



Before and after photos of a desk makeover by professional organizer Michele D. Mattles of No Worries Organizing in Framingham. Michele was hired because her client (and his wife) needed help downsizing from three offices and over 20 boxes in storage to one home office. Michele has been working through 50 years of her client's personal and professional paperwork as well as memorabilia and photos.

## Downsizing? Organize for simpler living!

After 50-plus years of living, many of us have accumulated an impressive amount of stuff. But what do we do with it all when we make the decision to downsize to a smaller home or condo? Especially since condos in today's market are likely to have one-third the closet and storage space of the homes in which we raised our families!

While the idea of downsizing may seem formidable, many of us will opt to do it sooner or later. With thoughtful preparation and the proper supports in place, this major life change can actually be smooth sailing. Here's a secret: Bring a professional organizer on board to help you whittle down and organize your belongings, plan and coordinate your move, and settle you into your new digs.

NAPO-New England (New England Chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers) is the region's "organizing authority" and a great resource for finding professional organizers in your area. The Web site ([www.napo-newengland.com](http://www.napo-newengland.com)) lists organizers by their cities and towns, and includes their various specialties. Almost half of NAPO-New England members specialize in working with empty nesters and seniors, and 60 percent specialize in downsizing.

Standolyn Robertson of Things In Place ([thingsinplace.com](http://thingsinplace.com)) in Waltham is one of them. She actually downsized her own family from a home in the suburbs to a condo several years ago. "For me, when I went through the process, I asked myself what decisions I can make now so that my kids won't have to make them in the future. I felt like every decision that I made freed my kids from having to make that decision after I'm gone. I say this to my clients, and it really hits home."

Downsizing inevitably involves letting go of things you are attached to. Experienced organizers understand that this is not always easy to do. Professional organizer Annie Taber

of All's In Order ([allsinorder.com](http://allsinorder.com)) in W. Yarmouth says, "Moving and relocating is a very emotional thing. This generation of today's seniors is one that has had a whole lifetime of collecting possessions that they have brought with them from home to home. They are very different from their parents, many of whom were immigrants who had to leave everything behind when they came to this country."

To help you decide what stays and what goes, some professional organizers advise asking yourself the following questions: 1) Do I currently use it? 2) When was the last time I used it? 3) Will it cost me money if I do not have it? 4) Could I get it back if I needed it? Organizers are great resources for what to do with the things you won't be taking with you. Furniture, high-end clothing, glassware and decorative items can be brought to consignment stores for resale. Charitable organizations accept donations in a variety of categories. Antique stores may be interested in purchasing your antiques. There are also Web sites you can access, like eBay, Craig's list, and [freecycle.org](http://freecycle.org), which will allow you to auction off, sell or recycle items.

Digital archiving is an emerging trend because it both preserves important papers and allows for their compact storage, getting rid of clutter and freeing up space. NAPO-New England organizers who specialize in this area will organize, chronicle, scan and archive documents as well as photos. Most people keep archive copies in remote storage as a safeguard in case of a disaster. In the aftermath of a fire or flood, for example, this will make it possible for you to re-establish your identity, file emergency insurance claims and replace your possessions.

Professional organizer Heidi Solomon, of P.O.S.H. Consulting in Brookline, has two clients for whom she is creating digital archives. For one client with art and antique

collections, Solomon photographed every item, chronicling important details about each, including its appraised value. Another client, who is charged with keeping track of her family's treasure-trove of photos, is having them digitally archived for posterity — so she'll be able to pass the family history along to her children and grandchildren.

Professional organizers also manage moves. They'll pack you up, coordinate the movers and unpack your belongings. "What sets an organizer apart from a moving company is that she looks at the bigger picture," says Robertson. "Moving companies don't usually ask a lot of questions. I ask the questions — well in advance of when the movers come. What do we keep, what goes? I look at the size of the new space compared to the old one and help my clients make informed decisions." She continues, "When I'm helping unpack a kitchen, I'm not just unwrapping tea cups, I'm thinking how can we optimize the new kitchen space — which is usually about a third of the size of the former kitchen."

Many organizers provide space planning and design and will work closely with you to ensure your new home is set-up with optimum comfort, safety and functionality in mind. And before you unpack your clothes, why not install your dream closet?! Organizers are up to date on the latest closet and storage systems on the market, and will help you improvise if you have to do it on a budget. They are also pros at setting up attractive and practical home offices and creating filing systems that will allow you to work productively and stay organized.

Eva Julius of H/OME (Home/Office Made Easy) says, "Whether the decision to move has been decided or still being pondered, the earlier one starts sorting through one's belongings, the less overwhelmed one may feel. More time can make for an easi-

er transition in every aspect of a move. While living in your home it is highly beneficial to routinely go through and 'pass on' what you are no longer using or needing. Having previously worked with a company designing closets, home offices and entertainment systems, the importance of efficient use of space cannot be underestimated. Finding solutions in items that do double duty is most helpful." Eva Julius can be reached at 781-894-9732 or [ejuliusathome@juno.com](mailto:ejuliusathome@juno.com)

The prospect of downsizing may seem daunting but it can be a positive experience if you plan ahead carefully and take a step-by-step approach to getting the job done. Pace yourself. Don't tackle it all at once. And most importantly, understand that you don't have to do it alone — there are 90 NAPO-New England members in Massachusetts! Here are some tips from Ann Marie Williams of Atmosphere Consulting in Braintree:

- Ask your children to sort and edit their own things
- Sort through each room focusing on one small area at a time
- Start with rooms you use least; often you are less attached to items in these spaces
- Create holding containers for all the items that need a new home and label them with: toss, keep, donate, sell, friends & family
- Throw worn and broken items away
- Don't lose sight of your ultimate goal — moving onward to a new and exciting chapter in your life!

Professional organizer Marea Santos is principal of S.O.S. (Santos Organizational Strategies) in Needham. Isabell Wells is principal of All's In Order in Needham. Both provide downsizing and moving services and are proud members of NAPO-New England. To find an organizer in your city or town call or visit the Web site: 617-335-1111; [www.napo-newengland.com](http://www.napo-newengland.com).