

## I CARE system for organizing

In this article, the **I CARE** system for organizing is explained. The concepts for the **I CARE** system are simple. They can be applied to any situation - spaces, things, activities, and time - anything you want to organize.

**I CARE** stands for:

**I**dentify  
**C**ategorize  
**A**ssign a home  
**R**etrievability  
**E**ase of maintenance

Let's look at each of these concepts separately.

### Identify

Ask yourself 6 questions:

- 1) Where do I want to organize?
- 2) What do I want to organize?
- 3) Why do I want to organize it?
- 4) When do I want to organize - start and end date/time?
- 5) Who do I want to organize with?
- 6) What will it be like when I'm finished?

You can choose to write down the answers, make a picture board with pictures that represent an answer, or make a video. However you choose to do it is fine. However, when you are answering question 6, I strongly recommend that you use a medium that you can easily refer to as you are organizing or preparing to organize. This will provide some motivation to keep going when you are in the middle of your job.

### Categorize

This part of organizing is usually the hardest part for people. This is the time to part with things or activities that no longer serve you. This can be a difficult process as you let go of something you've owned for 14 years, but really haven't used at all in the last 4. If you don't love it or need it and you haven't used it in the last year, it's probably time to say goodbye. If you're having trouble with this, often if you think about the object in question - it's been sitting in your closet, gathering dust for the last

4 years - and ask yourself this, "Would I rather this was hidden away, not being used, or would I rather that somebody who needed this was using it?"

You can use the **TRACK** categories for things:

Trash  
Returns  
Action  
Charity  
Keep

And the **FAT** categories for paper:

File  
Action  
Trash

And once you have the items to keep, or the papers to file, then you want to sort them into categories of like items. So, for example, your bakeware goes together in the kitchen and your tax related items go together in your filing system.

## **Assign a home**

Now you take your items or activities and make a home for them. This is the point to choose suitable containers for each set of items, or times for activities. If you are going to purchase containers, and containers here refers to anything from a box, to hooks, to furniture, take measurements of where the container is going to go as well as what you have to put into the container and make your purchase accordingly. Of course, if what you have will not possibly fit into the space available, you may need to go through your items and see if there is anything else that you could part with.

In time, you not only need to decide when you are going to do something, but how you are going to record when you will do something. There are many options, both paper and electronic. Think of your record as your container for time and ask yourself what features you want to it to have. Then choose the appropriate "container" - a planner pad, PDA, etc.

## **Retrievability**

When you are assigning a home, it is essential to consider the frequency of use. Place the most frequently used items close at hand. That platter that you only bring

out for family dinners once a year can go up high, in the back of a cupboard. The toaster that you use everyday should be accessible - not necessarily on the counter, but easily accessible. The computer software you have on CD as backup can go somewhere harder to reach. Your stamps, check book and envelopes should be handy.

## **Ease of maintenance**

This will be the litmus test for your system. The old adage, "A stitch in time saves nine" applies here. It is easier to maintain an organized home or office than to get it organized. If your system is too difficult to maintain, you will be right back where you started in a matter of weeks or months. It does, however, take **SOME** effort to maintain your organization. Items do not get put away by watching television, surfing the Internet or [insert your favorite time-waster.] Look for ways to make things easier. Either consolidate tasks or break them up. For instance, to consolidate tidying, one way to minimize the time it takes to pick up at the end of the day or week is to collect all the things that are out of place in one basket. Take the basket into each room, putting things in the basket that don't belong in that room and taking out what does belong in that room and putting the items where they belong. (N.B. If you have more than one basket's worth of tidying in a week, you need to break up the task to make it quick and simple - consider doing it twice a week, or every day.)

Estimates vary as to how long it takes to make a new habit - maintaining your organization is all about making new habits. Be gentle, but firm with yourself as you create the new habits that will give you the life you identified you wanted at the beginning of this process. Make it a habit to clear your desk at the end of the day. Make it a habit to prepare yourself for the next day the night before. Make it a habit to make your bed each day - and teach your children to do the same! Make it a habit to maintain your organization - then you can say, with pride, **I CARE** for my home/office/time.