



Organized Simplicity: The Clutter-Free Approach to Intentional Living

Tsh Oxenreider

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Remove the Mess, Add Meaning

Simplicity isn't about what you give up. It's about what you gain. When you remove the things that don't matter to you, you are free to focus on only the things that are meaningful to you. Imagine your home, your time, your finances, and your belongings all filling you with positive energy and helping you achieve your dreams. It can happen, and *Organized Simplicity* can show you how.

Inside you'll find:

A simple, ten-day plan that shows you step-by-step how to organize every room in your home
Ideas for creating a family purpose statement to help you identify what to keep and what to remove from your life
Templates for a home management notebook to help you effectively and efficiently take care of daily, weekly and monthly tasks
Recipes for non-toxic household cleaners and natural toiletry items including toothpaste, deodorant and shampoo
Start living a more organized, intentional life today.

Organized Simplicity: The Clutter-Free Approach to Intentional Living Details

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Mscout says

I must admit, I have a habit of reading how-to books, particularly the organizing and simplicity type. Sounded like a match made in heaven, right? Unfortunately, I was really disappointed in this one. While there was a fair amount of useful information, Oxenreider spent so much of the book explaining how she wasn't talking down to you, that it just came across as condescending. Very much along the "me think thou doth protest too much" line.

All of the suggestions are doable (especially if, as the author does, you live outside the US and you can afford to live on one salary, thus freeing the other partner to do A LOT). She included a lot of appendices with handy worksheets, templates, and even recipes for homemade cleaning and beauty products. There's also some thought experiments regarding life choices, such as: are you really making more money by having both partners work, or is that decision actually *costing* you money? I really enjoyed the chapter on "opportunity costs" and found that, perhaps the most beneficial part for me.

I begrudge no one their life choices, but I really could use my books soap-box-free.

Kathryn says

The author's approach to Organized Simplicity is all about intentional living. Her approach to do this with all members of the family as equal participants is essential for it to truly work and last. Being retired and just the two of us at home our home is organized and runs well. I have always gravitated towards organizing techniques and ideas as well as appreciating every day and all that we have. This book is excellent.

sage says

Eh. 1.5 stars.

For every hundred suggestions, maybe five of them were useful. The rest were either common sense or unworkable for my situation. The ten-day plan is fundamentally ableist in that it requires more physical exertion in a day than many even mildly disabled people can accomplish in two weeks running. Also annoying is the use of the rhetorical "we" in the beginning of the book, in which she preaches a sermon on what all is wrong with the world today. I found myself wondering what planet she lives on and desperately wishing her editor had insisted on I-statements.

Kathleen Basi says

I expected this book to be a skim-through. I was wrong. This is a great book to get you started living intentionally--in other words, figure out what's most important to you and arrange your home to support that

goal (or goals). Her basic premise is to declutter, to simplify by getting rid of stuff you just don't need, and then think through what's left.

Some reviewers have griped about how it doesn't give any ideas about how to organize what they already have. I submit that they missed the point. The point is to look around at your world and say, "How much of this stuff is clutter that I don't need at all?" The point is a change in attitude and approach to life.

She goes room by room through the house and at the end has appendixes with recipes for cleaners and worksheets to help you keep not only the Stuff organized, but also the Things To Do.

I did not do the room by room cleaning as she suggested because as I looked around with new eyes, I realized we already had done a fair amount of the "detox" she talks about. It's sort of an ongoing process for me now, and we're collecting things to get rid of--although at some point I can see doing the whole program for real.

Overall: An excellent resource, because it helps you figure out how to organize not only your possessions but also your activities in a way that helps integrate your deepest-held philosophies into your actions.

Rebecca Henderson says

I agree with about 90% of what the author says. I've been streamlining my life and home for the past three years or so, and it's made a huge difference on my happiness and ability to have time for the things I truly love in life. It's also enabled me to invest more time in my writing career, since I'm able now to live off less money: simpler life = fewer bills = less time required to earn money for bills = more time to write (or run or hike or travel to see family and friends).

One of the things in the book that doesn't seem overly simple to me is her home management notebook. I've transitioned to using only my laptop, iPad, or phone to handle all of the categories she puts in that notebook - for me, getting rid of paper calendars and organizers and notebooks was a huge simplifier in life.

I also think she goes a bit over the top with her homemade cleansers. I like the idea of using more natural products, but skin and hair types vary so greatly, and her suggestions for toiletry options are over-simplified. Someone with curly hair cannot substitute vinegar and honey for conditioner, and you shouldn't attempt to use baking soda as a hair cleanser if you color your hair. If you're thinking of doing these types of substitutions, you have to do more research for your own skin and hair type.

And, I would have to add rice cooker and wok to her list of kitchen necessities :-)

Kaytee Cobb says

I thought this was a short, succinct way of looking at your home from a minimalist perspective and paring things down to what really matters. I realize this book is older, but I feel like Tsh would also find some parts of it to be a bit dated at this point? Like the home management binder... I know Tsh usually uses a BuJo now, so I'd love to get her take on what she has migrated over and how much she still keeps in a binder-type setup. Not to say that the basic tenets are not totally timeless! Of course they are! It just didn't feel as fun and fresh

as her current writing and more recent stuff. More like something she had to put together for homework. If you're looking for a "getting started" with organizing or simple living, this is probably a great place to look!

Chelsey McNeil says

Part 1 is about living simply in the real world. Some of the chapters in this sections are worth reading the book for, as they guide you through creating a family purpose statement and thinking about reasonable priorities for your stage of life. There aren't a lot of new ideas here, but she gathers things all to one place from other reading you may have done (i.e. fly lady, dave ramsey)

Part 2 takes you through the house to declutter, clean, and organize. There's not a lot of new thinking here, although the task lists for each room could be helpful.

The appendices contain recipes for natural cleaning products, templates for home management, and other resource lists.

I would value this book for Part 1 and the Appendices, but not so much for part 2.

Cathy says

This book is divided into two sections. In the first section, Tsh defines what living simply in the real world looks like. Her definition of living simply is to "live holistically with your life's purpose." She talks about creating a purpose statement for your family and how every family's purpose statement will look different. What is important to one family may not be important to another. With that in mind, we are to reevaluate how we spend our time and money. Once we do that, we will realize that a lot of things that we enjoy here in the US are really luxuries, not the necessities that we think they are. Such things as cable TV, 2 cars, or even a clothes dryer are not in the average home around the world.

Once we have a clear purpose statement written we can move on to the second section of the book - 10 days to a simpler, more organized home. In this section, Tsh takes you through each room of your house - living room, kitchen, bathrooms, kids rooms, master bedroom and entryways. As you go, you sort, declutter and clean. Her mantra throughout this organization is "Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful." (William Morris) So as you declutter, sort things by asking, Is this useful to me? Is this beautiful to me? If it is not, toss it. You will also keep your purpose statement in mind and redefine your rooms purpose in light of that. For example, if your purpose statement is to lower your family's ecological footprint, you might lessen the amount of electronics you have in the house or choose to put up a clothesline. In the end, you are left with a home that has less clutter, less stress and one that more adequately meets your family's purpose statement.

My Thoughts:

I really enjoyed this book. It was very well-written and well-organized. You would have thought Tsh had been writing books for years. We don't have a family purpose statement and to be honest, the thought of making one is pretty daunting for me. But I think the concept of having a purpose statement is excellent. Businesses and corporations have them and refer to them often in their decision making. My childrens'

school has a purpose statement that the whole school quotes every morning. Every child there knows it and every teacher teaches with it in mind. So a family purpose statement may be something we will work on in the near future.

In terms of her decluttering "rules." I think they are awesome...in theory. I tried it out (not as extensively as she outlines in the book) by cleaning out my closet. I tried to be really objective and get rid of anything that had not been worn in a year, anything that didn't fit, anything out-dated or the wrong color. And I got 2 garbage bags full of clothes ready to be donated as well as a basket full of nicer stuff ready for the consignment store.

All that to say, I think this is a wonderful book with a wonderful concept but for me to really follow the plan in it, I will have to have agreement and assistance from the family and a lot more will power than I currently have. Not only to get rid of non-essential things in my house, but to limit myself and not buy more of them. I do recommend this book.

I'll leave you with my favorite quote from the book:

"The secret to happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less."
(Don Millman)

Jessica Howard says

I may be biased because I love her blog, but I thought this book was full of helpful, practical ways to simplify your life and possessions. I like the idea of creating a family purpose statement, and then the step-by-step breakdown of how to go through your excess possessions.

Meredith says

This book was not what I expected. I was looking for practical ideas to de-clutter and suggestions on things to keep and things to pass on. This read more like a memoir on having garage sales, moving overseas, and keeping ridiculously long lists for one's family. Do I really need to make a list of my daily "chores" such as wipe down counters, wash the dishes, replace the toilet paper? Not a good use of my time.

There were a few good pages in the, "Money is a Tool" chapter, but that was all. I definitely agree that most Americans need to de-clutter their homes and lives, however, for me this book was not very inspirational.

Suzanne says

Updated: Fantastic. I can't wait to get started. The book is beautifully organized, well-written, attractive and, well, tidy. As someone who is always on the brink of being really well-organized I feel a renewed commitment to that life. I see myself referring back to this book often and I'm looking forward to the upcoming family meeting in which we discuss our family mission statement. No. Really. Read the book. You'll see.

Quarter finished review: I was flying through this book until I realized how great a book it really is at which time I turned back to page one and did a complete re-read. Glad I did. On my first reading I could not get past the hokeyness of crafting a "family mission statement". On my second read, at the close of a particularly hairy day, I realized that it might be exactly the kind of thing we need to redefine our purpose as a family. It can't be about just surviving each day. So, even though one exchange involved the question, "If our home were filled with one emotion, what would that emotion be?", and I answered, "Pizza", I do intend to take the rest of it quite seriously. If you think your family could use some reorganization and you're finally convinced that such things really do not happen organically it might be your turn to take this for a spin.

Jen says

the first few chapters read great, and got me excited. by the end of the chapters on simplicity and why to simplify and how she has organized her whole life made me feel completely inadequate. lol. i was bored with the overall tone of the book. a bit judgmental really. i believe in the simplicity movement, in being organized, in doing less, but it is a journey for each of us to find, maybe preachy is the word i am looking for in the tone. i read the first half in an afternoon, and the second half you could get from any organization book, the organizing part was almost exactly the same to Peter Walsh's book, *It Is All Too Much*. i skimmed the second half, finding nothing new except the recipes for home cleaners which i really appreciated. i will copy a few quotes down from here that i really like though!

karenbee says

I think if someone really, really loves simplemom.net, they'll love *Organized Simplicity*. If, like me, they take what they can use from Simple Mom and ignore the rest, then this book will probably just be *okay* -- especially since most of the useful info in the book is already covered in the author's blog.

Much of the first half of this book is devoted to explaining why we should buy into simplified/intentional living, and while there are some good points, this section as a whole feels a little judgmental and overly simplistic.

To be fair, I may have gotten off to a bad start with the background section of the book -- in the beginning of the first chapter, Oxenreider talks about not making excuses, that we have the ability to shape our lives into simple ones. She posits that "[w]e can't blame a hectic schedule, too many bills to pay, or too many messes to clean for keeping us from our goals because we can do something about those." That sentence might be more convincing if she'd left out the "too many bills to pay"; sometimes those bills aren't there by choice and they're too large to buckle down and pay in a year or two. Similarly, her arguments against dual-income families rub me the wrong way. Is "working a dead-end job that leaves you unfulfilled" really just a bad habit?

Maybe I should just say: I think Oxenreider and I live in very different worlds. Which is fine! In case you don't believe it's fine, the author herself allows that the reader "may be thinking [she's] extreme, and you just can't or don't want to live life the way I do. That's okay."

Something I've seen mentioned in other reviews: Oxenreider is a Christian, and mentions giving things to God or glorifying God a handful of times in the first few chapters, which might turn some people off. I

expected it because she is vocal about her Christianity in her blog, but I guess it could have been a little jarring if I hadn't.

Once you get past all of the extended set-up there's a ten-day plan for simplifying your house. I picked through it to see if there was anything I can use. This part of the book is nicely organized, going room by room and giving tips and checklists for cleaning and decluttering. It's not new information if you've been reading blogs like Oxenreider's for a while, but it is nice to have it all in one place. There are some good recipes for green cleaners in there, too.

One of the four appendices has pro/con lists for several "choices for a simpler life" and I had to laugh when I hit "Should we use cloth or disposable diapers?" because the author's bias is so evident that she might as well have drawn a picture of a sad-faced Earth for the pro-disposables list. Then I got to "Should we become a one-car family?" and found the two-item con list: lack of independence to travel, and it MIGHT limit "choices of employment, entertainment, and community involvement." *Someone* has never lived in the sticks.

Mostly I think I should have just skipped the preachy bits and stuck to the meat of the organizational stuff. I know there are people who will get a LOT from the ~lifestyle choice~ section, but it isn't applicable to my life at this point. The Simple Mom blog is a better fit for me; I think I'll stick to that.

(two-and-a-half stars)

P.S. TOTALLY UNIMPORTANT BUT BUGGING ME: What is UP with that usage of "privy," I DO NOT EVEN KNOW. Is it common usage that has just escaped me my entire reading life? ("But more than 50 percent of Americans live in the suburbs. I'm not sure too many of those folks are privy to abandoning their motor vehicles.")

Stephanie says

I downloaded this book when it came up as free on the Kindle app. I occasionally read Oxenreider's blog, so I expected that this book would be enjoyable.

Organized Simplicity is definitely written for families with lots of children and lots of stuff. We aren't really "stuff" people, and while I know we have some items that are worth donating or tossing most of her book was beyond anything we have. I did pick up a few good tips and tricks for storage and organization. Her tips on simplifying commitments were definitely taken to heart, and that is something I have promised myself to work through in 2012.

This book is worth the read if you are wanting to slow down your life and simplify. You will find a few nuggets of good advice and information; however, this book is definitely worth reading if you have way too much stuff and a crazy schedule.

Deena says

I did it! What a sense of accomplishment! I just finished reading a book primarily about getting your life (simplifying) and home (spring cleaning/organizing) in order! I was plugging along nicely on the read until it hit me...The author actually has an expectation that I APPLY what I was reading! Ya know? Is it too much to ask to JUST be left content READING about improving without actually having to bother with the whole APPLICATION business? ;) Mm Hmm. It's one of "those" books.

Truth be told, I actually find cleaning and organizing to be cathartic. Which was the reason I was drawn to *Organized Simplicity* in the first place. I experienced every reaction from: 1) "You go girl! I'm right there on that soapbox with you!" 2)"Oh, that makes sense. I'll have to try it." 3)"Yeah. I'll have to work on that." [Head down. Tail between the legs.]

It's a tidy and well-organized book. I found myself cleaning a lot along the way. But not the items suggested. Because I'm a rebel. I enjoyed the focus on family/relationships vs. acquiring stuff and overbooked schedules. My on-the-ball friends will find much of it to be common sense. In other words, how useful it is depends on where you're coming from.
