



Get More Organized by Doing Less: the 80/20 Rule

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For most of us, the thought of “getting organized” can be a bit overwhelming. Where should I start? What needs to be done? What does being organized really mean anyway? In the face of an endless list of tasks, many of us end up paralyzed by organizational anxiety – overloaded before we even begin! But in reality, you don’t need to do it all, just the small percentage of things that *really matter*.

Alicia on ‘Pareto’s Principle’

“In 1906, a very smart Italian economist named Pareto came up with the Pareto Principle, also known as the ‘80/20 Rule’. Quite simply put, the 80/20 rule states that in any pursuit a few things (20%) really matter while everything else (80%) is trivial, so the most efficient way forward is to focus on the 20% that is absolutely critical to success and spend less or no time on the rest. Businesses all over the world use the 80/20 rule to gain incredible efficiency. Certainly, this rule applies to the world of organization and we encourage you to apply it. How liberating to think that if you focus on the few, important things, you will take care of 80% of your problems!”

Sarah on “Letting Go”

“In order to just focus on the 20% that matters, you really need to be able to let go of the need to become ‘perfectly organized.’ Perfection requires a superhuman effort to achieve and constant, superhuman vigilance to maintain. The risk of

focusing on achieving perfection is that you miss out on life. The beauty of the 80/20 rule is that it enables you to get organized so that you can do more of what you want, not more organizing! You have enough work on your plate already; you don’t need another full time job. So let the need to achieve perfection go.”

The Section Criteria

Here are three things to consider as you evaluate which tasks matter, and which are trivial.

#1: What’s the big picture?

At first glance, it may seem as though *everything* on your to do list is an absolute priority. But in the long run, only a few things really matter. It’s easy to get lost in the whirlwind, so, set aside five to ten minutes at the start of the week to review your big ‘to-do’ list and at least mentally identify the four or five tasks that are most important.

#2: What would happen if it didn’t get done now?

One incredible marker of a top 20% priority is a high-impact, negative consequence if the task is *not done now*. If you didn’t organize that junk pile on your desk today, would you miss some bills that have to be paid by tomorrow and incur usurious late fees? If you didn’t get little Logan’s after school commitments entered into your master calendar, would you be likely to schedule over and miss important dates and events? If the implications of not getting something organized are significant, it counts as part of the 20%.

#3: How will you *feel* if it doesn’t get done now?

This might be the most important criteria of all - how you feel about getting it done. Will getting the task done and out of the way give you a huge lift? If so, do it first. That pile of old newspapers and magazines in the middle of the kitchen table may not be urgent or time sensitive but by taking five minutes to clean it up you’re likely to get a real boost. Focus on those tasks that will give you peace of mind and a burst of energy.

We are the co-founders of Buttoned Up, inc., a company dedicated to helping stretched and stressed women get themselves organized (along with everybody else they’re responsible for too!). We welcome your thoughts! Please send ideas and questions to us at: yourlife@getbuttonedup.com or visit us at www.getbuttonedup.com