed to protect the innocent.

1. **3 Most Important Tasks**. Writing down and making mental note of my top 3 tasks to get done for the day. Everything else seems to fall into place if I do that.
2. **An easy and workable task list, or to do list**. While I love all of these handy web 2.0 apps, computer software, very neat gadgets like palms and really cool cell phones, they just don't work for me. I'm a lazy woman, with an even lazier attitude. I might put a task in Remember the Milk, another task in my palm, one in my Gcal and send another text to my phone. With all of these different ways of doing things, I end up spending much more time trying to organize my to do list, or consolidate it, that I don't get much actually done.
3. **Keep ubiquitous capture device**. It might not be the same device for every location (I have a moleskine for work, but use my mobile for inspiration on the fly) but just being able to write stuff down when you think about it is key for me.
4. **Choose one tool and stick with it**.
5. **Do one thing at a time**.
6. **Do it now**.
7. **Make use of the word no**.
8. **Use the recycling bin/trash basket.** Organizing unnecessary items is wasted energy. It is amazing how much more in control I feel just by ridding myself of now outdated articles I'd like to read "someday," or countless meeting notes from which relevant action items have already been extracted.
9. **A (good) place for everything, and everything in its place**. By finding places that are easy to get to for

all the things I use most often, and places that are pretty easy to get to for the things I use less often, I spend less time dreading doing things and more time actually doing things. And the place for things you never use is elsewhere (trash can, place that accepts donations, etc.).

10. **Simplify, simplify, simplify**!

11. **Put it away now**. The single, simplest thing I do to stay personally organized is to put whatever tool, item, clothing, bag, hairbrush etc., away immediately after using it. I always know where everything and anything is so I never waste time looking for something. Very efficient. I could tell a stranger where to find anything in my home.

12. **Keep a to-do list that syncs with your mobile phone** (so you can add stuff as and when you remember it). And make sure every item has a due date.

13. **Change**. It obsoletes unimportant things. It brings down any method or idea that isn't timeless. It brings up newer and more important things that you and others can't resist anymore. Best of all: it's an organizing tool that operates itself. You simply have to embrace it.

14. **Divide material into red, yellow, blue and green plastic file folders**. For example, anything that has to be done today (paperwork to be given to a client, bills to be mailed) go in the red folder. Contact material or anything related to customer field support goes in the yellow folder. Your mileage may vary as to how you organize your briefcase, and like me you may also have project-specific manilla file folders as well, but dividing stuff up into just four color coded folders is a huge help.

15. **Flylady.net**. She helped me realize that I needed to apply GTD principles to my home life and not just work. I had work under control using checklists, projects and next actions. I tried the same system at home and failed. Then about a month ago I discovered flylady.net courtesy I believe one of your blog posts. Wow, what a difference. My house is clean and so is my desk at work. Many if not most of her basic ideas are just like GTD in a slightly different perspective (control journal, baby steps) and also concrete methods for accomplishing next actions (2 minute hot spots, 15 minute timers). Her most useful tip was to put my daily/weekly lists into shiny page protectors in my control journal. I use a dry erase marker and voila no more killing trees or not doing my list because I can't print it (or want to avoid the hassle). The best thing about this, I am more relaxed, my blood pressure is finally dropping and I feel less stressed.

16. **Unapologetically take control of your time and priorities**.

17. **Sort at the source**. My favorite organizational tool is my post office box. I visit it once a week (usually Saturday), stand at the counter in the lobby and sort my mail. I use the P.O.'s trash bin. What comes into my house is only what I need to have. Bills and letters and checks go into my inbox (which by the way is a box with a lid that is wrapped in lovely fabric and has a yellow bow on it so it looks like a present sitting on my desk). Reading material goes on the table by my chaise lounge which is where I do all my reading.

18. **A sheet of paper, a calendar and a white board**. I've found that the easiest way to organize myself, my days and so forth is a good paper calendar, a sheet of paper that I divide into four sections and a medium sized white board. For my paper the top left section is my actual running to do list for today. The top right section is my running grocery list, or list of things I must purchase. The bottom left is for notes such as calls I made, who I spoke to, appointment dates. The bottom right is whatever I need to move to another day. If I'm told to call back on Monday, then I note that on the calendar. As for the white board, the kids can make notes (Can I spend the night at Brian's on Friday? Grandma called), and I can jot down things as I think of them to be added to tomorrow's to do list. My calendar, and the white board are in the same location, so I can transfer short notes if need be. I carry my paper task list with me everywhere, so I can make notes at any given moment.

19. **Color coding**. I'm a visual person, and I find that color-coding my various lists and calendars minimizes the time I have to spend looking at them. This worked especially well when I was in school: I dumped every class syllabus into Outlook, and then color-coded every class period (blue for paper due, yellow for quiz, red for test, etc). It took awhile to set up, sure, but then for the rest of the semester I only had to glance at Outlook to get a very clear idea of what kind of week I was going to have.

20. **One binder**. I use a binder cleverly labeled "@ 2007″ with the following divisions:
    - @ Today - With my Emergent Task Planner from davidseah.com;
    - @ Week - The remaining days of the week ETP's as a skeleton;
    - @ Year - All my historical sheets;
    - @ Diet - Which tracks what I have eaten for the day;
    - @ Fitness - Which tracks my workout routine for the day. My binder is with me all the time and it has helped me become a better employee, family member and relationship guy.

21. **Write down, execute and tidy up on the way**. These are is my organization bible. I've been living that way since more than two years and I can say that I'm an organized person.

22. **A little whiteboard on my bedroom wall**. I have it separated into two sections, a "todo" and a "today". "Todo" is a list of general things I have to do, like get my car inspected, buy someone a present, etc. Then "today" is what I need to do, obviously, today! Things can be moved back and forth as appropriate. I find having a specific list for today helps push me to get the important things done in a timely manner. I also keep two things permanently on the "today" part, which are meditation and exercise. This seems to help.

23. **Note cards**. One can write tasks on them — one per card, or in a list (depending on the type of task in question; I do both). When doing one per card, the stack serves as an easy prioritization scheme. But wait, there's more: They can be arranged on cork boards, shared, annotated, torn up and rearranged. They can be used as placeholders, as mini-white boards and as tokens to model ideas. They are easy to carry around, and to attach to other documents. Further, different colors allow for a visual representation of different kinds of todo's (as can different annotations). Finally, they are cheap and most importantly of all: easy (much easier than software) to reconfigure as needs and projects change.

24. **Never rely on a single point of failure**. I've seen people pay $1,000 to hear speakers at a conference and only have one pen to take notes. It's a great feeling when one thing breaks, gets lost, or runs out of power, and you have another one in reserve!

25. **Have.. less.. stuff**.

26. **Delegate**. Learn to trust people with critical tasks in all areas of your life. When you learn to effectively delegate tasks you actually find that it is easier to keep the stuff you cannot delegate better organized.

27. **You control your life**. Whatever electronics or paper you use, make them work for YOU not the other way around. Does Outlook really have to stay checking your email every 5 minutes? Maybe, but I bet you'll get a whole lot more done if you check it a few times per day. That goes for the Blackberry too! After all, there are so many tools, and one to fit everyone - so use what works, but make it work for you!