

The Life Chaotic

By Cedar Burnett | Published 08/1/2007

The Challenge

Think you've got too much stuff? In March of 1947, two reclusive brothers by the name of Collyer were found deceased in their apartment in Manhattan. The pair were known to be compulsive hoarders and had packed their brownstone so full of their possessions that they were forced to move through tunnels carved into the detritus. Between the stacks of gas chandeliers, bowling balls, a wine press, a baby carriage and fourteen pianos, one brother, blind and paralyzed, was discovered, having perished of starvation. His younger brother was unearthed some time later, where it was found he had been crushed to death by a large stack of newspapers. From this hapless tale we get the term Collyer Syndrome, a history-rich euphemism for "disposaphobia," which is estimated to affect up to two million people in the United States.



While most people aren't as extreme as the Collyer brothers, many may at least have leanings toward packratry. So for those of us who save wrapping paper or cry at the prospect of pruning our book collections, the lesson from the Collyers is clear: an overabundance of stuff can kill you (or at least bring stress and chaos into your lives). How many of us have searched wildly for lost items in our own mini-mountains of paper and mail, or wasted precious time hunting through packed, disorganized closets and junk drawers looking for a can opener, a spatula or that perfect blue sweater we "just know is in here somewhere!"

Luckily, help is on the way! As our lives have sped up and our need for household efficiency has risen, an industry has emerged in response to our rampant disorganization. Professional organizers are on the move and on a mission to bring order to our disorder and trunks for our junk. One such organizing services firm, Eliminate Chaos, was recently hired to help a family in Bothell. A mother of two teenage girls had finally had enough of her haphazard kitchen and pantry, and looked to Master Builders Association member Eliminate Chaos for support.



The family was highly active and extremely busy, and between work, the kids' various sports and other activities, all members of the household were nearly always on the go. Their mother wanted a kitchen conducive to making quick, healthy meals, and she wanted to teach her daughters good organizational skills before they headed off to college. As it stood, the family spent so much extra time trying to find things and so much extra money buying food they didn't know they already had, that mealtimes had become focal points for stress and arguments, not the relaxing times to connect they so sorely needed.

After a full evaluation of both the kitchen and the family's needs, Eliminate Chaos dove into the fray. First, they reestablished zones of use throughout the kitchen. The zones were determined by type and located based on the natural flow of use. Everyday dishes were compiled into one dish zone; a coffee center zone included coffee-making supplies, the coffee pot and coffee mugs; and a bake center zone was created with all baking staples like flour and sugar, as well as pans and other baking accoutrements. Other zones, including a small appliances zone, a paper goods zone, a utensils zone and a serving dish zone also staked their rightful claim in the footprint of the kitchen.

After the zoning plan was completed, Eliminate Chaos sorted through each cupboard and drawer, removing things that were never used, food that was expired or would never be eaten and items that did not to live in the kitchen. While they sorted, they grouped similar items together for use in the new zones. Canned goods hung out with canned goods and cereal bonded with cereal in countertop harmony. Meanwhile, old chapsticks, ticket stubs, long-since inkless pens and ancient soy packets found a final resting place in the trash. With the junk removed, the drawers and cupboards received new inhabitants, grouped by type. All of the utensils were condensed and placed in drawer dividers, while another drawer was established for picnic items. Mismatched Tupperware™ was recycled and uniform, stackable GladWare™ was introduced, complete with a cd-like holder for the lids.



Turntables, can risers and drawers bring order to the pantry.

In the pantry they removed two lower shelves and added two wheeled storage units with drawers, maximizing the depth of the cupboards and the empty space below the bottom shelf. To further exploit the available space, they added can risers (effectively bleachers for canned goods), put condiments on turntables to allow for easy access and placed sauce mixes into clear containers for visibility. All tea and other drinks were stationed in a pullout drawer, while other drawers were filled with pasta, snack foods and other dry goods grouped by type.

A lazy susan provides deep storage and access to heavy pots and pans.



A new recycling system was created under the sink, with separate containers for glass, paper and cans. Pullout drawers were installed in lower cabinets and old, unused dishes were set aside for the thrift store. A command center, including a central calendar and a spot for mail was established. Finally, the art and pictures cluttering the cabinets were cleared off and moved into a formation of frames on the wall, offering a full display without the chaotic feeling the pictures had previously induced.

Because Eliminate Chaos had truly taken into account how the family lived and not some prescribed, unrealistic vision of how they should live, the project was highly successful. Knowing that this was a household that had little time, heavy traffic, sentimentality and youth to contend with, a Spartan show house was out of the question. What Eliminate Chaos gave the family were the tools to remain functional even in times of near-pandemonium. As a result, and because the family had been involved every step of the way, they not only gained a more organized kitchen, but a wealth of education on how to organize and streamline other areas of their home; lessons the mother hoped the girls would implement for the rest of their lives.

Thanks to Laura Leist, CPO© of [Eliminate Chaos](#), for contributing her information and ideas on behalf of the Master Builders Association. All pictures copyrighted and courtesy of Eliminate Chaos.