

## July, 2008 Routines

While teaching a class recently, it occurred to me that I talk a lot about “creating a routine that works for you”, but I don’t go into much detail on how to do that or why. I just re-read my “Summer Routines” newsletter from June, 2006, and you can, too. Consider this a more in-depth continuation to that introduction!

### Call It What You Want:

I have had clients and class participants who are very critical of the idea of a professional organizer and routines in general. Organizing sounds too rigid and something they would have to “do to” their families. I usually suggest we go back to their house and discuss it more over coffee, which first horrifies and then amuses them. A routine would allow spontaneous invitations instead of being embarrassed to have someone stop by. Routines ensure we can embrace spontaneity, not be boxed in rigidity. Weekend trips, drop-in guests, surprise opportunities for fun or profit.

Finding a name for the list of essential tasks can help that list take shape. The word routine can seem very boring and uninspiring. So, two options:

- New, more positive definitions for the word “Routine” (per Dictionary.com): “A customary or regular course of procedure, tasks, chores, or duties; typical or everyday activity; convenient or predictable response.” And
- New meaningful, positive and purposeful terms to instead of “Routine”, if you wish: “Your... Way, Standard, Function, Course, Custom, Ritual, Modus Operandi, Groove, The Usual, House Habits, Pattern, Daily Systems”. Personally, I’m going to try Modus Operandi and Groove!

### Make It Your Own:

- First step is actually to sit still. At a table, with a cup of coffee and a pen and notebook.
- Look at what you do everyday for basic livelihood. Decide if there are things you could lump together (all kitchen tasks, morning and evening), delegate to others (the kids can walk the dog and feed the fish), do at more convenient times (shower at night, save time in the morning).
- If you have other people or pets in your home, they can have their own routines (older children, spouses) or be part of yours (babies, young children, pets).
- Put it on the computer and print it up on colored paper (harder to lose). Better yet, try plastic sheet protectors and dry erase markers, and actually check items off as you complete them to reinforce the new habits.
- A routine is not your daily to do list. “Go to the post office” is a to-do, take a shower and take your vitamins is routine. “Call the dentist” is a to-do, wash the dishes / run the dishwasher is routine.
- It helps to think chronologically when setting up and implementing Routines:  
Per Marla Cilley, of FlyLady.net, “Think about today, tomorrow and this week”. For example, it’s 8 pm on a Monday. Snacks and PJs for the kids are first priority. Then ask yourself: “Tuesday morning, are the things set out for breakfast and our clothes laid out? Briefcases and backpacks by the door? Lunches packed? Tuesday afternoon, are the baseball uniforms clean and the bags ready for practice? Tuesday evening, is the frozen meat for dinner thawing in the frig for dinner?”  
When I have my kids pack for trips (yes, they pack themselves) we first talk chronologically, too, about how long we’ll be gone and what we will be doing. Then they know how many of each item to pack, plus if they need things like swimming shorts for the beach, or a nice outfit for church or dinner at a restaurant. Thinking ahead saves time and hassle later.

### **Stick To The Basics:**

- Decide on no more than 10 things you must do in the morning or the evening for basic livelihood, for you and your family. More than that may be too much.
- Our third child was born a week before school started for my older sons. My husband reminded me that we legally and morally have to feed the children, clothe them and send them to school. The rest is optional, if things get too crazy.
- Establish a habit, a good one to replace a bad one. Take one habit at a time.

### **Make It Work For You:**

- Routines do not change based on your location. Whether we are at home, visiting someone else's home or on vacation, we still get up, wash up ourselves, brush our teeth, comb our hair, get dressed, put our dirty clothes in the hamper, and clear our plate after meals.
- Routines help us get through the day and cope with the unexpected.
- Routines mean that what needs to get done in the course of day for basic livelihood happens. Laundry is mostly up to date, so if someone gets sick, including you, there are clean sheets in the closet to put on the messed bed. There are basic staples in the cabinet for a few days. Emergency numbers and back up plans are available if you are called out of town for an emergency. Your house is relatively tidy, so people can stop by, and you don't have to pretend you aren't home, or lock the bedroom door so no one stumbles in there in search for the washroom.
- Routines keep you from that horrifying, overwhelming feeling of "There is so much, where do I even start?".
- Routines help us focus. If I am scrambling for what to do next, quite often 3-5 minutes of perfect stillness helps me refocus. The routine supplies steps on a path and some times the small picture is easier to look at than the big picture.
- If something new needs to happen, like taking your prescription medicine, attach it to something that is already part of your routine. Perhaps leaving it on the counter the night before next to the coffee pot or your car keys will remind you in the morning to take it.
- Also, if something needs to happen, like clearing the clutter or paper management, adding 10 or 15 minutes morning and evening can go a long way to making those things happen!

### **Kids and Routines:**

- We are not just raising children, we are raising future adults.
- Your children need to understand what is essential to the running of the house (general maintenance, a paycheck, meal prep and clean-up, paying bills), and also their place in taking care of those things. (mowing the grass, taking out the trash, putting the milk away so it doesn't spoil and waste milk and money). We all like to be part of a team, something larger than ourselves.
- We give the kids a "Why" for new tasks, and they are more likely to comply. Seeing ants in the dining room this spring—a big "Why" we clean up—has helped my 10 year old stay willing to vacuum up after dinner.
- Another "why" getting to school or camp in the morning or getting to bed at night—we all know the goal, so putting shoes and backpacks at the backdoor before bed is not an arbitrary chore, it works towards a smooth morning and getting to school or camp on time.
- We have to set the examples for our children. We cannot nag them to tidy their room or put their laundry in the hamper if we do not do so.
- Kids can only add one new habit at a time, just like us.

Just like when you are trying to go on a diet, adding a long list of new habits all at once can spell failure. Instead, try introducing "Loading and Unloading the dishwasher" for the next two weeks, then "vacuuming all the bedrooms once a week" for the next two weeks. There are other things for 'some day', but that is enough for now.