

ORGANIZING

When the organizer is disorganized

Sometimes a story is just too funny to keep to yourself, even if it paints you in a not-so-pleasant light. I had been looking forward to attending my first NAPO (National Association of Organizing Professionals) conference for years. NAPO is an organization of 3,500+ members who are dedicated to helping people and businesses bring order and efficiency to their lives.

I have been a member of NAPO from the very beginning, even before I officially launched my business in August 2016. I had taken online classes, read their daily email discussions, and had corresponded by email and

phone with several organizers from all around the U.S. When I decided to attend the NAPO 2018 conference in Chicago, I just couldn't wait to finally interact with other list-obsessed people like me.

As the date approached, I paid special attention to all of the emails concerning the conference. I had chosen my class sessions, connected with my conference buddy (NAPO assigns a buddy to every first-time conference attendee), and had packed everything on the suggested packing list.

On Thursday, April 26, my wait was finally over. My flight was scheduled to leave at 5:55 p.m. We pulled up to the curb at the airport at 5 p.m., I opened the trunk to get my suitcase, and it wasn't there. Yes, you read that correctly. I had left my suitcase at home. And I was headed to a conference for professional organizers. Talk about irony.

Although my husband, Eric, made a valiant attempt to retrieve the suitcase in time, I didn't make that flight. I wasn't able to leave until 6 a.m. the next morning, but I still made it to the



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conference in time. Somehow I was able to stay calm and to laugh about this turn of events, and it definitely made for a great conversation starter at the conference.

So why am I telling you this story? Why am I admitting that although I pride myself on organization, I am by no means a perfect example? I firmly believe that humility is a good thing, and I also believe you can learn a lesson from my mistakes.

I remember thinking years ago that people who dropped their phones and ruined them were

just ridiculous. Until I dropped my iPhone in a toilet. I heard a story years ago about a friend who was traveling to Haiti on a mission trip. He got all the way to Miami before he realized he had forgotten his passport and had to fly back home. My story ranks right up there. I often say, "Add this to the long, ever-increasing list of stupid things I have done."

I am guessing that at least a few of you read my articles about organizing and figure that I must be 100 percent organized in every possible way. Now you know that's not true. Don't get me

wrong; my home is pretty organized. But when it comes to time management and routines, I have a lot of room for improvement. What valuable lessons can you learn from my story?

REMAIN CALM WHEN YOU REALIZE YOUR MISTAKE.

In the midst of the mini crisis at the airport, I am so glad I was able to maintain my composure. In a stressful situation, this is critical.

Prepare early. In the vast majority of cases, being in a hurry contributes to the problem. My daughters and I often tease Eric about needing to get to the airport so early. We have always thought his insistence on arriving so early was overkill. I learned the hard way last week that leaving early allows extra time for situations just like this one.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK.

Everyone does stupid stuff sometimes. But don't just say, "I am officially an idiot," or "Oh well, that's just how I am." Laugh a little, and then learn from it.

CREATE A CHECKLIST FOR ANY REPEATED TASK.

Taking the time to do this will make the situation much easier in the future and decrease the odds that you will make the same mistake again. Many of my best checklists or systems have been created as a result of mistakes I have made, sometimes over and over again. Because I have left way too many things in hotel rooms over the years, I do an extensive double check of the

room before I check out now. As a result of many forgotten items, I now have a packing list for bicycle rides and a general packing list. The night before I work with a client, I go ahead and set out my work clothes and pack everything I will need in the car. I have been doing this until now by just thinking of each item, but it would be much more effective to create a checklist. You'll be interested to know that my newest checklist is called "Last minute trip preparation"; the last item on this list is "Load suitcase into car."

What about you? Are there routines in your life (either at home or at work) that could be made less stressful by creating a system or checklist? As soon as you identify something, jot down as much as you can while it's fresh on your mind. Later, when you're not in as much of a hurry, think through the situation completely and complete the checklist. You may need to get input from other team members for this step. Don't worry about getting it perfect. You can always add or subtract items as you evaluate what's working and what's not working.

I hope this information will be helpful for you. We all fall short sometimes. Taking the time to evaluate what went wrong and establishing a better system for the next time is definitely worth the investment.

Happy organizing!

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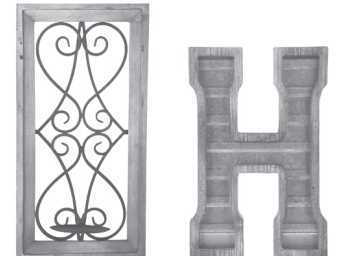
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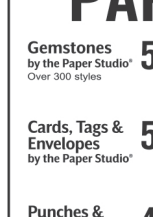
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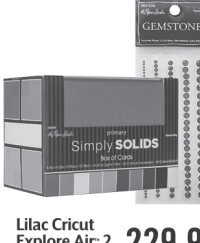
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