

10 Time-Saving Tools for Busy Households

Last month we looked at ways to reduce our work hours. Now, let's look at some ways to work smarter, not harder, at home. One of the gifts I received this year for Mother's Day was Allison Mitchell's book *Time Management for Manic Mums* (hint, hint!).

Here are 10 tools she suggests to help save time and energy at home. Some of these tools translate well into the workplace too.

1. The People and Place Planner

Capture what everyone's up to in your household on a large wall planner and hang it up where they can all see it. I really like the **Kikki-k Family Calendar** at www.kikki-k.com.au/catalog/category-Up-to-25-product-2010-Family-Calendar-Large.html which has room for up to 5 people on it. Students can use this calendar to record school holidays, assignments and exams and it can be used in the workplace to track your team's whereabouts, scheduled annual leave, deadlines, birthdays, work and personal functions, ensuring there are no double bookings!

2. The bite-sized room blitz

Organise your house one room at a time. Set a deadline for each room and chunk the job down into manageable tasks, e.g. for the kitchen, start with your pantry, then the freezer, the fridge, each cupboard or drawer, etc. Keep going, bit by bit, until it's done. Consider calling in a professional organiser to help you with this. Then, once a room is relatively organised, it becomes possible to keep it that way by giving it ten minutes of attention each day, using the bite-sized room blitz. If you have children, let them know that ten minutes each day will be dedicated to tidying up their rooms. If they're old enough (and that means as young as three) assign them some other simple chores to do around the house too, such as putting their food scraps in the bin, dishes in the sink or dishwasher, dirty clothes in the laundry basket, or dusting.

3. Possessions with a place to go

Assign everything a place to go and let everyone know where these places are. This way everyone knows where to look to find anything from a battery to sunscreen to a light bulb. You can also then safely introduce the rule that after anything's used it's put away in its usual place.

4. The one-warning pile-purger

Get agreement from everyone that there will be consequences if things aren't put away. You can use a basket (one for each room if it helps) and put whatever's been left lying around in it. At a specified time each week, warn everyone that anything that's sitting in these one-warning piles (or baskets) will be thrown away at the end of that day. Then, do it!

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5. Outrageous outsourcing

Outsource anything you can to your husband, children (often under-utilised, but a great resource), family, friends or contractors. Make a list of all the jobs you do now. Think of all the possible resources you have available to outsource them to. Decide what you will outsource. Try to think of something that can be outsourced on a regular basis and build it into your routine.

6. Systemising routines

Lack of any routines can chew up lots of time. Some examples of daily routines worth systemising are paying bills, your morning or evening routines, tidying up and meal planning and preparation. For example, you can find free weekly meal planners and shopping lists online. Start children with routines as young as possible - they will like the structure and boundaries. Remember to systemise things you do less frequently too, such as carpet cleaning, window cleaning, car servicing, heater and cooler servicing, gutter cleaning, haircuts, medical and dental checkups. You can plan and schedule all these in your calendar for the year ahead.

7. Dealing with information overload

How much time do you waste looking for papers that, with a good filing system, you could put your hands on immediately? Apparently the average executive spends up to 60 minutes a week looking for various pieces of paper. Become business-like in your approach to handling paperwork at home. Effective filing and storage systems will help solve this problem. I really like a product called **File'n'Go Household Organiser** for managing both financial and lifestyle paperwork at home. Find this and lots of other functional and attractive filing and organising options at: www.kikki-k.com.au/catalog/category-Organising_Filing-product-File_Go_Household_Organiser.html

8. Checklists and master lists

Do you find yourself wasting time and energy re-inventing the wheel and thinking about the same thing time and time again? Invest some time to create checklists you can draw on each time you need to make sure you've covered off on everything, e.g. travel essentials, children's overnight stay or day-care bags, party preparations. Create some master lists too, e.g. annual jobs around the house, party invitation mailing lists, Christmas presents shopping list. File these away under 'C' for checklists or 'L' for lists for easy reference.

9. Putting what you've used away

Even if you're only part-way through something, never leave it lying around for hours or days. Put it away, out of sight, until you're ready to go back to it. This will make you feel amazingly calm and stop clutter from accumulating around the house.

10. Focusing

People who do one thing at a time, on the whole, get more done. When we have multiple things on the go, we're like a computer with too many windows open and we start to slow down and be less effective. Take time to prioritise often, to know what's best for you to be focusing on at any one time.

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