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FOOD FOR THOUGHT AND UNDERSTANDING - WHAT ORGANIZATION REALLY IS

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With TV shows like 'Clean Sweep' and similar programs that are metaphorically 'waving magic wands' turning unbelievable quantities of excess into sparkling cleanliness, it is tempting to believe that *you* don't need to get organized because you don't have a garage bulging at the seams or a desk and chair you cannot find in your office. There is a subtler side to organizing that gets less attention but delivers a bigger impact. Consider the implications of these four concepts...

1. Organization is about flow... things moving into your environment, being used and then leaving your environment. Things move in almost of their own accord, especially in the work environment and while they are in use, are worth having, but few people have systems for the last step – getting them out of your environment – to make way for what is next – that is a place organization can help because unlike cleaning which is a repetitive chore, getting organized involves engineering systems.
2. Every thing you have – information, material goods, technology is always in a state of dying – some quickly, some slowly, but all inevitably will be used, put away, and 'die' because they are no longer used because change is happening to all of us, all of the time. It is a natural process and it requires periodic attention. This organizational process of reviewing and moving out – to donate, recycle or discard – those things that are now 'dead' is a periodic process that creates the space you need for what is coming next.
3. Organization is about how well your environment is supporting your ability get to important things accomplished - which has nothing to do with what the space looks like but everything to do with how it functions. This is a very different measure – for left brain dominant, linear thinkers, it is a clear space, but for right-brain dominant, creative thinkers it is a structure within what can appear to be a cluttered mess. When you look at the Felix Unger and Oscar Madison characters of *The Odd Couple*, Felix spent all his time tidying the environment but accomplished little more, while Oscar, though often buried in clutter, was a working columnist meeting deadlines in spite of what his environment looked like. It could be argued that Oscar – not Felix – was more organized.
4. Change is happening at an ever-increasing pace. We are experiencing as much change in just 2 years as the generation before us experienced in a decade. This means information, material goods and technology are 'dying' even faster – in fact projects are dying before they can even be completed. It can leave people feeling what they do is pointless and they are frustrated. One only has to look at what has happened to television in the last 2 – 3 years to see this reality of the increasing rate of change.

For the first 30 years about the only change in television was the size of the screen, the addition of color, the number of hours that were broadcast and the development of a handful of 'major' networks. During the next 20 years – things moved faster - cable TV and satellite



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TV with many, many more channels and networks, and the already come-and-gone video tape recorder – making way for digital recording – it all changed a lot of how and when we viewed TV. But look back two years ago - was it even on your radar that you would be watching your favorite show on a cell phone or PDA? That the episode you missed could be watched on-line? That a snippet would turn viral and be seen all over the world in less than 48 hours (just ask the last two Miss USA's)? That you would be interacting with your show by voting a winner while the show was being broadcast? That a local show would interact with viewers sending interview questions in to the reporter via Twitter? That isn't even the big stuff (digital TV, HD TV, the death of analog TV) and there's much, much more, but you get the idea. It feels like suddenly, there are more changes than we can process or care about, and, of course, it is not just television – its just about everything. Organization is a coping tool to manage these rapid changes – to make choices and have some control rather than being 'swept along with the flood'.

This is a more realistic view of what it means to get organized. It also illustrates why everyone needs some basic organizing skills – so as the world keeps changing, operational models can be re-engineered to meet new demands, so information, material goods, technology and everything else flow through your life with a built in exit strategy, so you can stay focused and accomplish the things that important to you and so you have a tool to help you cope with today's rapidly increasing speed of change.

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