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It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys: The Seven-Step Path to Becoming Truly Organized

by Marilyn Paul (Penguin Compass, \$14)

Now available in paperback, this insightful guide probes the deeper questions of why some dwell in homes that are serene sanctuaries and others camp out in houses that suggest social service workers should rescue the inhabitants before they are crushed by an avalanche of catalogs.

It's always cheering when the author admits she wrote the book because of her own struggle. The Barnard graduate has a doctorate from Yale and a MBA from Cornell, but having a stunning resume did not help her keep her desk clean, figure out her credit card balances, file her taxes on time or get her where she needed to go. Although successful in her career, she was haunted by the chaos she created at work and the disorder she lived in at home.

I was hooked by Paul's empathy for people bogged down in "the swamp of disorder," the intense shame and the haunting sense of lost opportunities. She stresses, however, that chronic disorder is far more serious than simply a failure to put things away. It stems from issues in one's childhood, feelings about creativity versus rigidity, an addiction to frenzy. Most of all, she believes that for true change to occur, one must find an inner purpose for changing. The delights of being tidy rarely spur the disorganized to action.

But lasting change can occur when people decide they crave more time to express their dream, to be seen as more reliable and trustworthy, to live a more serene life with time for friends and spirituality, to create a less stressful home and therefore a more relaxed family.

Paul displays a refreshingly Eastern approach. Instead of lashing herself into a Puritan-like frenzy of self-loathing and ceaseless action, Paul decides to watch herself create clutter, then uncover the reasons. She realizes she needs to do something, because the sessions with the personal organizer hadn't helped.

Being mindful in every area of her life helped. The book provides insightful exercises and questions. She strongly recommends that you keep a daily journal that explores your relationship with your body, finances, possessions, time, promises and family.

Though this book is technically about organizing, it also provides a wonderful, non-threatening way to examine how you live your life and not only whether you could perform surgery on your desk. It's highly recommended for anyone searching for deeper self-awareness.



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