

From
STUFFED
to
SORTED

Mary Anne Bennie



YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE
TO ORGANISING, ROOM BY ROOM



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About the author



MaryAnne Bennie is Australia's organising guru. She began her professional organising career after realising that being organised was one of the most valuable, transferrable life skills a person could possess.

MaryAnne is passionate about liberating people from the tyranny of clutter. In 2002 she founded a company called 'in8 home office and life organising' and has since developed systems to keep homes, offices and lives running smoothly.

Her Paper Flow system has already been documented in the best-selling book *Paper*

Flow: your ultimate guide to making paperwork easy, co-authored with Brigitte Hinneberg (Wrightbooks 2011). This book shows readers how to manage household, personal and business paperwork. The Paper Flow system is fast becoming the paper management system of choice for people all over the world.

In *From Stuffed to Sorted*, MaryAnne introduces readers to the **in8steps** system and shows how easy it is to apply these steps to totally reorganise the stuff in your life and turn houses back into homes. As a wife, mother and businesswoman, MaryAnne fully understands the struggle to juggle home, office and life. The **in8steps** system is tried and tested and, if followed, will work for everyone regardless of how much stuff or space they have.

Prior to becoming a professional organiser, MaryAnne was a senior lecturer at a leading Australian university. She holds a Bachelor of Education and Master of Business.

MaryAnne's organising expertise is regularly featured in newspapers and magazines, and on websites and radio. She motivates and inspires people, and fully equips them with the information and tools they need to organise their homes, their offices and their lives.

A word from the author

Organising your home is going to change your life forever. Some time ago a client—let's call her Jane—called me in and asked me to help her organise her cluttered home. It took a few weeks to work through every room in her house and we sent loads and loads of unloved and unused stuff to charity. A few weeks later, she called me again and asked me to recommend an interior designer, which I did. The interior designer went through the house and introduced new pieces of furniture, lamps, cushions, bed linen and artwork and—wow—the house really popped!

About ten months later I was running an event and noticed Jane's name on the list. I was excited to see her again, but I was not prepared for the transformation. The everyday, 50-something woman I had previously met had turned into a stunner. She had lost lots of weight, she was wearing a gorgeous outfit and her hair and makeup had been done with style and taste. She looked as though she had just stepped off the catwalk. I was speechless! After recovering my composure, I asked her what the secret to her success was and she replied with words to this effect: 'It's all your fault—you started it! Once my home was organised, I could think again and I could dream again. Then, once it was redecorated, that was the icing on the cake. But I didn't look the part! I was overweight, frumpy and had lost my sparkle and that's what I wanted to get back. So I started a weight-loss and fitness program. Once I lost the weight, I invested in a new wardrobe and used a stylist to create a whole new look for me! But, I could never have done this without taking the first step of releasing the clutter and becoming more organised. You changed my life forever. Thank you.'

Jane's story, and the stories of all my clients, inspired me to write this book, to bring you the system that turned their lives around and triggered a whole chain of new events. I will be with you every step of the way, cheering you on, giving you advice and celebrating your success. I hope just a little bit of your success in life will also be my fault!

Warmest wishes,
MaryAnne Bennie

Introduction

“Well begun is half done.”

Aristotle

Regardless of where we live or what we do, we acquire and accumulate items meant to enhance our quality of life. We call these items our possessions, our assets, our things or our stuff. These items come in the form of furniture, clothing, entertainment equipment, tools, cookware, crockery, cutlery, supplies, food, glassware, ornaments, artwork, books, transport, technology, appliances, footwear, paperwork, sports equipment and toys. And that just names a few! When in balance, these items are useful and appreciated: they support us in our endeavours and make life easier and more comfortable.

In an affluent society, people have the means to accumulate more and more. And in this technological age, items become obsolete within a very short time, compelling us to update regularly. Remember the computer you purchased last year? Well, it's a dinosaur today!

These days we have multiples of many items, whereas in days gone by one or none would have been the norm. How many TVs, tennis racquets, mobile phones, computers, salad bowls and kitchen appliances do we really need and, more importantly, do we actually use?

We have an infinite capacity to bring stuff in, but we have a finite capacity to store our stuff. *Everything is competing for space*. Everything needs to earn its right to stay!

Human nature is such that we are reluctant to dispose of something without good reason or without it having a good home to go to, especially if it is in good condition and we paid good money for it. So the accumulation continues...

Homes aren't designed to house large quantities of major appliances and entertainment items. Homes today are designed along minimalist principles, but people are living with the opposite tendencies.

Once our accumulation of possessions exceeds our capacity to store them, we are in big trouble. When something doesn't have a home, it's

homeless. Because homeless items have nowhere specific to live, they live anywhere and everywhere. They line the hallways, park on benches, slide under beds, perch on cupboard tops and hide in corners. Then they breed like rabbits! Before we know it we have a house full of mess and the resulting chaos has a detrimental impact on our quality of life.

The statistics are in! A study conducted in 2007 by The Australia Institute found that 88 per cent of Australian homes have at least one cluttered room, with the average home having three or more cluttered rooms. An incredible 59 per cent of women said there was a room in the house they don't like visitors to see and 40 per cent said they felt anxious, guilty or depressed about the clutter in their homes. In 2004 the Australia Institute found that the average Australian household wasted \$1226 a year on items purchased but never used. That's a whopping \$10.5 billion for the nation. We clearly have a problem.

We are too embarrassed to entertain at home and are constantly frustrated by our attempts to put things in order. No matter what we do, our possessions have outgrown our capacity to store them.

We think more storage will solve the problem so we add cupboards, shelving and containers. Some of us renovate or put on an extension; others relegate the car into the driveway or the street and use the garage as a storage solution. When desperate, we may resort to the 'out-of-sight, out-of-mind' storage technique and rent off-site storage to deal with the excess. If only we had a bigger house, everything would be fine!

Our possessions should support us and our lifestyle. They should reflect our personality and style. They should bring us happiness, not despair. Why, then, do we find the things we took so much pleasure in acquiring are now suffocating us, causing us misery and wasting our precious time?

Sadly, some of the things we acquired on past shopping expeditions no longer have their magnetic appeal. Our love affair is over!

The **in8steps** system helps you to reassess your relationship with your stuff. It shows you how to decide what stays and what goes, and how to efficiently store what remains so it's ready and available when you

need it. The delicate balance between your stuff and your available storage is restored. In this new relationship, your stuff will support you now and into the future. But when the time comes to part company, you will know how to gently break the news. The **in8steps** system will show you the way.

Excuses, excuses, excuses

People have many excuses for not getting organised. It's a good idea to look at some common excuses and dismiss them, just in case you are using them to justify your acceptance of the status quo.

Excuse 1: *You think you need everyone in your household to support your organising efforts.* It can be lonely being the organising warrior of the household, but like many crusaders you may have to go it alone. Good leaders lead by example. Organise your own space first and then move into other spaces with respect and permission from adults and the knowledge of children. You never know, they may even decide to join you on your space mission.

Excuse 2: *You think that storage alone will solve your problems.* A good lesson to learn right up front is that it's about you and your relationship with your stuff and rarely about storage. Most homes could do with a bit of extra storage, but the fact is, you will simply continue to fill the storage you have until it's back to overflowing. You need to limit the amount of stuff you keep and then employ the best possible storage solutions. When your stuff and your storage are in harmony, you will be free at last.

Excuse 3: *You think everything you have might come in handy one day.* The truth is that if you did need it, you would most likely not be able to find it in time. If you don't know where something is, you actually don't have it at all. Think about it: how many times have you gone out and purchased something you knew was in your house somewhere? I rest my case! The 80:20 rule says that you use 20 per cent of your stuff 80 per cent of the time—and you use the other 80 per cent irregularly or not at all. Remember that your stuff is competing for space and has to earn the right to stay. Concentrate on making space for the 20 per cent and eliminating as much of the 80 per cent as possible.

Excuse 4: *You believe that sorting and organising takes a lot of time—time that you don't have. You will actually gain time by having everything sorted and in its place. Sorting does take time because most of your possessions came into your home one item at a time and that's the way they must also be sorted or disposed of.*

If you sort your stuff efficiently now, you will save that time many times over when accessing, using and replacing your stuff in the future.

The choice of work pace and time spent sorting is yours. Some people prefer working in short bursts—doing one area at a time—while others like to get the whole room done in one hit.

Ask yourself: Would you rather spend some time organising your stuff once or looking for things over and over and over again?

Excuse 5: *You think that putting things in temporary homes or in safe places will do. You often say, 'It can go here for now' or 'I'll put it in a safe place'. Both of these storage options are fraught with danger. Temporary and safe storage places are invariably forgotten. Those diamond earrings you put in the pocket of your black jacket may not be found for months or years—or, even worse, be lost forever when you donate the jacket to charity. Now is a good time to dispense with the temporary and safe place options. From now on, everything goes into its correct home and, if it doesn't have a home, one is created.*

Excuse 6: *You believe you have been genetically programmed to be disorganised—either in keeping with family tradition or rebelling against it. I often see people having a bet each way. They are disorganised because they had bad role models. Or, they are disorganised because they had good role models and now they are rebelling and asserting their independence. Both excuses are lame! You're an adult now and able to make your own decisions and choices. So stop falling back on the genetic excuse.*

Dismiss all your excuses right now. Help is at hand. The **in8steps** system will bring a huge sigh of relief to anyone wanting to become more organised but not knowing where to start. We will start at the beginning and work step by step through the process until every room in your home is fully organised and you are back in control. So climb on board. Ready or not, here we go!

How to use this book

The best way to use this book is to first read part I and complete all the masterclasses. Armed with this information, go to part II and reorganise the rooms of your home in the order of your choice. I challenge you to do a room a week—you will have your whole house done in next to no time and still have a life! The key is not to bite off more than you can chew. You know how busy your lifestyle is, so work around it and make organising your home a gift to yourself, done at a pace that suits you and in a way that will sustain you now and forever.

Note it!

Keep a notebook dedicated to your organising project. Use it to take notes, answer questions, record measurements and play around with room plans.



Case studies are provided throughout the book to highlight how real people, just like you, have handled real situations.



Tips for success are sprinkled throughout the book to give you those extra power boosts, that extra edge and those little finishing touches that make a big difference.



Exercises, where you pause to answer questions or make decisions, are placed in strategic locations. Record your responses in your notebook before moving on.

So what are you waiting for? Turn the pages, follow the system and watch your home transform before your very eyes.



Mary Anne
Bennie



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PART I

Masterclasses

Part I of this book is critical to your success. This is where I share all of my insider secrets, my technical expertise and my years of experience helping people organise their homes, their offices and their lives.

Masterclass 1: setting up for success gets you in the mood for organising. It's important to have the right frame of mind before you get started on this incredible journey.

Masterclass 2: the in8 steps system takes you through all the ins and outs of the process. You get to understand what each step does, why you do it and how to put them all together.

Masterclass 3: a space mission introduces you to the three elements of space. Understanding the physical, functional and emotional elements of your space will empower you to bring your disorganised home back into balance.

Masterclass 4: getting a handle on hardware is where I reveal my five secret weapons. I've spent years studying shelves, drawers, hanging rods, hooks and containers. I know that may not sound very exciting to you right now, but they are the basis of all storage. By the end of this masterclass, you will love them just as much as I do!

Masterclass 5: time-saving techniques is where I share simple little ideas that you can use every day to make getting organised playful and a lot more fun.

Once you have graduated from the five masterclasses you will be fully qualified and prepared to transform your disorganised and cluttered house into a clean, organised and functional home.



ing a space

Pride

Back to the Drawing Board

HOUSE

life

Tidy Files = Tidy Finances
HOME OFFICE

Go with the Flow

rethink

"Every day is an opportunity to make a new happy ending" - Anonymous

organised

This is our space

PE

al comfort zone

Aha! Moment

It's Never Too Late

Makeover

CHUCK IT OUT

ep

love

How Much Is Enough?

ear
utter!

Make an Impact

pantry

STOPFOOD
waste

- Bathroom
- Dry shampoo
 - Cotton pads
 - Make-up remover
 - Pantyliner
 - Lip balm
 - Electric shaver
 - Foundation
 - Lipstick

kitchen

kitchen

1

Masterclass 1: setting up for success

“Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world!”

Joel Arthur Barker

In the mood

Remember the last time you went on a trip? You did some planning, chose a destination, set the dates, decided how to get there, booked your accommodation and set aside some spending money. You really got in the mood. You imagined being in new places, meeting new people and having new experiences. That's how I want you to feel about this trip to your new destination of being organised. I want you to see, feel, smell, hear and taste it. I want the excitement of it to be pulsing through your veins throughout your journey.

Complete the following three exercises to get you in the ultimate organising mood.

Exercise 1: be organised

What does being organised mean to you? Is it having a place for everything and everything in its place? Is it not being embarrassed if someone pops in? Is it having time to do all the things you have been putting on hold all these years?

Visualise it!



Imagine you had a crystal ball and you could see your organised future. What would you see, smell, feel, taste and hear? Take a few moments to visualise and experience your organised future through your crystal ball. Visualise every room in your home in its organised state and ask yourself these questions:

- What do I see?
- How does it smell?
- What can I feel?
- How does it taste?
- What can I hear?

Now close your eyes and answer the questions.

Write your responses for each room in your notebook. You will use your vision for each room in part II.

Tip



Repeat this visualisation exercise whenever you commence organising a room or need a little extra motivation!

Exercise 2: calculate your savings

No time to waste!

How much time and money will you save by being more organised?

You already know that being disorganised costs time and money. But have you ever really thought about how much time and money you will save? Being more organised streamlines every single thing you do: from getting ready in the morning, to going to work, to making dinner, to looking after the house, to retiring in the evening. If you're disorganised, every single thing you do takes more time than necessary. It could be the few extra minutes it takes to move the junk off the ironing board to iron a shirt for work, or the time you waste every day looking for wallets,

purses, glasses, remote controls and keys. Maybe it's the 30 minutes you spent on hold on the phone, waiting to explain why you shouldn't have your power cut off, after forgetting to pay the misplaced bill.

Now let's look at your situation and time it.

Tick, tock! Time it!



Calculate your time saving: just think back over the past week and note the time you wasted through being disorganised. The amount of time you wasted will become the amount of time you save.

I will gain _____ hours a week by being more organised.
My time savings will come from: _____

Money down the drain!

When it comes to money, just think about the food you waste every week simply because you have no idea what you need when you go shopping. What about the things you buy again because you can't find the ones you already have? If you have ever wasted money on late fees, interest charges and fines for being tardy with your bills, you know how much that hurts. Is your car fading in the sun and losing value due to a disorganised garage? What about other frustrating things such as lost gift vouchers and receipts for warranty items needing repair?

Now let's look at your situation and cost it.

K-ching, k-ching! Cost it!



Calculate your money saving: just think back over the past week and calculate what you lost through being disorganised. The amount of money you lost will become the amount of money you save.

I will save \$_____ a week by being more organised.
My money savings will come from: _____

Now let's look at your situation and spend it.

Spend it!



You have calculated how much time and how much money you will save by being organised. Now look into the future and imagine how you will spend that time and money.

How will you spend the extra time you have and extra money you save?

Exercise 3: shift your thinking

Talk to yourself!

It's now time to change your mindset.

So often it's the things you say to yourself that keep you from moving forward. This inner conversation is called self-talk. The good thing is that every negative statement you say about yourself or your situation can be turned around to be more positive. Statements such as, 'I've always been disorganised' are not helpful to your success. Instead say, 'I'm learning new organisation skills to achieve my goals'. From now on, focus on the future and forgive the past. Make positive statements every time you slip into negative thinking by changing your self-talk.

Change your mind! One of the self-talk changes you can make is to change from the old idea of 'letting go' to the new concept of 'releasing'. Many people find it hard to 'let go' of their stuff. 'Letting go' assumes a tug of war, with you holding on against an enemy who is pulling your stuff away from you. Well, you don't have to 'let go' of anything. You get to choose what stays and what goes. Your goal is to 'release' items that no longer serve or support you. This simple mindset change frees you to 'release' your things onto the next phase of their journey. It's not all about you. The stuff you 'release' has a higher purpose and a new place to be, serving people who have different needs from you.

Marcia's moving on



Marcia was moving house and she told me something that stuck with me. As she was packing, she asked herself a simple question: 'What things do I want to accompany me into the next phase of my life? What items have earned the right to continue to be in my new space and in my new life?' The items she loved and needed and those from which she received support were packed, while the rest were sent on their own journey elsewhere.

The key is to focus on what you are 'keeping' and not on what you are 'releasing'.

Whether you are moving into a new home or simply reorganising your existing home — affectionately known as 'moving without moving' — the process is the same. From now on you have the opportunity to make a conscious decision about every single item you possess. You have the chance to make a fresh start with a clean slate.

Re-frame it!



Make a list of your negative self-talk statements and turn them into new, positive ones. Here is an example to start you off on a more positive note.

Negative self-talk	Positive self-talk
I don't have time to get organised.	I can break it down and do a little bit at a time.

Now that your mood and confidence have been lifted, you are ready to learn the **in8steps** system. So read on.

The in8steps system

initi8

Start the process and set your vision and goals.

investig8

Take a good look around to see what you have.

consolid8

Bring like items together.

elimin8

Release what you don't need, use, want or love.

alloc8

Allocate containers and space for what you are keeping.

activ8

Put things into their new locations.

evalu8

Check how it's working.

celebr8

Maintain the system and celebrate your success.