

# The DAILY NEWS TRIBUNE

## Organized chaos

By Jennifer Roy/Daily News staff

Wednesday, January 17, 2007 - Updated: 12:57 AM EST

Clarissa Rodriguez helps people find order out of chaos.

The professional organizer from Newton has worked with people looking to downsize, with compulsive hoarders, and with families that just can't seem to keep their homes in order while juggling their private and professional lives.

"We get all kinds of calls. We work both in the business environment and the home," she said.

Rodriguez said she is working with a Waltham couple who have been working for years to downsize from a large Victorian, independent-living facility. She said she once spent 250 hours cleaning the two-bedroom apartment of a compulsive hoarder.

"She lived (there) for more than 13 years. It took 250 hours to clear it enough to see the floor," she said.

Rodriguez has also worked with the families of ailing clients, with people whose disorganization gets so out of control they're on the brink of losing their jobs and their families, and with people who simply just can't bear to throw things away.

"They know what they want, they don't know how to get there," said Rodriguez, adding one couple she helped consisted of a pack rat and a tosser.

"People relate to their things like they're family. They add a personality to their things. They get very attached."

She suggests getting rid of two things you don't need for every one thing you acquire.

"A lot of people just don't know where to start," she said.

Hildy Neumann, of Organizing Strategies in Newton, said she has clients she works with a couple times a month, and others who use her to complete specific projects.

"It depends on their needs," she said. "I'm very focused on reducing the amount of things you bring into your home and your life."

She said she also teaches her clients how to reduce clutter in their schedules.

"It's a personal experience," she said.

When Terry Noel moved to Boston from Pennsylvania two years ago, she downsized from a large house to a small apartment. She said she looked online for an organizer who wouldn't bore her with the psychological part of professional organizing. She found Neumann.

"I found I had gotten rid of a lot of stuff, but I still had a lot of things," said Noel, who has since moved to Waltham. "My clutter was overwhelming. I needed someone to help me."

She said Neumann helped her organize the kitchen and bathroom, and taught her to use the space under her bed as storage for her out-of-season clothes.

"She recommended I get baskets from the Container Store," Noel said.

She said she doesn't have a problem letting things go, but is bored with the thought of actually organizing them.

"I don't have psychological problems," Noel said. "I wish someone would tell me what to get rid of, and I'd be happy to get rid of things."

Eva Julius, owner of Home/Office Made Easy in Waltham, said psychology is often involved in professional organizing because people are often emotionally connected to their belongings and their habits.

"It depends on the client and it depends on what the issue is. You have to be very careful," she said. "Sometimes it's just a matter of lifestyle ... lives get crazy. We're just doing more and trying to do it faster than ever before."

She said the need for a professional organizer usually becomes clear when clutter gets in the way of everyday life.

Neumann said the approach many organizers use with their clients varies, depending on what the client is looking for.

According to Rodriguez, co-owner of Clear Road Associates, some people give human attributes to their belongings, and attach personalities to them.

"They represent places they've been, things they've done," she said. "We can never know what's important to the client, or what's meaningful."

"We're not psychologists."

Barbara Cullen, a Newton lawyer, said she is still "getting the feel of her new space," since Julius helped her organize.

"My office at home was woefully in need of somebody who not only knows what she's doing ... but who would serve as the impetus on the job I'd procrastinated in doing for 15 years," she said. "Eva acted as an instigator or a nudge to do what I should have done. It has ended up to be an ongoing process that has extended well more than a year at this point."

Cullen said Julius visits her once or twice a month. When she signed up for services, Cullen said she thought she would need three sessions, at most.

"She's actually better than I could have done myself," Cullen said. "I certainly knew how to organize bookshelves and drawers but she can be more efficient based on her expertise."

The problem now is finding her stuff.

"It can be daunting" because before the organizer, you have left things in piles. If you have a sense of your room, you know where things are, despite the mess, Cullen said.

For more information, visit the National Association of Professional Organizers at [www.napo-newengland.com](http://www.napo-newengland.com).

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