

The Washington Post

'Unstuff Your Life' shows way to organized life

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The Associated Press

Monday, August 16, 2010; 12:00 AM

-- "Unstuff Your Life! Kick the Clutter Habit and Completely Organize Your Life for Good" (Avery, \$16), by Andrew J. Mellen: Imagine never again having to turn your house upside down searching for keys. Or wondering where you filed your tax bill or a favorite recipe. Or having a closet stuffed with clothes but nothing to wear.

If this mental image makes you sigh with longing, the new book "Unstuff Your Life!" might be your ticket. Professional organizer Andrew J. Mellen methodically, logically and humorously walks the reader through a complete reorganization, promising "you will never again find yourself drowning in stuff."

The bite-sized steps toward this nirvana are anchored in two main principles: "Like with Like" - grouping all similar items together - and "One Home for Everything" - deliberately choosing where an item will live when not in use so you can always find it.

Another key step is simply getting rid of items that aren't used for whatever reason. When tackling the kitchen, for example, Mellen says to throw away or recycle anything that's been broken for more than six months. "Trust me, you don't need it. You haven't used it, and you haven't missed it. Or if you have missed it, you've found some working alternative, so it's still no longer necessary."

With piles of magazines that you haven't gotten around to reading, Mellen advises keeping only three issues prior because "chances are, you'll never be able to get caught up." He unravels the "someday" excuse, "that mythical land where time stands still" and the free time you've been waiting for mysteriously appears. Mellen takes the same approach for projects that have been left unfinished for years - "You don't need to feel bad about it. Just be clear about where your interests and free time line up and intersect with one another."

For those skeptical about whether the time invested in reorganizing is worth the trouble, Mellen has this wise advice: "As with so many other things, either you're going to pay up front or you're going to pay on the back end for being disorganized, and unfortunately, when you pay on the way out it's always more expensive."

