



Problem-Solving - How Do You Eat an Elephant?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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One bite at a time!

Life can pile up on us and all of a sudden we are facing what appears to be overwhelming tasks. The house is a mess, we have piles of unread mail, renovations never seem to end or work files all seem to be screaming for attention at the same time.

The first step to cleaning up a mess is to decide that you are going to do it. Sitting and stewing about the problem will not solve it. Think about what you want the results to look like.

Make a plan. Determine what resources are needed to proceed. Do you need cleaning supplies, equipment, professional help or specific time to complete the job? Planning often takes longer than the actual work.

Set up a system. Clutter experts always advise that you begin a project with an empty space into which you will organize items. An empty closet with good hangers, a new filing box with coloured files and labels or a pantry with various sized baskets can form the foundation of the system that will welcome your items.

Break the tasks into small goals or projects. It is easier, for example, to make all the file labels at a time rather than go back and forth between filing papers and creating labels. First decide what labels are needed, put them on the folders, file the folders. Now you will have a system into which the papers will be filed.

Prioritize. Which tasks need to be done first? It is usually wiser to do all the painting before flooring is laid. That way you won't have to worry about spills on the hardwood. An easy way to prioritize is to write each task on a small card and then move the cards around until they are in logical order.

Set out a timeline. On a piece of paper or on a calendar, mark the things that need to be done by a specific date. You will need to schedule the landscapers, for example, early enough so that the grass gets a good start before winter arrives.

Begin. I have always thought that the hardest thing about studying is opening the book! It doesn't matter how small the steps are, they are steps to progress. My aunt, for example, wanted to "downsize" before moving into a condo. She decided that every day she would get rid of three things from the house. It doesn't sound like much but, if you do the math, you realize that every month she got rid of 90 items! Beginning has a number of benefits. Usually when we start doing a project, for sample, the time goes quickly and we accomplish more than expected.

Be ruthless. Do not hesitate to throw things or give them away. If you haven't used something in a year, you probably don't need it! And maybe someone else could benefit if you give it to them. The idea of organizing is to ensure that the things you need are accessible to you. It is not to store things you don't need.

Celebrate every step of the way. Doing even one thing is accomplishment.

Resolve NOT to get in the same mess again. Commit to having a place for everything and then keeping it in its place. It is easier to clean up as you go than to wait for a week and then face what might be overwhelming.

When I am away, my newspapers tend to pile up. I don't want to cancel the newspaper because I love to know the news but it can be quite daunting to see week's worth of papers shoved under the door when I return home. The first thing that I do is to pick them up and remove all the flyers. (That reduces the pile to about half). Then I sort the papers by date with the oldest on top. Next, I stack the papers by putting a week's worth together facing one direction and the next week's worth on top but at a 90 degree angle. Finally, I haul the stack to the bathroom along with a large garbage bag.

As I read, I am sorting. The pages which have articles that I want to keep are laid over the towel rack. When I have several pages, I cut out the articles and put the scraps into the garbage bag along with other pages that I have already read.

It really doesn't matter what your project or how you choose to accomplish it. What does matter, however, is that you get it done in the least stressful manner.

If you need help to develop a plan to resolve something in your life that has become an overwhelming "monster" consider contacting a psychologist. It is usually easier to have objectivity and assistance from another person.