

An Uncluttered Life

The Clutter Wrangler turns organizational skills into tidy business

By Lauren Slavin, H&L



An expectant mother called “The Clutter Wrangler” with a simple enough project: She wanted to transform her home office into a nursery for twins.

The catch? The babies were due in a month. With Jaclyn Ray’s help, the office was a baby room with two cribs in just four weeks. And she did it without a lasso.

The pit that forms in many peoples’ stomachs before attempting to organize even the smallest of spaces doesn’t exist for Jaclyn Ray, a professional organizer who’s adopted the moniker The Clutter Wrangler.

“At the end, everyone is happy and relieved, even if they were reluctant in the beginning,” Jaclyn says. “I can always see through the chaos of clutter.”

Jaclyn has been a professional organizer for 11 years, the last year and a half spent establishing her business here in Bloomington, where she travels exclusively by bicycle. The Canada native—whose long “o’s” give her away—moved from Toronto to be with her partner, who teaches psychology at Indiana University.

Jaclyn also studied psychology in college with the intent to become a therapist. But Jaclyn says family and friends, who took advantage of her talents in de-cluttering their garages and rearranging their apartments, knew long before she did that her true calling was in professional organization.

“I wanted to be in a helping profession,” Jaclyn said. “I realized my therapeutic natural talent was the ability to help people reduce their stress and increase their overall sense of well-being by working with them hands-on to become more organized in their home environment.”

The Clutter Wrangler credits some of her success as an entrepreneur to having a strong

female mentor in her early 20s.

After college, Jaclyn started working with a woman who had her own clothing line. Jaclyn's employer went from working out of her basement to having three stores within a period of only five years.

Jaclyn went from clothing production to managing all three stores and realized that instead of having a passion for fashion, her passion was in organizing parts of the business. The owner knew Jaclyn wouldn't move on to starting her own business unless she fired her. So she did.

With mentorship from her old boss and through a "start-your-own-business" grant and class in Toronto, The Clutter Wrangler was born.

Causes for clutter

Jaclyn hasn't seen major differences in Canadian and American clutter. The fast-paced lifestyle of the 21st century, where people heap more and more obligations and activities onto their already packed plates, is universal. Organizing the home, like clutter itself, is pushed to the side.

"We're just short on time, high on stress. Organizing is one of the last things you want to do on your day off," Jaclyn says.

As an objective party, Jaclyn can give clients a new perspective on a cluttered lifestyle. Her non-judgmental and gentle guidance is especially helpful for those who feel overwhelmed or embarrassed about their clutter.

"It can be a very personal experience. People are inviting me to help them in their own private spaces," she says.

Once they've wrangled their clutter, Jaclyn's clients often see immediate results not just in room aesthetics but in their everyday lives.



Tips from Jaclyn

Three Criteria for Keeping: Useful? Beautiful? Loved?

- **When in doubt, throw it out:** This is a time to be ruthless ... really ask yourself: what is the worst possible thing that would happen if I didn't have this [blank].
- **Use it or lose it.** What is useful now, not in the future or at some point in the past. Have you used this item in the last 12 months?
- **Efficient storage:** Means that what you need is close to where you use it or where you expect it to be, and store all similar things together so you only have to look in one place.
- **Handle things once:** Make that decision then and there.
- **Donate, sell, recycle**—Almost anything can be used by someone else!
- **Have a “to-leave-the-house” spot** so you can dump items to donate there any time.
- **Everything in its place:** Sometimes clutter is just stuff that belongs someplace else.
- **Don't do things 'later':** Leave a room the way you found it.
- **Label things:** Put exactly what is in there on the outside of bins and boxes.
- **Think before you shop.** Try to break the habit of impulse shopping. Really ask yourself “Do I need this item? Do I already have something similar? Do I have space for it?”



Neatly stacked suitcases at Jaclyn's home are also handy storage—clever and functional

Jaclyn recalls working with an older graduate student who procrastinated on schoolwork because of her messy office area.

"After our initial session in her office, she called me back a week later and said, 'I finished my thesis. Let's do the rest of the house!'" Jaclyn says.

This is why The Clutter Wrangler's clients continue to invite Jaclyn to help with additional organization jobs or recommend a wrangling session to their friends and family, she says.

There are several common reasons why Jaclyn's clients claim they need to keep old belongings. The first is a feeling of sentimentality or guilt for discarding an item given by a loved one. While it's true that some objects are reminders of past experiences, Jaclyn helps her clients analyze their reasoning behind keeping various belongings—that's where her background in psychology comes in.

She often starts with three basic questions—"Is it useful, beautiful or loved?"

"If you haven't used it in the past 12 months, chances are you can live without it. The items in your home should give you a sense of joy, not a sense of dread or guilt. If it doesn't fit now, if you never liked it but it was a gift, if you think you just 'may need it someday,' or you can't even remember what it is, toss it. And just as important is having really high standards for what you decide to bring into your home in the future," Jaclyn says.

"The things in your life should be providing you a service, not just giving you something else to dust," she explains. "You should ask yourself 'How much work do I do for my stuff versus how much is my stuff actually doing for me?'"



Getting rid of clutter

But if her clients aren't using their clutter, Jaclyn usually knows someone who can. "Throwing stuff out" often translates into "landfill diversion" by having clients give items away to the Salvation Army, Goodwill or other charities in town.

One of the reasons Bloomington has been an excellent place for The Clutter Wrangler to set up shop is due to the city's thrift and donation-based stores, where others can buy her clients' belongings to put to good use. There are also many charities in the city that accept specific items to be distributed to their clients for free.

"I have lots of clients that say, 'I've got good stuff to give away but I don't know who can use it.' My goal is to work with clients to purge what they don't need and then organize what they keep to give them a beautiful and functional space to live in."

Purging a living space of unwanted items and caution shopping can offer a number of substantial pay-offs, Jaclyn says.

"A sense of freedom, the ability and time to manage our daily lives, the capacity to live in the present, having a more beautiful home environment, and having a more productive life," she says. "Just imagine having everything being in its right place, finding stuff when you need it, scheduling and keeping all your appointments, paying all your bills on time and ending up with less stress, more free time and more money. Just talking about it gives me goose bumps."



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