

Organize your office, your home, your life!

Organizing FOR DUMMIES[®]



Eileen Roth

Renowned organizing consultant

with Elizabeth Miles

A Reference for the Rest of Us![™]

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Organizing For Dummies

**by Eileen Roth with
Elizabeth Miles**



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About the Authors

Eileen Roth: When asked how long she's been organizing, Eileen Roth relies on the estimate made by her dad: since age five. At an evening dinner party in her native Chicago, the sweet young systematizer would go downstairs to say goodnight to the guests. Spotting the candy dish they'd been passing, she'd make a beeline for the bonbons—not to grab a treat, but to return the dish to its original place! Despite this early prowess, Eileen insists she wasn't born with an extra organizing gene. Instead, her parents had been teaching her to put things away from the day she could walk, and she draws on those simple lessons today in helping people see that organization isn't inherited—it's a learned skill.

Through her company Everything in its Place[®], Roth consults with clients including Fortune 500 companies, trade associations, entrepreneurs, and busy individuals and families. Her success shaping up even the organizationally impaired has landed her spots on *Oprah*, the *Today* show with Bryant Gumbel, *Handy Ma'am* with Bev DeJulio, and NBC, ABC, and WGN news. Eileen's organizing fixes been featured by the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun Times* and on a number of radio stations, and she uses her advanced time management skills to squeeze in workshops across the country.

Roth was sixteen when she first brought her organizing skills to the workplace. Her after-school job at SS Kresges (now Kmart) turned into a management coup

when she became the only part-time person asked to run several store departments. After graduating from the University of Illinois, Roth was ready for a bigger challenge: organizing business executives. She started as a secretary and went on to spend fifteen years in office and association administration, honing the systematic skills that keep her in demand at companies seeking a competitive edge.

Motherhood brought balance to Roth's organizing talents by taking her out of the office and back home. Eight months pregnant with her second child, Eileen attended her first Tupperware[®] party and fell in love with the organizational advantages of the plastic food storage system. When the local sales manager told her that she could earn a free set by hosting six parties of her own, she did it—all before the baby was born. Five more years selling Tupperware[®] enabled Eileen to stay home with her two young daughters while she perfected her domestic organizing techniques in the kitchens of her party hostesses.

When her daughters were older, Roth returned to her career. In 1992, as organizing became recognized as a profession and after being laid off twice in one year in a job market slump, Eileen called on her entrepreneurial spirit and her extensive experience in both home and workplace organizing to found her own company. Everything in its Place[®] caught on like wildfire, and Roth was soon a consultant, speaker, and trainer for companies such as Northwest Airlines and Argonne National Laboratories.

With her first book, Roth brings a lifetime of the lessons learned while organizing in the trenches to readers everywhere. Written for any level and to cover the full

spectrum of a busy life, *Organizing For Dummies*® , says Eileen, could even reduce the national stress level and improve GNP. No matter what, this tell-all reference will help people put everything in its place and put their disorganized days behind them for good.

Eileen Roth has recently moved from her hometown of Chicago to Phoenix, AZ to be closer to her college-age daughters. She is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO), National Speakers Association (NSA), and American Society for Training and Development (ASTD).

Elizabeth Miles: Looking for a better way to strengthen your mind, feed your soul, get healthy, wealthy, or wise? Turn to author, media personality, and entrepreneur Elizabeth Miles. Known to her fans for her user-friendly approach to peak performance on many fronts, Elizabeth offers answers that pop off the page and onto your to-do-now list. She's miles of smiles as she tells you how to tune into success, new-millennium style.

With a professional career that's run the gamut from banking on Wall Street to booking rock concerts and developing gourmet recipes, Miles relies on a broad range of experience in making the good life easier for busy people. She puts her graduate degree in ethnomusicology to work with her book and CD series *Tune Your Brain*® : *Using Music to Manage Your Mind, Body, and Mood* (Berkley Books, Deutsche Grammophon 1997-2000), which draws upon the latest neurological and medical research about music's effects on the body and mind to create an applied system for listeners. As creator and host of the daily "Braintuning Break" radio feature, she's taken her advice to the airwaves and

earned listener loyalty over three seasons on the California Classical Network.

Music is food for the ears, says Miles—but you can't live on sound waves alone, and you'll often find her in the kitchen cooking up something tasty and targeted to your personal energy needs. *The Feng Shui Cookbook: Creating Health and Harmony in Your Kitchen* (Birch Lane Press 1998) is the first book to reunite the Chinese art of feng shui with its age-old partner of nutritional medicine. Elizabeth's contemporary take on tradition helps readers of all tastes and lifestyles eat for optimal energy, health, and prosperity—the “good *chi*” that spurs achievement. If you prefer a scientific slant when serving up dinner, Miles has partnered with Hollywood nutritionist Carrie Latt Wiatt to pen *Portion Savvy: The 30-Day Smart Plan for Eating Well* (Pocket Books 1999), which pairs science with psychological and lifestyle factors to produce mind-body prescriptions for fitness.

Miles' popular approaches to achieving potential have been extensively covered in national and international media from *Self* to *Success*, PBS to the BBC, while the *Tune Your Brain* CD series has enjoyed long Top Ten runs on Billboard's classical chart. Miles lectures and consults for organizations such as Kaiser Permanente, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Young Entrepreneurs' Organization, the Wellness Community, and many more concerned with health, education, and performance. As a previous self-professed organizational dummy, Elizabeth enjoyed applying her trademark knack for making things easy to Eileen's expertise and proven techniques to help bring *Organizing For Dummies* to life. A native of Madison, Wisconsin, Miles holds a Master's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a BA from Dartmouth College. She lives in Los

Angeles, halfway between UCLA and the beach, amidst musical instruments, cookware, books and CDs that are all finally finding their place.

Dedication from Eileen

To my mother and father, Millie and Marv Roth, who taught me how to get organized and so are largely responsible for this book. If she's watching from heaven, my mother is surely proud.

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It's been a long year for me, what with a divorce, getting my youngest daughter off to college, and moving from Chicago to Phoenix all while writing my first book. For all the support, personal and professional, during this transitional time, I thank my children — Mindy and Julie Parelman; my family—Marsha Buck, Allan Roth, Marv Roth, and even my ex-husband Joe Parelman; my friends, especially Vicki Schneider; my colleagues in the NSA-Illinois Chapter, especially the Forum Group; Windy City Toastmasters; and all my clients, consulting and speaking, whose belief in my organizing skills has made my career possible. Most importantly, thank you Elizabeth, for working with me to create this book, for polishing a diamond in the rough. I couldn't have done it without you! I tip my hat to you. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you. (*Was that enough trite phrases to a writer? Whoops, I should have created an acronym!*)

As always, I have my friends and family to thank for keeping me centered and sane with generous input, insight, and unending patience when I disappeared from the scene for weeks on end to tend to my prose. Special thanks to my parents—the house at 200 North Prospect served as my mental model for each room of the Home section—to all the roommates who've shared the challenge of living in small spaces with me and so made me organizationally sensitized, and to the colleagues, creative partners, and clients who motivate me to find better ways to reach the finish line at work. Last but not at all least thank you Eileen, for entrusting me with your life's work and passion, for not laughing too hard when you saw my house and making me laugh lots of other times, for being a true partner even when your burden was heavy. Thank you for teaching me the deep power of putting everything in its place, a life-changing lesson

that has made co-creating this book a pleasure with
eminently practical results!

Thank you all.

Eileen and Elizabeth

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Introduction

Organizing for the Millennium

What's the favorite four-letter word of less-than-fully organized people? "Help!" Answering that call has given me a satisfying career and my 15 minutes on the *Today show* and *Oprah*. In case you missed the shows or absorbing life-changing information takes you more than 15 minutes, I'm here to answer the call for you with *Organizing For Dummies*.

If you think of yourself as an organizational dummy, don't feel bad; everybody is born that way. Organization isn't inherited. With the human genome decoded, the evidence is clear: DNA strings dedicated to putting things into place and managing your time like a pro are nonexistent. Instead, organization is a learned skill set, just like driving a car. In fact that's a pretty good analogy. If you think back, learning to drive probably seemed pretty daunting at first, but driving may now be so automatic that you can practically drive in your sleep (though national safety experts don't recommend this). Organization is acquired, and as in any learning process, you need help. This book offers you that help.

I learned how to be organized through a combination of luck and sheer force of will. The lucky part is that I was born with organized parents. My mother and father *taught* me to clean up my toys, put the dirty dishes into the dishwasher, and make my bed every day. They showed me that everything had a place, and that some things should be put away before others came out. Lucky me; I learned all this before I even learned to read. (*Organizing for Dummies* didn't exist at that time, so being able to read wouldn't have helped anyway.)

After college, I landed my first job as a typist. That was fine, especially back then, before the days of career women, but I wanted more, so I decided to come up with better ways to do things to build my own rungs up the corporate ladder. I learned office organizing skills to add value to my work, and soon I'd moved from typist to secretary. The next stop was as an office administrator and eventually I ended up in association administration, juggling the workings of huge organizations, honing the systems that made events and processes run smoothly, and accomplishing my company's strategic goals. I discovered organization by doing in my office career because otherwise all the executives I worked with never would have made it through the day, let alone reached the company's bottom-line objectives.

Then things really got complicated: I became a mom. Determined to spend as much time as possible with my two daughters but committed to working and staying involved, I left the office and became a Tupperware rep.

Yep, parties and all. Tupperware soon had me organizing kitchens all over the city of Chicago, coming in with my containers and leaving the place completely transformed. Being organized is a great way to win friends and influence people when you sell Tupperware. Meanwhile, I was busy with my family, attending all the girls' school and sporting events, acting as a teacher's aide and Girl Scout leader, washing a million loads of laundry, and racking up miles in the carpool lane. I discovered efficient ways to work and live because I had to. I couldn't be in two places at one time but my organizing systems were in place everywhere, 24/7, and I was supermom. (Sorry about the bragging, but they say it's okay for the Introduction.)

As my daughters grew old enough to need me less, I reassessed, set some goals (you can find out how in Part V), and became a professional organizer and trainer. Boy, was there a need out there! Today, through my company, Everything in its Place™, I help clients from Fortune 500 companies as well as trade associations, entrepreneurs, and busy individuals and families get organized. What I learned in the process is that anyone can learn organizing skills and put them into practice. So if you feel like an organizational dummy now, just open up your eyes and read, open up your mind and do, and you can create an organized you. All the pieces of your personality can remain in place, even as each element of your life and work finds its place too.

Being Busy versus Being Productive

So many technological, social, and economic changes impact your life every year that you probably need organization just to keep up, let alone advance. Many people have two jobs, one at the office and one taking care of things at home. If you have a family, you may have a third. Elderly relatives or community commitments? You can count off four, five, and keep right on going. No matter what life stage you're in, getting organized can make every day better and help you achieve your long-term goals.

Read this book if you'd like to have

- ✔ More time
- ✔ Less stress
- ✔ Greater productivity
- ✔ Fit finances
- ✔ Better relationships
- ✔ An improved professional reputation
- ✔ Space to live, work, breathe, and be

Don't have time to get organized? All the more reason to read this book. I can make the time for you and deliver the goods, and you may wonder how you ever had time to be any other way.

How to Use This Book

Did you notice I wrote how to *use*, not *read*, this book in the heading above? That's because reading is only half the battle. To get organized, you have to act.

I'm offering you a shortcut to my lifetime of learning. In these pages, you can have all my professional secrets. Still, all the organizing secrets in the world won't do a thing for you if all you do is read them. You must put the principles into practice. This is not a novel or a book to read through and toss into one of your many piles.

Organizing For Dummies is a reference book for real life, so you have to bring the pages to life by doing.

Thinking of a task as a pie and taking just one slice at a time is a time-management trick. Do the same thing with this book, read just one part, chapter, or a section within a chapter — depending upon your attention span and reading speed — then act on what you just read. Don't wait until you finish the whole book. That day may never come (I'm a realist), and furthermore, you're sure to forget all kinds of good tips and tricks by then. So read, and then do, and then read some more, sort of like an organizing sandwich.

First things first: Start with Part I. Chapters 1 to 3 contain the guideposts, the principles of organization that are key to understanding the rest, and they're a pretty quick read.