ORGANIZING

If it stresses you out, create a system

Angie Hyche

While listening to an organizing podcast several years ago, the podcast guest shared a statement that has really resonated with me. This woman was a small business owner and a homeschool mother of eight children (from my best recollection). To say that this woman had a lot on her plate is an understatement! Yet despite her situation, she was able to thrive in both her business and her home life. This is how she described the secret to her success: "If it stresses you out, create a system."

I have found this principle invaluable for both myself and my clients. While I love the process of organizing physical items, I always strive to take the work deeper and to teach organizing principles. The practice of establishing systems, organized and coordinated methods or procedures, is a powerful one. Let's explore what this statement means and how to apply it. Perhaps we can use her secret to help us with our stressors so that we too can thrive.

Whether you realize it or not, you have already established some systems. Most of us have a morning routine to get ready for the day. Most people have a method for common household tasks like laundry and dishes. But what if you don't have a system for a common activity, and it's stressing you out? What if you do have a system, but it isn't working effectively?

You can create systems for just about anything. I used to occasionally forget to take a morning medication or forget one part of
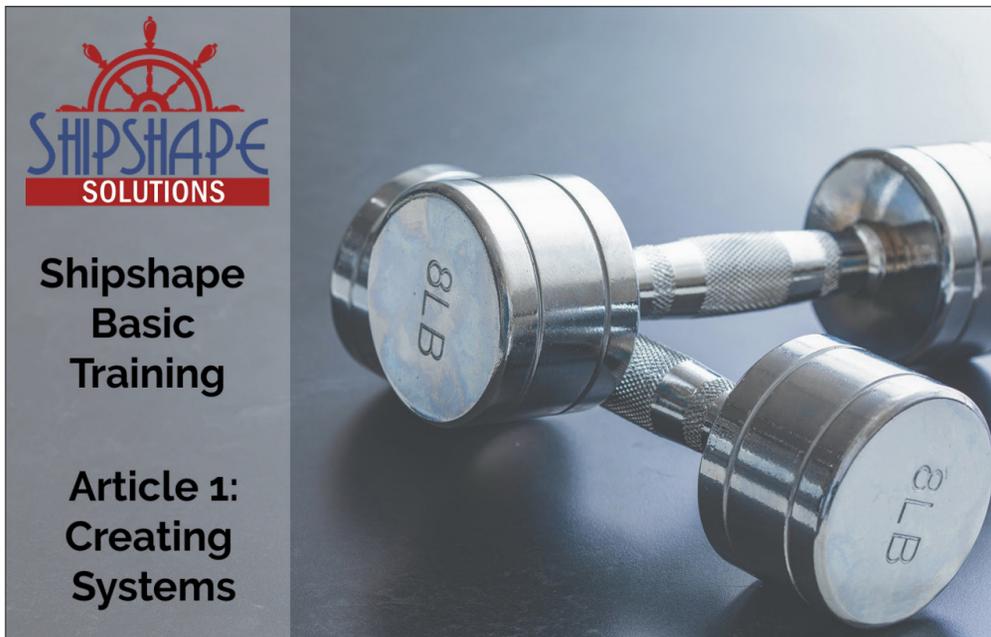
my daily makeup and skin care routine. So I created a system. I have every item that I use in the morning in one labeled bin. I start the morning by removing all of the contents from the container and placing them on the counter. Then as I use each item, I replace them in the container. When the counter is empty, I know I'm finished and I haven't forgotten anything.

I used to have a problem remembering what I needed at the grocery store. A paper list didn't work for me because I sometimes lost the paper, or the paper was at home when I was at the grocery. Now I use a free app called AnyList for my grocery list (and many other lists as well). I can add items to it using our Amazon Echo ("Alexa, add milk to Food City.") My husband, Eric, shares the same account. Now both of us always have our grocery list with us whenever we need it, and we can add items to the list anytime.

Now and again a system you've set up that worked for a while may no longer work. You may

need to adjust it slightly until it works again. Eric and I ride bicycles regularly. We used to keep all of our bicycling supplies in one large bin. This worked great for a while. But most of the time, we only needed a few of the supplies for a short ride, and we didn't like always having to get the large bin out and sort through everything to find what we needed. We also forgot our reusable water bottles sometimes, and it wasn't always easy or convenient to find the right size bottle that fit perfectly into the water bottle holder. We fixed the problem by moving the most frequently used biking supplies into an easy-to-reach location. We started keeping the water bottles that best fit our bikes nearby. Now we can quickly grab what we need for a short ride, and we don't forget our water bottles.

One system that I've helped numerous clients establish is a system for keeping active household papers organized. Active papers include things such as mail, invitations, forms to fill

out, receipts, magazines, bills, coupons, etc. Without a process for keeping this paper organized, it doesn't take long for it to get out of control with piles of paper everywhere. If papers aren't dealt with in a timely manner, the consequences can sometimes be serious. Missing a bill payment can incur either a fee or discontinued services. Using a simple weekly practice makes a world of difference. My article called "Process Paper to Prevent Piles" gives instructions for implementing the system I recommend. You can find the article on my website (https://bit.ly/3cnMIIo).

In the first few months of running my business, I found that I was frequently anxious about keeping up with all of the necessary "behind the scenes" tasks. I needed a way to keep up with tasks like checking financial records, posting to social media platforms, following up with clients, adding my latest newspaper article or Daytime Tri-Cities organizing demo to my website, and organizing before and after

photos. I had so many different operations to track that I felt stressed out. It was time to create a system!

I made a list of all of these tasks and established a weekly Admin Day. I learned to protect that day by not allowing myself to schedule anything else. This system has decreased my stress tremendously. It has allowed me to not worry about those tasks on other days of the week because I know I will catch up on my Admin Day.

Think about your day-to-day home life. What's stressing you out? What tends to get forgotten? What do you wish was easier? Take some time to think through the problem. Figure out what's working and what's not working. Think about other processes in your home that are going well, and see if you can implement something similar. Invite others in the home to help.

If you're a smartphone user, odds are there's an app that can help with almost any quandary. If you have a smartphone but don't know how to use it for anything other than the most basic processes, ask for some help. Some tech solutions are very straightforward and can be a tremendous help. For example, setting a phone reminder for a certain time of day or when you arrive at a particular location is simple. I use this strategy every day, and I can't imagine doing without it at this point. Or you may prefer to try another solution that doesn't involve technology. There's no right or wrong solution; the goal is to find what works for you consistently.

If you need more assistance creating a system to stay organized, I'd love to help! Contact me by phone (423-567-4273) or email, and we'll get started!

Angie Hyche is a professional organizer and owner of Shipshape Solutions and the author of "Unholy Mess: What the Bible Says about Clutter" (coming soon!). Email her at angie@shipshape.solutions.

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Article 1: Creating Systems