

Chapter

The Big Picture: Setting Goals

In This Chapter

- ◆ Where you got your ideas about being organized
- ◆ How disorganized are you, really?
- ◆ The benefits of “getting it all together”
- ◆ Setting meaningful personal goals
- ◆ Effective resolutions, New Year’s and otherwise

Before you dive in and start writing lists, tearing closets apart, and designing new storage, let’s begin at the beginning, which is figuring out how you got into this mess in the first place. Did it just “happen,” or are there real reasons your life is so chaotic? Rearranging things on the surface isn’t going to mean the kind of deeper life changes I suspect you’re striving for. You want this to be a permanent step in the right direction, don’t you?

Your Mother's Cupboard Isn't Yours

Imagine a child who was never allowed to make a mess. Let's say that child's name is Tony. Tony's parents won't allow him to play with paint because they worry it will stain his clothes or spill. Tony can't play in the dirt because he'll get grimy and disturb the garden. Tony's room is “neat as a pin.” There are no stray papers anywhere, no fragments of tape on the walls, and no clothes or toys out of place. To the average outsider, Tony seems like a “model child.”

When Tony grows up and leaves home, he figures he's in charge. He can decide to rebel against the way it was at home and say to himself, “Now that I'm a grownup, I can make a mess whenever I want to!” In fact, being a slob may give him a distinct pleasure. It may feel like delicious freedom. But he also may be unable to find the door through all the debris. Or maybe Tony will continue being extra-neat and careful, and rob himself of many of life's pleasures, simply because he can't allow himself to loosen up. Either reaction is just that—a reaction to the way it used to be and not necessarily in Tony's best interest in the present.

How you lived as a child may well help govern how you live now. If someone was always yelling at you to clean up your room, you may still be acting out your old need to be free from such constraints. You may now be “a messy.” Or perhaps you're obsessively neat. (Notice I said “neat,” not “organized.” We'll talk about that in more detail later.) Either reaction can get in the way of real freedom.

Picture This

Close your eyes and imagine yourself as a child in your room. What did your room look like? What do you remember your parents saying about it? Did you share a room? How much privacy did you have? Add lots of details here. Take your time.

Pay attention to any fatalistic words you hear popping up in your mind like *always* and *never*. These are powerful words and can set the stage for some of your adult attitudes. Also, be aware of both verbal criticisms and supportive language. When you set your organization goals, refer back to these memories and see if some of your goals stem from reactions to past events rather than present needs and desires. You may want to revise them accordingly.

There's also the reverse scenario. Maybe you grew up in a terribly cluttered household and vowed that when you were in control, things would be different. But now you may be going overboard. You may spend time compulsively washing, folding, and tidying all your stuff, rather than enjoying the sunshine or smelling the roses. Your

desire to maintain absolute control over your environment can prevent you from having fun, and even keep you from reaching your most important objectives.

Throughout this book, I'll be giving you a series of visualizations in the "Picture This" boxes. When you visualize, pretend you're directing a movie. Add as much detail as you can. Notice any emotions that surface as your "movie" plays on the screen. Write down anything that comes to mind during your screening or dictate your thoughts into a tape recorder. Write an essay or story or draw what you see—whatever most helps you get in touch with your visualization experience. What you see and believe in your mind, you create in the material world. If you want to change what you're creating, one of the first steps is to "see" differently.

You Can't Have Everything

Even though we're adults, we may still be trying to gain our parents' approval. This can be especially difficult for women, since housekeeping and making sure the family is well fed, clothed, and successful has traditionally been the woman's job. It's easy to get caught up in trying to be "as good as Mother" (or even better than Mom!), even though Mother might never have worked outside the home or had as many responsibilities or interests.

Recent studies show that although more women are in the workforce, and some even make more money than their male partners, most working women still do the lion's share of the housework and child care. Beware of the Superwoman syndrome. It can kill you!

Again, the important thing is simply to notice your feelings and experiences. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Of the chores that need to be done every day, every week, or every month (don't forget to include tasks such as bill-paying, driving kids, making appointments, washing the car, and doing household repairs), how is the work distributed? You may want to make a list on one side of a piece of paper, divide the rest of the paper into two columns, and check off which tasks you do and which ones your partner does. Be honest and fair.
2. How many hours does each adult spend working outside the home? Inside the home?
3. Do you feel that the work is evenly distributed? Are those feelings based on the facts? If you asked the other adults in the household how much of the workload they share, what would they say? How does that fit with your picture of how the work is distributed?
4. If you have children, how much do they contribute?

Note your answers and the emotions they bring up. Acknowledge them, learn from them, and move on. You’ll have an opportunity to deal with this more in Chapters 8 and 17, when you do some work surrounding the people in your life.

How Come Martha Stewart Doesn’t Sweat?

Not only does your upbringing affect your attitudes about being organized; so do the media and the entertainment industry. Personalities like home maven Martha Stewart, and the pages of many home and lifestyles magazines, present as “normal” certain things that are for most of us impossible ways of living. Don’t get me wrong. I subscribe to a few of the magazines. I even watch the TV shows on occasion. But do I really believe this lady edits her own magazine, does a weekly TV show, keeps several houses, irons her antique linens, shovels manure in her perfectly manicured garden, and single-handedly cooks up impromptu dinners for 50 from scratch? Naaah.

I enjoy reading home magazines, with all those lovely antiques, exquisite china, and collectibles on every available surface. I even wrote a book about Victorian weddings and the grace, romance, and elegance of those bygone days. When reporters would come to my home to interview me, they expected a vintage home overflowing with bric-a-brac. Instead, they found a contemporary place in the woods constructed with modern materials, an open floor plan, and an easy-to-keep-clean design. Sure, I have a few choice antiques that I treasure, but I work full time, I have a family and a large circle of friends, and I enjoy several time-consuming hobbies. I decided long ago that these things were more important to me than having a showcase home. I never want to be a slave to a house, and I doubt very much that anyone will ever pay me to show mine on TV.

Superwoman and Superman Are Myths

Then there are those guys on the Public Broadcasting Station or The Learning Channel. They know how to fix *everything*. Their Craftsman tools are all in place, and their workshops look like no one ever works there. Of course, that’s because after the show is over, someone else comes in, puts everything away, and cleans up for them! And what about those magazines that suggest being a real man means you have to work out, always look great and wear the right jeans, rebuild motors on the weekend, play touch football with the guys, and to top it all off, cook gourmet meals? No sweat, right?

Beware of the images created by movies, TV shows, and advertising. Remember, these people are paid actors. A hairdresser follows them around, their hands never touch a dish or change motor oil, and their homes only exist as movie sets or show-rooms.

Advertising especially is about illusions, with sales the ultimate goal. In Advertising 101 students learn how to “create a need” for a new product. If you’re “creating” one, that means there isn’t one to start with, right? The advertising industry shows you squeaky-clean homes that you feel you must have to be good parents, model home-makers, and acceptable people. Besides living in a perfect home or apartment, you should have white teeth, perfectly clean hair, sparkling clothes, and dry underarms. Don’t let yourself get caught in these marketing traps. See them for what they are: fantasies.

What you’re aiming for is a comfortable, orderly, clean, aesthetically pleasing place to live that works well to support your life goals and helps you get the important things, the ones you really care about, done.



Tickler Files

“We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make our world.”

—Buddha

How Organized Are You? A Self-Test

Before we continue, let’s find out how organized or unorganized you really are. Answer the following questions and you’ll have a handle on where you stand:

Yes	No	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you find yourself feeling frustrated that you have too little time to do the things you enjoy?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you often feel hurried, hassled, or not in control?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	When you need to find something, does it often take minutes (or even hours) of frantic searching to finally lay your hands on it?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you ever miss appointments or forget deadlines?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you have trouble remembering birthdays, anniversaries, important events, and holidays?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you usually shopping for special occasions at the last minute (like Christmas shopping on December 23)?

continues

continued

Yes	No	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you spend your “time off” running errands, playing catch-up, just trying to keep things from getting out of control?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there important things that need to be done to maintain the house or the car that you never seem to get to?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are repairs made only when something breaks or if it’s an absolute emergency?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you often pay bills late, not because you don’t have the money in your account, but because you just didn’t get around to them?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have you avoided setting up or updating a budget? A will? Insurance? A home inventory? A retirement plan?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are there piles of newspapers, unread magazines, junk mail, and various other papers scattered around your house or apartment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you embarrassed to have people see your home or office?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are mornings hectic, spent rummaging around for clean clothes to wear, gulping down breakfast, and running out the door late?



Oops!

If you have big piles of paper that are dangerously close to causing an avalanche, you definitely have some organization work to do. Good thing you bought this book!

If you answered “yes” to two or more of these questions, you can definitely benefit from committing to an “organization overhaul.” With this book and a few hours each week, you’ll be surprised how quickly you can make a difference.

You know by your answers to these questions whether or not you’re on top of it all or under the gun. I suspect there’s a heap of work to be done and you may be looking for some help. Well, you’ve certainly come to the right place!

How Would You Change Your Life?

You picked up this book for a reason. You were looking for answers. You were looking for simple, common sense ways to have your life run more smoothly. Or maybe your existence is out of control completely and you’re desperate for a way out of the chaos. Only you can know where you are in the organization continuum. Getting organized, if it is to be more than a temporary cosmetic solution, is really a change in lifestyle.

You're working to change old, deeply ingrained behaviors and adopt new, more productive habits.

Picture This

Take a minute to visualize what your ideal environment would be like. Walk through your house one room at a time in your mind and imagine each space clean and orderly. Imagine yourself getting ready for work in the morning with all your clothes ready to wear. See yourself eating a relaxed, nutritious breakfast. Next, visualize yourself commuting to work and see your office a pleasure to work in. Daydream about what you would like to do with your leisure time. Experience the pride, confidence, serenity, enjoyment, and overall sense of well-being that living in this fantasy place gives you.

So what do you really want to change? Actually, the better question to ask is, “What do you *want*?” I’m not talking about what your parents wanted for you, or what you think you should want, or what the media tells you to want. But what do *you* really want?

As you begin your plan for getting organized, you will keep in mind what’s truly important to you and make sure the systems you set up support your goals.

Setting Your Organization Goals

Okay, you’ve been honest with yourself about what your life is like. You’ve thought about how you’d like things to be different. Now let’s decide on some concrete areas to work on—your own personal plan, broken down and in the order of importance that most makes sense to you. Once you know what matters most in your life, then you can use this book to help you accomplish your goals. You don’t need to read it from cover to cover at first. But even if you do, be sure to come back to this first chapter and narrow down those areas you know you need to get a grip on. Concentrating on these right away will have a significant impact on your life.

Doing the exercises I’ve given you will make the information presented here more effective for you. Write down your thoughts and make a plan. Consider drafting a written contract. Share your plan or contract with a buddy. Having a “partner in crime” can drive your likelihood of success up another big notch. Make sure you pick someone who’ll be “in your face” about what you say you want. Do the same for your partner. Put due dates on your contract or plan and tell your buddy to get on your case when the date is drawing near. Meet in person or by phone with your buddy

every week or month to review your progress, and celebrate when you meet a deadline. Have the same commitment to the other person’s goals that you have for your own.

Be fair to yourself. You need to look at any special considerations you may have. My husband and I, for example, both work at home in separate businesses. We have a much larger volume of paperwork, supplies, and equipment than the average household does. Managing these areas takes more of our energy than is required by most people.

Friends of ours own and operate an animal-training business from their home. They need to concentrate on daily cleaning of certain parts of their home and deal with lots of strangers coming in and out. If you have a large family with children of varying

ages, your considerations are different than a couple’s whose children are all grown and gone. Different still is a household consisting of one individual.

While you do your self-assessment, be aware of the realities of your circumstances and know that your plan needs to take these into account. You’ll probably need to tackle the special challenges your particular lifestyle presents first.

As you get serious about setting your goals, think about the rewards. Visualize the final result you’re aiming for. Draw a mental picture of how being organized would look in your life.

**Oops!**

Using your spouse or your significant other as your “buddy” in setting your goals could have some pitfalls. Your partner may be one of the challenges you’ll be dealing with later (see Part 5). But if he or she is the supportive, nurturing, team-player type, by all means, enlist your partner’s help!

Wishcraft

Now, get out that pad and pencil. We’re going to do some broad-based goal-setting. Make a separate sheet for these eight major areas of your life:

- ◆ People (you’ll get help with this in Chapter 8)
- ◆ Work (Chapter 9)
- ◆ Food (Chapter 11)
- ◆ Clothing (Chapter 12)
- ◆ Shelter (Chapter 13)
- ◆ Money (Chapters 14 and 15)

- ◆ Health (Chapter 16)
- ◆ Fun (Chapters 21 to 26)

On each sheet, make a random list under the main topic of how you'd like that area to be. Don't hold yourself back or censor yourself. No matter how irrelevant or unachievable your wishes and desires may seem, write them down. Include your "if onlys"—the things you'd like to have or do if you had more time, money, or skill. By including everything, you'll get clearer about what you really want.

For example, under "Food," your goals might be to eat more healthful foods and perhaps lose some weight. How can being organized help you meet these goals? By having the proper foods on hand, by actually planning your meals to stay within certain nutritional guidelines, and by having the right equipment for preparing those foods handy, your chances soar. If, however, your goal is to become a gourmet cook and start your own catering business, then your kitchen and your meal-planning would look completely different.

On the sheet for "Money," your goals might be to get out of debt or secure a better-paying job. Your goals would reflect your desire to change your current situation. Developing a plan and organizing your life around that plan can certainly help you get out of debt or find that new position. If you're debt-free and make enough money in your current job, the way you organize the financial areas of your life might be directed instead toward putting money away for retirement or financing a future project that's important to you.

The point is, if organizing your life is going to be lasting and meaningful, you don't just "get organized"—you *organize with purpose*. It's up to you to discover what that purpose is.



Orderly Pursuits

Some recommended books to help you further with goal-setting and planning are: *The Magic Lamp: Goal Setting for People Who Hate Setting Goals*, by Keith Ellis; *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, by Stephen Covey; and *Wishcraft*, by Barbara Sher.

Narrowing Your List

Continue writing your "wish list" for each category until you've done all eight. Now, on each sheet, circle the one wish that, if it was fulfilled, would have the most significant impact on your life right now. To add a little perspective, think about what would make the most difference in your life if you only had a year to live. I'm not getting

morbid here, I’m just trying to inject a little urgency into this exercise. Funny how such a thought cuts through the chaff and gets to the kernel of wheat in a hurry!

As you read this book, use these sheets as a reminder when you begin to list specific tasks taken from each chapter that will help you achieve your goals. You can save the back of each sheet for that, if you like. These are the actions you can take to help you reach the goals you just decided are most important to you. In this way, wishes are transformed into goals, and goals into tasks; ultimately, all is magically turned into results.

Going back to one of our earlier examples, let’s say under “Food,” you listed as your primary goal “to lose 20 pounds and eat more healthful foods.” When you turn to Chapter 10, you’re going to be looking for the tips and projects that will help you organize your kitchen, and adapt them to cooking healthier meals that will work with your new eating plan. In Chapter 15, you’ll learn more about adding a regular fitness plan to your schedule and planning for a healthier lifestyle.

If you put on the “Work” sheet “perform better in my job and set up my office so I can find things,” you’ll want to pay special attention to Chapter 6, on handling paper, and Chapter 9, on “Work Systems.” I know you’ll find at least three simple things you can do immediately to get headed in the right direction.

Setting Priorities

Now, take your sheets and number them in order of priority, with number one being the most significant for you right now. If you feel the most important immediate area to work on is your relationships, then the “People” sheet will have a number one on it. If your doctor told you to lose 50 pounds or you’re likely to have a heart attack, then “Food” and “Health” might share the number-one spot. You get the idea.

How and what you organize first will depend largely on your priorities. If you decide that weight loss is a top-of-the-list priority, then your kitchen and food systems will need special attention, as will your activity level. If your career is in high gear and you want to focus on furthering your education and getting ahead, but you’ve got the health thing pretty much in hand, other areas jump to the top of the list.

Next, on each sheet choose two more wishes (goals) with a very high priority, and circle them. That should give you three circled wishes on each sheet. Decide, in order of importance, which should be number two and which takes the number-three spot. If you’re having problems with goal-setting and decide to do some extra work and read one of the books I’ve recommended, you’ll have an even more finely honed set of goals and priorities to work with. *The Magic Lamp* covers all aspects of goal-setting,

including the things that get in the way, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* focuses heavily on developing a mission statement, and *Wiscraft* will give you additional exercises to help you pinpoint your goals.

Finally, place the individual lists of three goals for each category on one sheet that you can put in your daily calendar book or on the wall near the desk or table you use to manage your daily affairs.

Commit or Fail

Let's examine your motivations for a minute. Are you doing this because someone close to you is on your case? Has something happened (like you blew an important appointment because you forgot or couldn't find the materials you were supposed to bring)? Or did you just spend two hours looking for a wrench you know you have, and finally ended up driving to the hardware store so you could buy a duplicate to complete the job?

Those kinds of aggravating events can sure be the beginnings of getting motivated. But what if you take this trigger incident and broaden it? What if you made a decision to overhaul the larger areas that are out of control, where lack of organization seems to be holding you back and affecting your enjoyment of life? If you look at these incidents in their broader context, the motivation can be even greater and longer-lasting.

This is going to take some work on your part, but it need not be overwhelming. You know the old saying: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." Well, that's what you're going to do—eat an elephant! I'm going to help you, but you're going to have to dig in with both knife and fork. Sure, you can just slap on some quick fixes and they'll probably make a difference, at least for a while. But think of what a difference it'll make if you work on the big picture and set up organization systems that will put your life in high gear. You can have it all if you're willing to make the effort and see it through.

The Master Plan: Keep It Flexible

This is not going to be like the diet fads many of us have experienced—something you go on for a week until you get tired of counting calories or denying yourself what



Oops!

If you don't have a calendar/planner or a central planning place, you'll make the task of organizing much more difficult than it has to be. We'll deal with this in more detail in Chapter 7. For now, get an organizer and put it someplace where you'll be able to refer to it often.

you enjoy. Gradually it goes by the wayside. Why don't these diets work? They're too rigid. Expectations are too high. They make you feel deprived and stifled. They focus on the symptoms, not on making deeper lifestyle changes.

Experts agree that the best way to lose weight is to change your lifestyle to support healthful eating and regular exercise. You need information to make that change. Which foods? How to cook? Which exercise? How to stay motivated? That know-how—some of it general, some of it specific to you (what foods you like and which exercise you most enjoy, for example)—will let you create a plan that will help you achieve a more healthful lifestyle.

It's no different with getting organized. You need to do the following:

- ◆ Gather general information.
- ◆ Collect information about your specific likes, dislikes, strengths, and weaknesses.
- ◆ Identify goals.
- ◆ Set up a plan.
- ◆ Break up the plan into simple tasks.
- ◆ Schedule tasks, and work toward your goals a little each day.
- ◆ Develop ways to check progress and reward yourself for achievements.

It's important to do this brain work up front, before you start tearing apart your closets or canceling all your magazine subscriptions. You've already made a good start in the goal-setting area. And there's an added bonus: The techniques you learn here to get your life in order can be transferred to any other area of your life you'd like to

change. Figure out what you really want, make a commitment to get it, get the information you need to achieve your goal, and work at it a little each and every day.

Be willing to adapt your plan as you begin to implement it. Think of your life as continually “under construction,” and be open to changing things as you go along. It's been said before in many ways that life is the greatest do-it-yourself project you'll ever undertake. Acquiring the tools and skills you need will make you a better craftsman.



Orderly Pursuits

Software programs can help you define your goals. I've heard good things about GoalPro 5.0 (Pentium® 1 - 200mhz or better, Windows® 95/98/ME/2000/XP).

You Deserve a Break Today

Another fundamental concept for changing behavior is providing rewards when you do what you set out to do. Probably the greatest reward of getting your life organized is having more time to spend doing the things you most enjoy. Why not make a list of these things, and when you achieve one of your goals, reward yourself with some time spent doing one of them? I enjoy certain crafts and playing several instruments. When I've done something that was especially difficult or took special discipline, I reward myself with some time in front of the piano or a couple of hours of crafting.

Be good to yourself. Changing your old ways will not be easy. We all resist change. It makes us uncomfortable. It can even be scary. Reward yourself as often as possible, even if it's just to look yourself in the mirror and say, "Well done!" Create small rewards for small things, bigger rewards for bigger things, and don't forget to include some rewards just because you love yourself.

Rewards for getting organized will be inherent. There's the good feeling you get when you can finally walk into your walk-in closet again. The feeling of a burden being lifted when you're out from under all those books and magazines and you can finally face the daily junk mail undaunted. There's the simple pleasure of spending an afternoon lazing in a hammock with a glass of lemonade in your hand, knowing that the house isn't going to fall down around your ears. You're prepared and up-to-date at work, so when you choose to do something fun, you feel completely guiltless, and everything you need for your downtime will be right there where you put it.

Some rewards are even greater than you may realize. When you're in control of your belongings and your time, it's easier to create a bigger vision and work toward it. You have the luxury of contemplating the grander, more philosophical—even spiritual—things in life. So, now is probably a good time to ask yourself, "What's my vision of the future?"

You remember the age-old interview questions: "Where do you want to be tomorrow? Next year? In five years?" Well, ask yourself now. Give serious thought to these familiar questions. Then move on to two even heavier questions: "What do I want on my gravestone? What do I want said in my eulogy?" Whoa! Cosmic, you say? Well, maybe. But answering these questions thoughtfully and honestly should set the stage for you to get the most out of this book and to start thinking with the bigger picture in mind—what getting organized can actually mean for your future.

Putting the Resolve in This Year's Resolutions

Each time we replace last year's calendar with a new one, we hear all about resolutions to be made (and probably broken) for the coming year. Usually these involve something we need to give up or deny ourselves, or they highlight bad habits we need to break. More often than not, these are the same resolutions we made the year before.

Amazing Space

I want you to have a life you love. I'd like to see you take your dreams seriously and be able to achieve them. You deserve to wake up every morning excited about the day and what it will bring, knowing that you are prepared and clear about the prize you're going after. You deserve to be a *winner*.

But from now on, you can look the new year square in the eye filled with excitement and expectancy. You'll view it as a time for congratulating yourself on your achievements and for setting new goals that are meaningful, realistic, and fueled by your innermost desires. You'll expect that the coming year will mean you'll have more of the things you wish for in your life and you'll be doing more of the things you love to do. Now that's a Happy New Year!

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ Your upbringing has shaped your organization skills and habits.
- ◆ Setting standards too high actually interferes with lasting change.
- ◆ To ensure true success, set goals that are based on what you really want, not what others want for you.
- ◆ Being fair to yourself and rewarding yourself often will keep you motivated.