

CHAPTER NINE



BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

The Power of Organization

by Saren Eyre Loosli



Saren and her husband, Jared, had five kids in five years, which wasn't exactly planned. In fact, Saren has learned that very little about motherhood (or life in general) goes as planned!

After growing up all over the place (Washington DC, London, Salt Lake City, Mexico, Japan, Boston) as the oldest of the nine children of best-selling parenting authors, Richard and Linda Eyre, Saren graduated from Wellesley College, got her M.Ed. at Harvard, and conducted training conferences for educators across the country. But it wasn't until after she got married and had kids that the real education and hard work began! In response to what SHE needed as a mom and her desire to use her background in training and development to help other moms, Saren worked with April Perry to found The Power of Moms.

When she's not trying to answer five different needs and questions at once, Saren squeezes in all the reading, traveling, hiking, and biking she can. For more information, visit Saren's blog, Five Kids in Five Years, which is found at looslifamily.blogspot.com.

Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up. - A. A. Milne

Should I really be writing this chapter? There are so many moms I know who are vastly more organized than I am. But as I've thought long and hard about organization, I've realized a lot of important things for myself that I hope will help you as well.

Organization means different things to different people. I have a friend who keeps her house spotless and clutter-free but somehow can't find anything she needs when she needs it (out of sight out of mind?). I have another friend who doesn't carry a planner or use a calendar but very seldom forgets things and gets her five children on time to all their activities and special events.

My husband feels he's organized if he can find what he's looking for immediately—and somehow he can do that quite well even when his stuff in the garage or papers on his desk look like a huge mess to me. I feel like I'm *not* organized if there are any papers out on my desk or non-food-related items on my kitchen counter tops. And my brain feels like a mess if I don't make my weekly list of "immediate actions" and refer to them each morning as I get going.

Here's how family "organization" works for one mom:

Hubby: "Has anyone seen my shoes?"

Me: "Under the table."

Hubby: "Which one?"

Me: "The end table where they were kicked under, like always."

Hubby: "How about my keys?"

Me: "Downstairs on the arm of the couch."

Hubby: "My phone?"

Me: "Stuck between couch cushions in the living room."

Hubby: "Wait, what about my wallet?"

Me: "You left it in the console of your Jeep."

Hubby: "Oh yeah. Has anyone seen my hat?"

Are you KIDDING me? Thank goodness I adore this man.

I live a life of organized chaos. We're a fun-loving family that stays very busy—a family of four with two Chihuahuas and a rotating door that invites house guests at all times of the year. My kids are creative and inventive—which naturally leads to some messes. Most of the time, the chaos is fun.

My ultimate goal is to simplify our lives by having everything organized. This would mean that everything has a place, the closets are perfectly organized and labeled, my books and files are where I left them in my office, bills pay themselves, and shoes can find their own way to the closets.

I've since come to my senses and I am settling for being able to see the kitchen counters and not get anything stuck to my feet when I walk through living room. Yes, it's not my idea of "clean and organized," but as long as others are helping out, I've decided to not be such a perfectionist.

This brings me to the chore list. Sometimes it gets done, sometimes it doesn't, but mom's rule is that if it's not done before I get home from work, you don't get allowance for that day. This tends to work with my ten-year-old, and I'm hoping it rubs off on the seven-year-old soon. However, she tends to be a walking tornado . . . things literally fall on the floor as she walks by. I'm thinking about having her tested for a sixth sense. Isn't that what they call it when you can make things move without touching them?

*At least with a system of chores (written down and posted on the fridge counts as a system, right?) and some family members that help, we can typically find the things we need to make our family function without too much freaking out—on good days. This is what I call *My Life of Organized Chaos*.*

Now, who has my pedometer and why is the dog in the baby doll stroller?

- Chantól Segó

As these examples show, there's no one right way to be organized and no one way that organization should look, but I feel pretty confident saying that organization is important to all of us. When we feel organized, it's easier to get things done, to find things and to feel that our life is generally under control.

Why be Organized?

Before delving into the "hows" of organization (much of which is offered through the excellent *Power of Moms Mind Organization for Moms and Family Systems* programs), it's pretty darn important to stop and think about the "whys" of organization. What do you personally crave when it comes to organization? What areas of your life feel most disorganized? What is not particularly organized in your life but doesn't really matter that much to you?

Perhaps you could take a few minutes to think about or jot down your responses to the questions above before you move on. Then as you read the rest of this chapter, record any sparks of inspiration that will help you move toward the type of organized life you'd like to live.

In general, organization is a means to an end, not an end. There are some “organization junkies” out there who love to organize for the sheer joy of it, but for most people, organization is something we do because it provides us with something else we really value. When we think about the “end” that we're organizing towards, we can better assess how much and what kind of organization is really important for us.

So why be organized? Here's what I came up with:

- So we can find things that we need in a timely manner and not lose things that are important.
- So we can enjoy the present without our brain constantly being distracted by schedule items and tasks we need to remember, ideas and worries that haven't been dealt with, or piles of stuff that remind us of undone tasks.
- So we can get things done on a daily and weekly basis (and help our family members with the things they need to get done).
- So we can raise our children in a deliberate manner and help them develop the traits and abilities we know they need.
- So we can steadily work towards our longer-term goals that tie to our values, dreams and deeply-felt passions and purposes.

Based on the purposes of organization above, here are some areas of organization that every mom can use some help with (especially me!). I'll go through each of these areas in the rest of this chapter:

- Thing Organization
- Thought and Task Organization
- Time and Routine Organization
- Family Organization

Thing Organization

If you're like me, the first thing that pops into my head when I hear the word “organization” is displaying a clean house. My father used to prep us for chores by saying, “Today we're going to move the house to the left a couple of inches.” Lately, I've been finding that statement too true for my own comfort.

It seems like I get up, my children move things around, and I must move them to the right or left in an effort to find order. I used to want my house clean throughout the whole day. I found I was cleaning up the same messes three or four times a day. My latest and more realistic goal is to have the house clean and orderly at least once a day. After all,

I am outnumbered. My children and my husband un-do everything I do faster than I can do it.

There's a saying that says, "Cleaning the house while the children are still growing is like shoveling the walks while it is still snowing." Cleaning is an endless process and often menial in nature. It definitely has its place, though. A clean environment helps us stay healthy and safe both physically and emotionally.

- Sharla Olsen

For most of us, as the saying goes, "thing order precedes thought order." Our minds generally feel cluttered when our homes are overly cluttered for our comfort level, but each of us has a different level of comfort with clutter and cleanliness. Perfectionism is bound to be a losing battle when it comes to keeping our homes neat and clean with kids underfoot. But it's important to think about what matters most to us and discard ideas that others may have passed along that actually don't resonate to us personally. I've adopted my friend April's basic standards for my home: "clean enough to be healthy, messy enough to be happy" and "clean enough to be sanitary, messy enough to be sane."

Following are some tips and ideas I've figured out and gathered from others that can help us with "Thing Organization" in our homes.

Keep the "Stuff" Quantity Under Control

Downsizing your "stuff" is an important key to clutter control. Having moved every few years my whole life and having helped many other people complete moves, I've seen that having lots of stuff is never a positive thing and can be a real problem. I've helped people pack up houses full of over-saved mementos, seldom-used or outdated electronic gadgets, mismatched dishes, out-dated and out-grown clothes, and broken items that "I might get fixed or need someday." I've seen how people end up needing storage units and larger homes to accommodate their ever-increasing piles of stuff. It's so easy to accumulate in our society. So many things are relatively cheap, and buying things is pretty much a national pastime.

Here are a few rules of thumb you may want to live by if you want to minimize the "stuff" in your life and make organization easier:

- **"If in doubt, throw it out."** There are so many things we keep because we think there's a slight chance of needing them again. But there's a far greater chance we WON'T need that thing again. And if you do happen to need it down the road, it's probably not that big a deal to get another one. So get rid of it! We keep important official documents and throw away pretty much all other papers (or we avoid even receiving papers—most bills and correspondence can be handled in a paperless way these days). When it comes to all the "special" things my kids create, most of them get thrown out too—but only after they've had a place of honor on the bulletin

board for a while, they've been properly photographed, and the digital photo has been added to that child's "special things" folder on the computer that they can review any time. They do keep a handful of their "most" special things in hard-copy form, and these go into sheet protectors in their own binder (we create a binder for every three years that contains these most special things).

- **When something comes in, something must go out.** If you buy something new, or if your child gets new toys for Christmas or for a birthday, you can make it a general rule that something should be given away to Goodwill or to a younger cousin or friend—or thrown away in the case of things that are shabby or broken—in exchange.
- **Embrace an “abundance” mentality.** Sometimes we hold onto things because we paid good money for them, but we don't even really like or need them anymore. Rather than embracing this “scarcity” mentality, embrace the “abundance” mentality. We all have more than we need. We don't need all that we have. Giving is a pleasure. And giving away something that is still perfectly usable can make someone else really happy.
- **Think of toys and clothes as consumables** (like food, toilet paper or tickets to a movie). There are some heirloom toys and clothes we may want to save for posterity. But in general, if you think of toys and clothes as regular consumable parts of life that you'll use and then pass along or throw away when they've been outgrown or aren't particularly used anymore, it's easier to get rid of them. If you pay \$10 for a toy and your children really enjoy it for a month and then it's just taking up space, just think of that \$10 like you'd think of the \$10 you spent to go to a movie or go bowling. It was money well spent because it provided nice enjoyment for a period of time, but just like you don't have to keep the movie ticket stubs, you don't have to keep the toy. It can be passed along to someone else who might really enjoy it.
- **Have a “giveaway box” on hand all the time and use that trashcan freely.** *“I routinely keep a charity donation box that fills up as I find things that have out-lived their usefulness around our home. My favorite aid to downsizing is my trashcan. I use whichever method fits the moment and item in question. It's empowering!” - Sharla Olsen*

Decrease Stress by having a Place for Everything

One mom writes,

I love to organize. I know it may sound crazy—but I do. Give me a stuffed closet or a disheveled toy room and I am good to go. I am not sure exactly where this trait comes from, but it is actually quite annoying on many occasions. Don't get me wrong, I spend

plenty of my time playing with the kids and taking out toys, but in the back of my mind is always the thought of organizing them in some better way.

I don't function well in chaos. My home is fairly tidy, but not always clean. What is my secret? My motto is: "Everything has a place." Many moms get discouraged with the toys, shoes, clothes, bills, etc. lying around their homes. One reason it gets so mind boggling is that these things don't have a place. When everything in our homes has a place, we are better able to organize and function.

We can't ask our children to put away their school bags and shoes if there is not a place for them. And, shouldn't that place be somewhere really handy to the door they use to come in and out of the house? We don't have a fancy mudroom, but each kid has a hook in our entryway for coats and backpacks with space on the floor beneath for shoes. When I ask my kids to clean these things up, they know right where to put them.

Each toy needs a place. That doesn't mean that during playtime my home is not littered with toys in every nook and cranny. However, when clean-up time comes, the kids know where everything goes. Try a bookshelf for larger items, a plastic tote for cars or a cute basket for baby toys. Too many toys? Put some away for a while and rotate them periodically or donate some to charity.

As moms, we need to be logical as to where we put these "places." There has to be a spot close to the front door for shoes (a simple shoe rack can work). Our children are not going to go to their rooms each time and put their shoes in their closets when they come in the door—and having them run to their rooms to get their shoes when it's time to go somewhere would make us late all the time. You could try keeping socks in a basket near the shoes as well.

Where do we put the mountains of paperwork and mail to go through? There needs to be a place. Try a file or an inbox on your counter or a mail center on your wall near the door. And I find that if I go through the mail right away and use the trash can liberally, my inbox can stay pretty manageable.

My motto has made all of the difference in maintaining order and organization in our home. My husband likes to joke, "Everything has a place—and I know mine!" As long as his shoes and dirty clothes are picked up, all is well!

- Mary Christensen

Thought and Task Organization

So if "thing order precedes thought order," then once we've got the things in our life in order, it's time to get our thoughts in order—and this includes our "to do" lists, our worries, our hopes, our calendar items, our goals—all the things that fill our minds day to day. Different systems work for different people.

Develop a System that Works for You

It's important that we create or tailor a program for time, thought, and task organization to our own unique needs.

The “how” of accomplishing what’s most important is the nuts and bolts of being organized as a mom. When it comes right down to it, we need to find something that will help us remember what we need to do.

Remembering is one of the keys to being organized. Choose your own method. Some people have planners or file folders or sticky notes or to-do lists that help them remember everything they need to accomplish for that day. Do whatever works best for you. Each of our situations is different, so what works for one mom won't necessarily work for another mom. When I started out as a mother, I could easily remember the appointments we had coming up because I didn't have that many places I had to be. Then, after having my fifth child, my oldest started school, and I felt bamboozled for a whole year. It took me awhile to figure out what I needed to do in order to stay on top of everything. I've relied heavily on the list system throughout my years as mom. Now, I require a BIG calendar and a to-do list to keep our family afloat and headed in the right direction.

- Sharla Olsen

Thousands of moms have had great success using the Power of Moms *Mind Organization for Moms* program to help them plan projects and accomplish goals successfully. It also helps them keep track of their short- and long-term ideas and dreams, and frees their minds of worries, calendar items and “to-do” lists so they can really be “present” for their families. I won't go into the details of Mind Organization here, but this mom explains a bit about why using some sort of system for organizing our thoughts, tasks, etc. is so important:

I confess to being an overachiever. I feel a perpetual itch to start new projects and constantly find myself mentally starting lists of things to buy—at four different stores, debating on what new recipes to try, scheming a girls' night out, considering tomorrow's early morning run, plotting my next apartment de-clutter, and anticipating the book to be read that is waiting by my pillow. While I do my best to make sure essentials and priorities are at the top of my list, I proceed to cram all sorts of other things into the nooks and crannies of my schedule and brain because I deeply enjoy looking forward to projects and events and getting things accomplished.

To organize all these activities and thoughts, I've always turned to one of my most favorite and reliable comforts: lists. I love lists. I love filling a pad of paper with my sprawling handwriting, watching the transfer of ideas and thoughts become more concrete. I feel in control and organized when I write things down. My usual solution for organizing things I need to do, want to do, and someday hope to do is simple: I make lists. Nothing is better than making a bold slash through a particularly daunting task item on a long stretch of a "To-do" list.

But when my big long list is jam-packed and overflowing with information, ideas, tasks, and deadlines (self-imposed and actual), I can get overwhelmed. As with many good things in life, too much of anything can be detrimental. Occasionally (okay, to be more honest I should say regularly), I found that my once-refreshing list system was becoming never-ending and overwhelming. Plus I realized that I have priorities such as personal worship, time with my husband, unstructured time with my girls, family playtime, downtime for myself, and sleep that weren't making it on my lists and were being neglected.

Recently I was thrilled—absolutely floored—when I discovered the Mind Organization for Moms (M.O.M.) system on the Power of Moms website. I consider it epic in my career as a mother, significant in my daily success, and monumental in my happiness. The system literally took me a week to even consider. I will admit the newness was a little daunting. Now that I am a full-fledged believer and implementer, I am still learning to trust and rely on the system. Occasionally I find myself resorting to my previous frantic and hectic norms. When this happens, I recognize how ineffective I was in my former way of handling my tasks, priorities and goals. With a little readjusting, I get back on track.

At one time in my life I was a slave to my “to-do” list. I often told myself that I could play and rest once everything was done. Unfortunately, a mother’s work is never done. Daily, I set out to conquer my un-prioritized lists, attacking each item with frenzy, never considering the time or energy I had available. Initially it was rewarding to tick items off my list but it was exhausting to keep up the pace. I survived but didn’t thrive. I commonly felt my kids were ‘getting in my way.’

I gratefully traded this particular disheartening method in for one of my new favorite features of Mind Organization, a “Next Actions” List. This particularly lovely and wonderfully handy piece of paper is created during my planning sessions each week. It is a way for me to take care of essentials while moving a few select projects forward simply. I love how the M.O.M. System helps me to organize my projects and tasks into “baby steps”—simple actions that go on my “important next actions” or “immediate next actions” lists.

I also love how the program has helped me to organize my “next actions” by context. I’ve got a “phone” list, an “errands” list, a “computer” list, a “do with the kids” list, etc., rather than a long, overwhelming list with no real flow to it. I also love the “someday” folder the program helped me create where I can write down and not lose track of all the great ideas and hopes I’ve got. I know I’ll get to the many things on my “someday” list when the time is right—and I don’t have to worry about forgetting them.

These new ways of thinking through and organizing my tasks have helped me to be more effective with my time. Now I know just what to do with a few spare minutes with energetic kids or a rare hour of uninterrupted quiet time. Rather than undertake to conquer a list from top to bottom, I can accomplish what I have time and energy for and

what works best for my kids after referring to my nicely organized lists. And I enjoy it! I take pleasure in my daily tasks because planning my next actions has made it easy for me to stay motivated. The pending items on my now manageable “Next Actions” List can wait when dress ups and toe nail painting sometimes cannot.

Mind Organization for Moms has given me tools to see that an organized momma is a happy momma. I have learned the hard way that I can't do it all. (I also realize I don't want to do it all!) Instead I've learned to focus on determining what I can and should do now. I am discovering what things can wait. And I am learning how to keep tabs on those things I want to do, someday, that I don't have the time or energy for now. It is liberating and exhilarating. Some days my apartment is messier, some days my next-action list gets tossed to the side. And some weeks I tackle a long list of things that needed to be done. Thankfully I don't have to compromise my family's happiness to be productive. I don't have to live with a burden of “mom guilt.” I feel confident that when I make efforts to keep my mind organized I am able to plan, prepare and organize. As a result I am learning to dream and enjoying the journey more than ever.

- Danielle Porter

Planning Sessions

No matter what system you choose to organize your projects and goals, it's vital to set up a regular time when you'll assess how your systems are working and plan for the upcoming week (this is called the “Weekly Review” in the M.O.M. program). I like to do it on Sunday nights. I spend about a half hour looking back over my past week, looking at the calendar, thinking through what tasks would need to be accomplished each day to make the calendar items work, and setting goals for the upcoming week. I use the Power of Moms Bloom Game to help me set goals—It makes it so easy to set balanced, bite-sized goals and I can print out a sheet where I track the accomplishment of my goals.

After I've worked on my own schedule and task lists for the week, I get together with my husband, and we spend a little time discussing the things we've got on our calendars for the week, what we need to do to support each other and the kids in the calendar items, and what our personal goals are for the week. We talk about any concerns we have about our family and/or individual kids and talk about longer-term goals and plans as well as immediate weekly needs.

Just as any effective company or organization has regular staff meetings, the management team of the family, you and your husband or partner (if you're blessed to have one), need a regular time to discuss what is coming up, what you're both working on and any concerns and ideas that have come up over the past week.

Time and Routine Organization

Effectively managing the timing of activities in our lives as moms is a vital part of organization. When we're saying "hurry, hurry, hurry!" to our children all the time, stress levels go way up for us and for our kids. When we can be realistic about how long things will take and pad our time estimates, we have a much better chance of being on time to things and feeling calm.

According to one mom:

Timing seems to be a major key for being organized. I've had so many moms say to me, "I just don't know how you do it with nine children." Right now, I'm still figuring it out myself! But I do know that once you have one child, you're a mom. And, with each child you add to your family, you're still a mom. Your timing is just different with two than with one. Part of timing everything right is knowing how much time it takes you to get a project done and then planning ahead to have time to accomplish it. For example, when my family goes anywhere, I aim to start loading kids into the car a half an hour before I need to arrive—plus driving time. That's the time it takes my family to get somewhere on time.

-Sharla Olsen

Routines can really help us organize our time. And routines make kids feel safe.

Last year, we moved to a new city and a new house just before the holidays, which sent our family routines for a serious loop. We had some serious lateness issues, and that made for a frazzled mom and rushed, unhappy kids. After a particularly bad week, we sat down as a family and had a serious talk about our school-day routine. We identified some of the things that were making us late and we talked through all the specific things that need to happen to get out the door on time in the mornings. We came up with these basic daily standards:

- We lay out our school clothes the night before.
- We make beds when we stand up out of bed.
- We brush teeth when we go to the bathroom in the morning.
- We take a shower before we get dressed (we were having troubles with kids getting dressed then realizing they were supposed to take a shower and that was adding a lot of extra minutes . . .).
- We don't play or eat before we're dressed and ready.
- We put our socks on before we come downstairs so we don't have to go back upstairs and get them.
- We keep our shoes in the shoe place by the door.
- We meet at the breakfast table at 7:15.
- Mom doesn't look at email or answer phone calls before school.

The next morning went really well. I got all the big kids to school on time for the first time since the move. After dropping off the big kids, the twins and I had a quality reading time and I so enjoyed snuggling with them by the fire while we read. I replied to a handful of

emails while they drew pictures (30 minutes of email time in the mornings—max—that was one of the boundaries I realized I needed to have), then we had a nice little lunch together before I took them to school (another routine standard—lunch at 11:15 so they can be at school by noon—and we were on time!). I came home, got dinner in the crock pot (another routine standard—figure out what to have for dinner at lunch time or before), and spent the time while the twins were at school really working through quite a bit of my “next actions” list for things I need to do when the kids aren’t going to interrupt me. It was a great day!

Of course, most days the established routines get messed up here and there. Unexpected things pop up—usually at the least opportune times. The repairman shows up when you need to go pick up the kids from school. Someone calls with a crisis when you're trying to help your kids with homework and you probably shouldn't have answered the phone right then but you did (or one of your kids did). Your two-year-old twins dump out 20 pounds of pinto beans in the pantry while you're downstairs cleaning up the potted plant they upturned a few minutes prior while you were trying to do story time with your older kids. (This happened to me a few years ago. And similar sorts of things happened again and again almost every day while my twins were two. Any semblance of a routine was hard in those days—but still, days when I tried for a nice simple routine went better than those when I didn't even attempt a routine.)

Having a routine that generally works is a very good thing. Having times where you can usually plan on a little quiet time to get things done, time when you plan on helping with homework and time when you plan on running errands is a good thing. Being able to “blame” the clock for the necessity of doing certain things at certain times can be a great thing with kids—and can help you be more personally disciplined as well. Knowing what to expect and setting up expectations for your family members about how the day should go generally makes the day go better—as long as your expectations are realistic and you are ready to be flexible as needed, that is.

But please remember: Just as it’s important to decide when and how to DO things, it’s also important to decide when NOT to do things. You’ve heard the quote, “Never put off until tomorrow that which you can do today.” Well, this saying is quite nice in some ways, but as any mother knows, there are tons of things that need to be put off or need to be added because of needs and moments that never could have been put on our calendar or list when we did our planning. My parents coined this new saying that I believe works much better: “ALWAYS put off a ‘put-offable’ in favor of a ‘now or never.’” And I’ll add: “Don’t feel guilty about putting off something non-essential for something that really matters!”

Family Organization

As I was researching quotes about organization (I love a good quote), pretty much everything that came up was about organizations, not about being organized. At first I was annoyed. Then I started reading some of the quotes and started thinking about how we call groups of people working together towards a common mission an “organization” (whether

they're actually organized or not) and how families are really organizations—organizations that need to be organized in similar ways to companies and non-profit organizations.

Just as great businesses, charities, and nations don't crop up of their own accord, strong families don't just happen. They are built with thought, love, planning, and yes, organization.

Having been raised by New York Times bestselling parenting authors, Richard and Linda Eyre, who focus on helping parents develop methods and systems for pro-active parenting, I have quite a bit to say on the subject of family organization. In fact, I have way more to say than can fit in this little essay. But I'll share some basic principles here and you can find a whole lot more at *The Power of Moms* if this whets your appetite.

I've found through my growing-up experiences, through my experiences building my own family with my husband, and through being a keen observer of families far and wide, that pro-active parenting is much more effective than reactive parenting. When you think about what you want your children to be gaining and then build methods and systems that support these purposes, beautiful things can happen (but sure, it can take a lot of patience and trial and error).

I suggest that you sit down with your husband and talk about what traits and abilities you want your kids to have when they "graduate" from your home and from your daily parenting at some point down the road. I'm guessing you'll come up with something like the list below:

- responsible with money
- empathetic towards others
- helpful
- polite
- kind
- excited about learning and growing and progressing
- able to clean and cook for themselves
- able to work hard and stick with a job
- able to set and accomplish goals
- skilled and talented in various areas
- firm in their understanding of who they are and what they stand for

Once you have your list, think through what methods and ideas you can use to help your children develop each of these skills and character traits. And then you'll want to set up regular "staff meetings" (including you, your spouse or parenting partner, and maybe some of your older children) for your "organization" (your family) so that you can discuss new programs, goals and methods and how things have progressed since the last meeting.

Organizing your family like an organization, with pro-active plans that lead to short and long-term goals, is a vital part of organization.

Chip Away

This essay just touches the tip of the organization iceberg. But hopefully it's helped you to think of a few specific areas where you may want to enhance your level of organization.

Organization is something you chip away at—focusing on one area at a time and regularly assessing and reassessing what you can do to better organize your things, your time, your thoughts and your progress towards what really matters to you and your family.

Here's one place to start: Take a few minutes to list all the areas of your life (and of your home) that need to be organized. You could make this list in the four categories this essay focuses on: Things, Thoughts, Time and Tasks, and Family Systems. Then, before you get overwhelmed by your list, circle the ONE thing in each category that is bothering you the most. Work on some methods for those things you've circled for a week or a month. Then move on to some other items on your list. Little by little, in an organized way, you'll feel more and more organized!

Of course, organizing will never be “done.” As your family grows, your children get older, your projects and goals change, and your responsibilities are adjusted, your organizational methods and systems will have to change too. This is why those weekly “staff meetings” with those involved in your family organization and those weekly planning meetings with yourself are so important.

All of us will have different challenges and strengths when it comes to organization, but all of us can find great power as we chip away at developing practices and systems that help us feel more of the power of organization in our lives.