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Our goal is to Help People Live Better & Help People Work Better. The following information from the **CONCERN WorkLife Services** program is intended to help you accomplish that goal and remind you that, as your Employee Assistance Program, we are here for you and your family. Visit us on-line at www.ak.concernservices.com or call (513) 891-1627 / (800) 841-5002 for no-charge, confidential assistance.

Alternative Organizing Solutions

Practical Tips from Organizing Strategist Debbie Williams

You've read all the books, magazines, and tips on organizing the clutter in your home. But something's missing in the equation and things are just not going as smoothly as they should.

Guess what? Organizing tips and expert advice are just that, advice and tips. Professional organizers are real people too, and they realize that the systems you create for your filing systems or paper clutter will not work perfectly forever and ever. You have to tweak, tug, and modify them until you make them your own; and that's just part of the solution.

No man (or woman) is an island, so it makes good sense that your planning and organizing efforts are not going to work all day every day unless you have help. After all, unless you live and work completely alone, you will have help in creating the clutter, so why not get help in managing it?

Theoretically, you should create a list of chores or procedures for your home or office, delegate as many of these tasks as possible, and serve as a supervisor to make sure things get done. But that would be in a perfect world, and things just don't always go that smoothly around my house-What about yours?

Here are a few real life strategies for those of you trying to figure out how to balance it all with your family life. After years studying, researching, and regrouping, I've found the following unorthodox organizing products to be invaluable for containing (not conquering) the clutter in my own home:

- **Wooden Cigar Box.** Remote controls multiply; it's a known fact. Even if you use a universal remote for your audio/video system, you still have all those others that need to be used occasionally. Consolidate them into a wooden cigar box purchased inexpensively from a tobacco shop. This will solve the question of "where did I put the remote" and keep the neat freak in your home happy at the same time.
- **'Tween Rack.** I wish I had invented this, but the Shakers beat me to it. Use a pegged coat rack to hang not-so-dirty clothes (the wooden kind you use for hanging jackets and hats in your mudroom). Kids, teens, and adult males know all about this category of laundry, but it takes wives and mothers a little while to catch on to the system.

Clothes that aren't stained, don't stand in the corner by themselves, or walk to the laundry room belong in the 'tween category. Don't hang them back up in the closet and don't wash them yet- they'll be worn again. If your 'tween stacks are having baby stacklets of their own, then buy a 'tween rack from a dollar store, discount store, or organizing product catalog. It will save your sanity! Hang one in each bedroom or closet near the stack creators.

- **Dead Zone.** There is a space between refrigerator and cabinet (or wall) that I fondly refer to as the dead zone. No pet or child can possibly squeeze into it for hide-and-seek, no vacuum has ever touched it, and very little can be stored there.... until now.

Store cookie sheets, serving trays, science fair boards, or tagboard portfolios for the kids' artwork in this newly claimed space. Think tall and thin and the options for storage are endless. And if you don't want to think or plan this space of your home, keep it clear for utilitarian use only, stashing brooms and dustpans there for quick retrieval.

- **Miracle Iron.** This is the lazy man's iron, and is my father's miracle cure for avoiding wrinkled laundry. If you have not folded, ironed, or put away the last load (or was it two?) of laundry in your home, don't rewash and redry the already clean clothes-That's a huge time waster. Save time and energy by tossing the entire load into the dryer with a damp towel-a low or warm setting for 10-15 minutes should do the trick, and I highly recommend using a lint-free dishtowel.

- **No Man's Land.** If all your attempts at organizing, decluttering, nagging, and bombing have failed in certain areas of your home or workspace, designate that "No Man's Land." I hereby give you permission to walk away from the smelly, candy wrapper-infested wasteland that was once your teenager's room-Don't clean it, don't nag about it, and don't sweat it! I firmly believe that each of us has a unique level of organizing, and as with politics or religion, we shouldn't feel compelled to impose those standards upon another. Now I'm not saying that it's ok for you to never clean your home, office, or car again. What I am saying is that each of us needs to have a space or haven to call our own, and if your significant other likes having cigar butts on the garage floor or your daughter insists that she likes having all her hairstyling paraphernalia in plain sight on her dresser, then it's ok for you to respect their organizational standards. After all, you have the rest of the house to contend with, and like it or not, there is definitely plenty of space to organize.

Being organized is an ongoing journey, a process not a product, and I for one would like to have a pleasant journey free from nagging, cajoling, and harping.