

Don't know where to put it, how to file it, when to do it?

Ask the Organizers

**A panel of professional organizers
with the answers to your organizing dilemmas**

Meet the Panelists

Today's panelists and host make up the executive board of the Southeast Michigan chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO). They bring a variety of backgrounds, experience, and organizing specialties to the discussion today, and are ready to answer all of your organizing questions. Wondering what to do with your paper, time, and stuff? Ask the organizers!



Shannon Burdick

Shannon, owner of Shannon's Organizing Service founded in 2002, holds degrees in family and community services and early childhood education, and a Certificate of Study in CD from the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization. She specializes in residential organizing and is treasurer of NAPO-Southeast Michigan.

Contact Shannon at 248-854-7037 or on the web at www.sosorganizing.com.



Betty Huotari

Betty founded Logical Placement in 2001 and specializes in office and residential organizing. She helps to guide and educate clients about basic organizing principles through direction and hands-on work. Betty is vice president of NAPO-Southeast Michigan and a member of the Fenton Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors and the Women's Exchange of Fenton.

Contact Betty at 810-348-1772 or on the web at www.logicalplacement.com.



Susan Pinkowski

Susan is president of Organizers 'R Us, Inc., and secretary of NAPO-Southeast Michigan. She is also a member of the Better Business Bureau, the Southern Wayne County Chamber of Commerce, the National Association of Women Business Owners, and the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization.

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Your Host: Debbie Stanley



Debbie is a chronic disorganization coach and owner of Red Letter Day Professional Organizers, founded in 1997. She is president of NAPO-Southeast Michigan and NAPO's Publications Chair, and has earned the Chronic Disorganization Specialist Certificate and Certificate of Study in AD/HD from the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization.

Contact Debbie at 586-746-1428 or on the web at www.RLDPO.com.

To Do NOW: Ask Questions!

To Do Later: Turn the Page for Even More Organizing Info!

***“I know nothing about professional organizers,
so how can I pick one?!?”***

• How to Find the Right Organizer for YOU •

Hiring a professional organizer (also known as organizing consultants, organizing coaches, personal organizers, or just organizers) can be intimidating. Aside from admitting to a stranger that you're disorganized, you also have to try to guess whether this person has the skills to actually help you and the empathy not to judge you.

It takes a lot of courage even to make that initial call, so if you're willing to do that much, you already have our respect. Now how about some tips to help you find the best organizer for you? Consider these questions:

• *Okay, what exactly IS a “professional organizer”?*

Here is the official definition from the National Association of Professional Organizers: Professional organizers provide information, products, and assistance to help others organize to meet their needs. A professional organizer should guide, encourage, and educate clients about basic principles of organizing by offering support, focus, and direction.

• *Do all organizers know about AD/HD and work with AD/HD clients?*

No! Not all organizers are educated or experienced in AD/HD. If you have AD/HD, it's not always necessary to have an organizer who is an expert in it, because most of the principles of organizing apply to both AD/HD and non-AD/HD people. However, you might find yourself having to explain more to an organizer who doesn't "get it," just like you do in other areas of your life.

• *What can a professional organizer do for me?*

A professional organizer can provide ideas, information, structure, solutions, and systems, which can increase productivity, reduce stress, and create a newfound freedom and sense of being in control. You can hire an organizer to do a "makeover" of a room or your entire house, but for a more long-lasting result, you'll also want your organizer to teach you how to maintain the new systems once they're in place. Working side-by-side with the organizer and participating in the transformation of your space is the most effective way we've found to create lasting improvements.

In addition to space organizing, a professional organizer can help you tackle paper and data organization as well, and some also provide time-management coaching.

• *What will it cost?*

There is a lot of variety in the ways in which organizers bill for their work and in the rates they charge. In general, an organizer is likely to bill either by the hour or by the project. Factors that impact the organizer's fee include his or her level of training and experience and the cost of living in your area of the country. Some organizers might charge extra for travel time or for working on weekends or in extreme conditions (very dusty, hot, or otherwise uncomfortable or hazardous conditions). NAPO reports the hourly fee generally ranges from \$40 to \$200 per hour.

Some organizers offer packages (e.g. purchase 10 hours up-front and receive a discount), while with others you simply pay as you go.



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Supplies will most likely be extra. Some organizers will pick them up for you or they resell products themselves; others will recommend products for you to purchase on your own, or will take you on a “field trip” to buy products together.

Most organizers will charge for cancellations (although some have very liberal cancellation policies) and for bounced checks.

• How long will it take?

Getting organized is a lot like losing weight: You could go on a “crash diet” and see dramatic results in a very short amount of time, but the results are not likely to stick if you haven’t developed better habits and thought processes at the same time. Slow and steady improvement is more likely to produce lasting results.

The amount of time you will need with the professional organizer actually present depends on two things, and they are both all about you: How quickly can you make decisions, and how much can you accomplish in between sessions with your organizer?

Disorganization often stems from indecisiveness. Your organizer can help you develop the habit of deciding and not deferring as you sort through clutter and papers. Eventually you will begin to exercise this decisiveness on your own, and it will be easier to decide what to do with things, because you will have put new systems in place and designated homes for your belongings with your organizer’s help.

Once you and your organizer have gotten through your “backlog”—the accumulated piles and boxes—and your organizing systems are in place, you’ll be in “maintenance.” Many clients find it helpful to have a session with their organizer every few months to help them stay on track as they practice maintaining their now-organized lives. Clients will also often call their organizer back for a “tune-up” when they experience a crisis or stressful time and their organization level starts to slip.

• How much will I have to do myself?

That’s up to you. Some clients become even more motivated to be as self-sufficient as possible when they consider the alternative of paying an organizer to do these things for them!

Some organizers will do all of the work for you—you don’t even have to be there. Others insist that you must at least be present to participate in decisions regarding what to keep or toss and where to put things. Some clients are not able to physically participate, and organizers understand this. By the same token, organizers have their own physical limits, so your organizer will work with you to find solutions if large, heavy objects need to be moved or removed.

Your biggest contribution to the organizing process is this: Be ready to change. When an organizer finds a client answering every suggestion with “Yeah, but . . .,” s/he can tell the client is not ready to change. If you find an organizer you like and whose suggestions make sense to you, but you just can’t seem to follow through, don’t blame yourself: You’re simply not ready, and that’s ok. Ask the organizer to call you back in six months or a year to try again.

• Will they drag my stuff out onto the lawn like on the cable show “Clean Sweep”?

We sure hope not! A conscientious organizer will not force you to part with things if you’re not ready, and s/he certainly will not use humiliation or a beat-the-clock approach to pressure you into throwing stuff out! A professional organizer is a consultant who will ask questions and make observations and suggestions to help you decide what is or is not important to you. Ultimately, you, the client, are the final decision-maker. →

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• Do organizers work by phone?

Many do! Many organizers offer phone coaching, which is especially useful for time management training and ideal for follow-up after an in-person session. Some organizers work exclusively by phone, but most can work with you either in your space (home or office) or by phone.

• Do organizers do housecleaning too?

Generally, no. Organizers help you manage clutter, and getting organized makes it easier to keep your house clean, so clients usually find doing housework isn't as much of a chore as it used to be. Some even treat themselves to a housecleaning service as a reward for getting organized!

• How do I know whether they're good at this?

Well, there is no guaranteed way to tell, the same as with any other consultant or service provider. Ask questions, check references, and use your intuition to determine whether the organizer is likely to be a good match for you.

You can learn a lot by asking about the organizer's educational background, past experience (both before their organizing career and as an organizer), and training. There is no college degree in professional organizing, but there are now some classes and certifications offered for members of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD). Members of these groups are also required to abide by an official Code of Ethics which includes rules for confidentiality of client information and ethical, professional, and courteous behavior.

Good organizers are very careful about client confidentiality, meaning you can expect that all of your personal information will be protected when you work with a professional organizer. Ironically, this commitment to confidentiality can make it difficult for you, a prospective client, to obtain references from the organizer's past clients. Rather than giving you names and numbers of people to call, the organizer might instead offer to give YOUR name and number to a past client.

Good organizers will not come across as judgmental, superior, condescending, or bossy. The goal is to help you find organizing solutions that work for you, not to bully you into getting things done or make you feel even worse about a situation that you're probably already not too happy about. A good organizer recognizes and will teach you that there is no one "right" way to be organized—no product or system is right for everyone. If an organizer pressures you to use a particular system and doesn't offer or consider other options, that organizer is probably not open-minded, creative, or experienced enough to help you. By the same token, if the first solutions you try don't work for you, don't condemn the organizer! It takes time for both of you to learn what will work for you, and even when you do find your perfect solution, chances are your needs will change over time and the system will need modification in the future.

• Why will this work when nothing else has?

People often find that they make more progress working with an organizer than they ever have on their own or with the help of family and friends. There are a number of reasons for this:

* Organizers are objective outsiders. They won't remark on how many times you've tried to do this while rolling their eyes, and their lives haven't been impacted by your past attempts at organization. They can be neutral and open-minded precisely because they are not among your close circle of friends and family.



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* Organizers are experts at finding the right solution for YOU. Most naturally organized people can tell you exactly how they do something, but they can't tell you ten other ways to successfully do the same thing. Professional organizers can.

* Having an expert guiding the process makes it much less scary. The organizer serves as a "safety net" and will make sure you don't get yourself into even deeper trouble by trying to change. If you get overwhelmed or lost, your organizer will get you back on track.

* Organizers are ideally positioned to help you make the right choices in buying organizing products. You won't have to buy and try every container, software, book, and gadget: Once your organizer gets to know your needs and preferences, s/he can tell you which products are likely to work for you and which aren't. Also, organizers often have connections and resources to share with you, such as ways to dispose of or donate items, and they can refer you to other helpful people, such as therapists, contractors, or real estate agents.

* The organizer's presence will make you more efficient in the time s/he is there. The organizer serves as an anchor to keep you on task, answers questions along the way, and helps you to get used to focusing on organizing tasks.

Things you can do to improve your results:

1. Be ready to focus on organizing as soon as your appointment begins. Do whatever you can to minimize or eliminate distractions and interruptions that will take away from your time with your organizer. It is strongly recommended that you have a babysitter for young children, because, as you know, they might ignore you all day, but when a visitor arrives or you get on the phone, suddenly they must have your attention!

2. Make the effort to follow your new systems. If you don't, those systems won't work, so keep at it until you find a system you like, and then, as the Nike ads say, Just Do It! If you discover there are some things you can't keep up with no matter how hard you try, talk to your organizer about options for delegating those tasks to someone else.

• *How do I find a professional organizer?*

The best way is to get a referral from NAPO National, your local NAPO chapter, or the NSGCD. Visit www.napo.net and use the automated referral system to obtain names, details including specialties and years in NAPO, and contact information for organizers in your area. Visit www.napomichigan.com for a list of Michigan organizers arranged by county. Visit www.nsgcd.org for specific information on chronic disorganization and CD organizers.

• *What should I ask when I call an organizer?*

Ask everything you want to know! Ask about any of the above points that are of concern to you, so you can be sure the organizer understands what you want and you understand how the organizer works.

Some sample questions:

• *How long have you been an organizer?*

(Remember, lack of experience does not necessarily mean s/he is not right for you.)

• *What did you do before becoming an organizer?*



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- *Are you a member of any professional associations?*
- *Have you taken any classes or received any certifications in organizing or AD/HD?*
- *How do you set your fees? What will my fee be?*
- *Will I pay you in advance or at the end of each session? What payment methods do you accept?*
(Most organizers accept checks or cash only, but a small percentage also take credit cards.)
- *What hours are you available? Do you make evening or weekend appointments?*
- *How many clients have you worked with? How many of them have AD/HD?*
(Listen for the facts and also the attitude in this answer. An organizer should answer this question honestly, objectively, and without judgment or sarcastic remarks like “Well, they’re all so disorganized I think they all have ADD ha ha ha!” A conscientious organizer will not make light of the question and will take care not to imply that s/he can diagnose AD/HD, unless s/he is actually qualified to do so.)
- *Do you have references I could call, or could you give my number to them?*
- *Are you insured?*
(Many organizers carry business insurance and/or are bonded.)
- *Do you offer a free initial consultation?*
(Some do and some don’t. Either way is normal.)
- *Will you be doing the work, or will we be working hands-on together? What is a typical work session like?*
- *Will you yourself be my organizer, or will you assign an employee or subcontractor to work with me?*
- *What is your cancellation policy?*
- *Do you have a client agreement or contract?*
- *What do I need to do before our first appointment?*
(The organizer might ask you to sign and return a client agreement, have trash bags and boxes on hand, or arrange for child care. Most will tell you NOT to try to “clean up” because this can make it harder to get an accurate first impression of what’s really going on in your space.)

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• Too Much Stuff? Pass It On! •

Check out these resources for donating or disposing of your excess stuff:

General Resources

DISPOSAL: Got something you'd be glad to toss, if you could only get it to the curb? Dial **1-800-GOT-JUNK** or visit www.1800GotJunk.com for pickup of heavy items or large quantities of trash. They'll extract it from the most inaccessible spots, and they charge by the space it occupies on their truck—not by weight or the effort it took to drag it out!

DONATIONS: Contact www.GiftsForSight.org which accepts most new or gently used items, or check out www.freecycle.org to share items with members of your own community.

RESALE: Are you keeping things you're going to sell on eBay "one of these days"? Take it to a BayListers location (www.baylisters.com)! They'll help you determine whether the item has any eBay value and will handle the sales process, from photos to listing to collecting the payment to shipping; you pay a small commission and avoid a big hassle!

Specific Resources

BATTERIES: Used batteries can be dropped off at many retail stores or community recycling centers, or look for drop boxes at your local library.

BICYCLES: Donate used bicycles to www.ibike.org/youth.htm. Click on "local drop-off sites."

BOOKS: Donate to your local library or VA hospital, or sell to a used bookstore.

CARPETING: Carpeting can be recycled by participating in DuPont's Reclamation Program in Sterling Hts. (586-795-1800) or in Grand Rapids (616-988-4524).

CELLPHONES: Drop off at Verizon Wireless, Sprint, or Franklin Covey Stores, or visit www.WirelessFoundation.org.

CLOTHING (WOMEN'S): Donate used business attire to www.DressForSuccess.org. Click on "Where We Are" for drop-off sites. From January through March annually, donate old prom dresses to www.GlassSlipperProject.org. Click on "How You Can Help" and then "How To Donate."

COMPUTERS: Computer towers can be recycled by participating in Hewlett Packard or Dell Computers' recycling programs or by going to www.cristina.org.

COUPONS: Donate expired coupons to Military Coupon Drop, Attn: Heather Donovan, POB 570, Bensalem, PA 19020.

EYEGLASSES: Donate old eyeglasses to www.lenscrafters.com. Click on "Gift of Sight" and then "Get Involved" to find your nearest location and more information.

GREETING CARDS: Donate old greeting cards to St. Jude's Ranch for Children, 100 St Jude's St., Boulder City, NV 89005-1618.

HANGERS: Wire hangers can be taken back to dry cleaners for reuse. Remove paper or foam.

LUGGAGE: Donate used luggage to Lutheran Social Services, 8131 E. Jefferson Ave., Detroit (313-823-7700).

MOTOR OIL: Drop off used oil at Valvoline Instant Oil Change locations throughout the Metro Detroit area.

PACKING MATERIALS: Drop off clean foam packing peanuts/bubble wrap at your local UPS store.

PAINT: Find tips for disposing of old paint at www.TimeToRecycle.org/paint.htm.

SHOES: Donate old athletic shoes to www.ShoesForAfrica.com. Click on "Donating Shoes." You'll be helping needy athletes around the world.

STEEL: Find sites to dispose of used steel at www.recycle-steel.org.

TROPHIES: Old trophies can often be donated to school or church youth groups or to the Special Olympics (www.SpecialOlympics.org).