

## **Are We There Yet?**

by Helen Kornblum, MA

Adults chuckle when they hear “Are we there yet?” coming from a child in the back seat of a vehicle. Children, having no sense of time, are impatient for arrival because they don’t know how long they have been or need to be traveling to reach a destination. But some of us are guilty of the same kind of unrealistic thinking when it comes to changing our lives so that we’re more “organized.”

As a professional organizer, I’m all too familiar with people who decide to get their lives in order and ask me for the secrets to do so during an upcoming weekend. My stock answer is that getting organized is a process, not a marathon weekend activity. Organizing is the journey to new habits and systems that support your priorities.

Dealing with physical or psychological clutter requires conscious analysis of what’s not working for you, how you want it to change, and how you will achieve one or more changes. Reorganizing a bedroom, for example, may take just a few hours, depending on your To Do list. You can move clothing around in a closet and tidy up a dresser quickly, but if you want to repaint the room, look for more functional furniture, and add a new closet system, you’re looking at a variety of activities that need to be sequenced. And after making the improvements, you want to be sure that you have safeguards in place to prevent you from slipping back into old habits that made the room messy to begin with.

Changing work habits to improve your daily functioning and bottom line productivity is a more challenging focus. Do you know which of your habits are counterproductive? Are you wasting time in your workday without realizing it? Do you allow others to waste your work time because you’re too passive or polite to object? Can your calendar system be improved so you don’t miss appointments or travel excessively on certain days? Changing one habit can take up to 3 weeks, so dealing with a series of habits and routines is serious work.

Assuming that we’re committed to making positive changes in our lives or surroundings, how do we know when we’re “there”? Look for a few of these signs:

1. You substitute new ways of doing things automatically without having to think about what you’re doing. Putting your keys and phone down in the same spot every time you enter your home is an example of routine but helpful behavior. Routines ultimately save time.
2. You control time by planning your activities. You don’t jump to respond to the phone or e-mail all day long. Instead, you group taking and making calls and responding to messages at your convenience.
3. You make colleagues and friends aware of when you are available for them, while preserving your prime time for yourself.

4. You feel less pressured and more creative about the important activities in your life. Getting rid of mental or physical clutter gives you more time to develop old interests or new ventures. You're less defensive and more involved in life.

5. Nothing is "perfect" in your life, but everything seems to be under control and moving in the direction you want. Being organized is never a static state.

I hope your weekend plans include more than just "getting organized" because trying to reform yourself in a hurry can demoralize and exhaust you. Tackle a discrete part of the change you want and little by little, you'll reach your destination—without having to ask if you're there yet.

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