

March, 2010 Tame Your Laundry Monster

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I love clean laundry. The sight of orderly folded piles, the fresh, homey smell. The smooth and warm feel. The problem, of course, is all the time I have to invest to achieve those lovely, fragrant and smooth piles. Note, I said “I love clean laundry” and not “I love doing laundry”.

I have a friend who invests in a laundry service. The time saved is worth the money invested. During my teen years, my dad owned a Laundromat in addition to his full time job, and he would occasionally drop off our personal laundry to be done. It was heaven. God Bless Shirley, the lovely woman who took care of it, wherever she is.

During my hubby’s busy season at work, we invest in a shirt service for his work clothes, and that time and effort saved is worth the \$\$ investment, too.

For everyday life, though, I don’t actually mind doing laundry. So, let me go start a load, and I’ll be right back. It occurred to me as I started that load of clothes that even though laundry day seems entirely dedicated to the pursuit of clean laundry, it is really about little bits of time throughout the day. I rarely spend more than 5 minutes at a time in my laundry room, but I do those 5 minutes every half hour for 5 or 6 hours.

Sometimes I stumble on the path up Laundry Mountain when I get into perfectionist thinking. For example, I may think “I can’t start the laundry until it is all in the laundry room”. Wrong! In our house, every day can be laundry day, which means I almost always have a load that can be started / dried / folded / hung, etc.

So get started, and don’t worry about perfection. And get used to the idea that laundry rarely stays done for long.

Beating back that Laundry Monster: Hot Tips

1. Set up the Laundry Room for Success:
 - a. Store supplies on easy-to-reach-shelves above or near your machines, and not on the dryer top. Supplies may include Detergent, Stain pre-treat, Chlorine Bleach and Vinegar, fabric softener sheets or liquid. I do not pretend to give advice on the actual removal of stains, etc.
 - b. Have close at hand:
 - i. Safety pins (to pin lost buttons to items), scissors (for removing tags without damaging the seams), and 2 threaded needles, one in dark thread and one in light, to make quick work of those lost buttons;
 - ii. A rod stocked with empty plastic (not wire, just like the movie says) hangers; and
 - iii. Clean flat space close, to facilitate folding and also for drying delicate items.
2. Make the Washing Process Work for You:
 - a. Keep a stain stick or pre-treater in your hamper (my sons treat their own stains when they toss their dirty clothes in the hamper)
 - b. Take laundry to laundry room regularly, to keep it from piling up in other areas of your home.
 - c. Two methods – Every Day or All At Once.
 - i. We live by the “every day is laundry day” method.
 - ii. We take dirty laundry down stairs every morning, and sort it right there on the spot. I have 3 hampers lined up for dirty clothes: Whites, Lights and Darks. Once a hamper is full, we start the load.
 - iii. The All At Once Method works sometimes for me, too, typically on Cleaning Day. I’ll do all the bedding and towels in addition to clothes while I clean the house, giving me a few laundry free days leading up to Cleaning Day.

- iv. You can also save sorting and time by doing each person's laundry in its' own load
 - d. Go green and save yourself some energy—do multiple loads at once, as keeping your dryer hot improves performance. So does cleaning the lint trap, do this with every load.
 - e. Set a timer.
 - i. I admit, I used to forget all the time that I have a load running. I set the timer for 30 minutes to remind me to check on the washing machine or dryer. Helps me stay on task.
- 3. Dry and Fold:
 - a. Set your dryer for half the time needed to dry your items. At the half-way mark, clean the lint trap and take out that which can hang up to air dry the rest of the way, then dry the rest of the way.
 - b. Determine how long your stuff really needs to dry. I used to run everything for a total of 60 minutes, but actually paid attention to a few loads and cut that number back to 40-50 minutes.
 - c. Hang up or fold stuff immediately upon removal, to decrease wrinkles.
 - d. Color code your laundry baskets and hangers by person or destination. Each of us has a plastic hanger color, and school or work clothes get hung up on those hangers as soon as clothes leave the dryer. Then we just lay each persons' hangers on top of their basket when the laundry is all done, and it all goes to the closet together.
 - e. Don't fold more than necessary: with my first child, I carefully folded every baby item and gently stacked it in it's place. By the time child #3 rolled around, I realized that sleepers can be laid out in a drawer, flat-not-folded, and retrieved just as easily. Same went for burp clothes and Onesies. My kids' underwear is still un-folded, merely stacked neatly flat in their drawer.
 - f. Fold your items to fit their destinations, but Use Destinations that fit your items.
 - i. By this, I mean make sure your linen closet shelves are deep enough to hold your folded towels. An early-in-our-marriage disagreement broke out over how to fold towels. We hang them up on the rod triple folded the long way, so I insisted that is also how they should be folded and stored, not folded smaller to fit the small shelves. So we changed the shelves. And I do almost all the laundry, so I won.
 - g. Also consider your shelves when you go to put things away. Deeper shelves mean fewer folds, and more shelves mean shorter piles. We can only stack stuff so high before it topples.
- 4. Now that the clothes are clean, finish the job.
 - a. Finish the job means actually putting everything away.
 - b. We sort folded laundry into baskets per person, and then either I or they take them to their rooms and put everything away.
 - c. Consider the laundry's end-user, and put outfits together on one hanger for those who need them (like my youngest).
 - d. All dressers in our house are set up the same way, so top drawers are always pajamas, second drawers are always underwear / t-shirts / socks, etc.
- 5. Maintain! And Simplify the Process from now on:
 - a. Shop differently.
 - i. No iron, low maintenance clothes.
 - ii. Lower your amount of clothing, overall.
 - iii. Buy extras of really hot commodities. Last summer, my boys fought for 3 days straight over their new favorite beach towel to go to sports camp. I opted to go out and buy 2 more, thus ending the fight, for just \$10 at Target. An excellent investment.
 - iv. Buy extras of essentials that need washed after every wearing, like underwear and socks.
 - b. Purge Regularly. Keep baskets in the laundry room for
 - i. Dry Cleaning, (make maintenance routine and take weekly trips to the cleaner on a specific day);
 - ii. Donations, and
 - iii. Outgrown clothes. Once the bin is full of "too-smalls", it gets labeled and put in the crawl space to wait for the next child to grow.
 - iv. Keeping the excess to a minimum makes maintenance and putting-away easier.