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ORGANIZED AT HOME

1 Think first. Before embarking on a new organizing project, ask yourself which organizing projects succeeded in the past, and why. Then ask which ones failed, and why. Knowing yourself also means knowing your weak points. These answers guide you toward organizing strategies that work for you and steer you away from those that don't.

2 Design your system first. Buy products to get organized next. Let your solutions dictate the products you purchase, not the other way around.

3 Know yourself. Look around and take note of piles you've made. Try some self-analysis by asking: "Why is this pile here?" You might be deferring a decision—dropping it there because you can't think about it at the moment. It helps define your next organizing step when you understand why you are making a pile.

4 Be specific. Saying something general like, "I'm going to get organized," has no specific meaning. Saying instead, "I'm going to make my master bedroom a retreat instead of filling it with laundry and the ironing board," provides a concrete goal and helps guide your strategy.

5 Have a launch pad. Check this spot as you leave for home or office. This can be a good place for keys, cell phones, PDAs, DVDs to return, and other items that need to go out the door.

6 Put your car keys on top of your lunch in the refrigerator if you keep forgetting your lunch. This makes it impossible to go anywhere without your lunch.