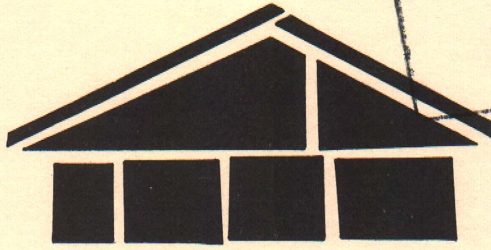


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Organizing for Family Living

BY LUCILE KETCHUM
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"You may have all kinds of equipment to make your job easy, but still never seem to find enough time."

DO YOU CALL YOURSELF a homemaker or a housekeeper? Whatever name you use, if this is your calling, you ought to feel ten feet tall. You are the manager of a most complex and important "business" — building a life for yourself and your family.

You may find this a pretty demanding job, particularly if you are a young homemaker. You may have all kinds of equipment to make your job easy, but still never seem to find enough time. No need to feel guilty about this — many homemakers have the same difficulty. Because there are so many of us in the same boat, let's consider some ways to approach this business of organizing the work of our homes.

To do this, we will share with you the strategies one young homemaker used in conquering her daily round of housework. As she tells us how she organizes herself and her resources, she reveals the kind of home and the kind of life she values.

Your goals and your "tricks of the trade" will not be exactly the same as Sharon Corsiglia's, but we would like to look with you at her story as an example of a way to approach the work of the home — and from this example, pull out some principles that any of us could apply in our own various ways.

Sharon's first principle — "*Do what should be done first,*" has a philosophical tone, and might reveal a whole approach to life. How do you view the tasks you manage in your home? Do you establish priorities? Decide what is essential? Can you decide *not* to do what your judgment tells you is not essential to your family's welfare? Can you make this decision and stick with it — regardless of custom, what your mother did, what the neighbors will think, your own past habits?

Sharon's two other stated principles — "*Cut tasks to size,*" and "*Plan ahead*" are practical in nature and deal very directly with managing physical resources and time.

As you consider her story you will notice in the right-hand columns some statements about principles or general guidelines that we can observe in the way she organizes the management of her home. You may say to yourself, "This is a guideline I follow, too, but I don't do it that way." We hope, and believe, that you will find it helpful in considering your own job as "home manager" to ask yourself how you use these principles — in your own situation, with whatever resources *you* have.*

Many homemakers say that asking themselves "Why do I do this?" or "Why do I do it this way?" helps them to weed out the unimportant, to evaluate their ways of working, and to gain a sense of control over the job of running their homes.

So — here is Sharon Corsiglia's story and, in adjacent columns, some points to consider (numbered for reference).

* A broad meaning of "resources" includes not only the equipment in your home, your income and the goods that you own, but you yourself and your family — the skills, energy, attitudes of all of you — and the services available to you in your community, such as libraries, laundry, school, shopping center, etc.

"HOW I LEARNED TO KEEP HOUSE"*

A Young Wife's Story

I am a career girl turned housewife and mother. I believe they label me "homemaker" on television quiz shows and panel discussions. But I prefer to be called a housewife, the worthy old-fashioned term that my grandmother uses and understands.

Betrayed by the illusion that I could lick the world because I'd been a magazine reporter for five years, I felt I could conquer housekeeping with ease. . . .

Retiring for love, marriage, and pregnancy, I picked up a mop and broom. It was my desire to create a clean, serene, and happy home for my husband and children. ① I couldn't cook or sew, but I felt grimly and smugly that I could keep house well if I put my head and heart into it. I then put head, heart, hands, knees, and feet ② into "homemaking," but failed to keep my house or me in order.

The clue to my failure in housekeeping was that I could ardently discipline my children but not myself. ③ It was I who needed the spanking, and I must have needed it for a long time. I've been trying for three years to master this discipline—doing what *should* be done at a particular time instead of what I *feel* like doing. . . .

At the risk of showing a beginner's ignorance and mistakes to the seasoned housekeeper, I'd like to speak with the ripe experience of three years. I want to do it before I forget what it is like to be a beginner, because the job of running a household is growing easier for me.

1. DO WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FIRST

My key to easier housekeeping is self-discipline. And it has been my hardest lesson. It takes discipline to break bad habits. And good daily habits make good housekeeping. Every day that I follow a good schedule makes it a little easier the next day. I try to forget the days when I don't make it, and start every day as the first. This is the way I began my marriage and the continuing effort—plus a perfect husband—has made it work.

It is hardest to discipline yourself to *do what should be done first*. This battle starts with waking, with the simple practice of making your bed when you get up, then dressing before you leave the bedroom. This is

(story continues in left column of following pages)

* From a story by Sharon W. Corsiglia, "How I learned to Keep House—and My Self-Respect, Too." Reprinted from *Family Circle Magazine*, February, 1965, by permission of the publisher and author, Copyright, 1965, by the Family Circle, Inc.

SOME IDEAS TO THINK ABOUT

① A clear statement of goals.

Sharon states here exactly what her ultimate goal is. Successful organization in home management takes into account many values and goals and sets some priorities among them. For example—the goal of keeping the house in order, the goal of developing responsibility in children, the goal of having time for companionship. The priorities a homemaker sets among goals provide the basis for organizing the work of her home.



"I'd like to speak with the ripe experience of three years. I want to do it before I forget what it is like to be a beginner, because the job of running a household is growing easier for me."

② "Human costs" of getting work done are represented by "head, heart, hands, knees and feet."

Two experts in the study of home management¹ classify these human costs (plus a fourth, which Sharon refers to later) thus:

- a. *Affective component* (heart)—attitudes, feelings, interests.
- b. *Cognitive component* (head)—knowledge, thought processes, skills.
- c. *Temporal component*—time of the worker and the timing of the tasks.
- d. *Physical component* (hands, knees and feet)—the use of the body in work.

As a homemaker patterns her days she sometimes

¹ Steidl, Rose E. and Esther Crew Bratton. *Work in the Home*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968.

not easy. It takes discipline, especially if your husband has to eat before catching his commuters' train and your children need to be diapered, dressed, and the baby given a bottle.

It's hard to get back to dressing and bedmaking. If you don't do these chores first, you may find yourself answering your doorbell at noon, your hair shaggy and lips pale, and making the bed after lunch. (4) And it's surprising how a fresh face and good appearance can help your housekeeping. They give you some strange boost of confidence that lends self-respect.

It took me three years to learn that dusting is the quick-and-easy wonder of housekeeping. It brightens, cheers, and conceals the need for heavy cleaning you may want to do tomorrow instead of today. But as a beginning housewife I postponed dishes, dusting, and other details of daily "musts" for the last hour of my household day.

This freed me for "creative" cleaning. This meant what I *wanted* (4) to do. Washing the kitchen curtains, for example, then shining the window and scrubbing the woodwork around it. That shining kitchen window was my notion of what was essential. It somehow reminded me of Dutch domesticity and cleanliness, bringing to mind a vision of bright red tulips swaying in a gentle breeze on a sunny day.

Or waxing floors. I love to do this. No woman who keeps spotless floors, I told myself, can be a poor housekeeper. Or cleaning the kitchen range. What a big job, well done! Who cared if the bathroom didn't get tidied up that day? My husband did, that's who.

One of the (kinds of) crises my daily habits provoked took place at the end of the day, during the time my husband and I have begun to call "the witching hour"—the time when you get your children bedded down and your dinner on. Many days I devoted exclusively to such grandiose efforts as washing windows or waxing floors, with the hope of sandwicing in the chores of vacuuming and dusting before feeding the children and fixing my husband's dinner. On these afternoons it was often my luck to hear the doorbell peal about four o'clock. Uninvited (5) guests have a way of dropping by at that hour, when most housewives who have preserved their sanity have finished their household day. If you've been missing the outside world—the "career" world—and your caller is congenial, the balm of conversation is welcome. When your husband comes home, you can blame the unexpected dropper-in for ruining your day.

Or you may open your door to an unexpected and heart-warming call (5) from a neighbor you don't know well, as I did—a frail little woman whose health had been undermined by the privations she had suf-

overlooks the human resources available to her in her family. For example:

"Head"—Who is the boss? Sometimes the homemaker, sometimes her husband. (And sometimes children.) Communication is important here—coming to an agreement as to who will be responsible for what.

"Heart and head — hands, knees and feet, too"—What tasks can children or other family members take over? What kind of attitudes and skills are there to work with—and what kind does a mother want to build?

(3) Self-discipline.

Like many of us, Sharon has found that self-discipline is the crux of the matter if one wishes to control—rather than be controlled by—the running of a home.

(4) Several points to look at here.

—*The value of self-respect*—and the boost given to self-respect by a neat personal appearance, and house in order.

—*Sequence of tasks*—not only from the standpoint of what is most important to get done, but what order of doing tasks will make the smoothest flow of events for the day?

—*How much time?* Learning how long it takes and allowing enough time for routine and heavy tasks—proceeding with dispatch on the daily routine.

(5) Routine and order.

The value of some *routine* and *order* in getting housework done—not as an end in itself, but be-

"uninvited guests . . . the balm of conversation . . . When your husband comes home, you can blame the unexpected dropper-in for ruining your day."



"When your husband comes home, he sees your shining windows, but he also sees you."



ferred in Germany during the war. She brings your son a tiny woolen sweater she found on the subway. She wanted to buy him a gift, but had no money. You urge her to stay.

Or it may be a caller who leaves you with a bitter taste — an imperious widow who has survived three husbands, her hair vividly beauty-parlored and her nails manicured. She asks for a contribution to some cause that does not interest you. Her gaze sweeps your stale menage and its untidiness, but misses your shining window.

When your kind husband comes home, he sees your shining window, ⑤ but he also sees *you*.

2. CUT TASKS TO SIZE

There were many backward days before I learned to do first what is necessary and also to save a little time — at the end of the day or while the children nap — for personal satisfaction. ⑥

To find these minutes of freedom I had to learn a second hard lesson: *Do less work each day.* ⑦ I must not try to do more than I can accomplish easily in a day. I must learn to do heavy cleaning a little at a time. I have been surprised — almost amazed — to find that the less work I do each day, the better my home looks. I have learned to concentrate my daily work on the general appearance of my home rather than on heavy cleaning projects. This means more orderliness, more routine, but most of all, more "picking up." As I pass through a room I pick up whatever is out of place. One of my friends, who keeps a cluttered house, derides this as a nervous habit, but it's helped me overcome any disorderliness.

Now I am seldom caught with a disarrayed house. I do not have a frantic pickup hour to add to the evening confusion of dinner and bedding the children. Closets, drawers, and shelves are kept in order,

cause it frees a homemaker for the unexpected interruptions. It frees her to become the kind of person she wants to be, rather than a household drudge. It frees her to experience fully the "great moments," when they come along.

⑥ Time for personal satisfactions.

This means getting some balance into the day's activities. It also means self-discipline — to take time for personal interests and to leave some household tasks undone — for today.

⑦ Assessing energy — then dividing tasks in relation to both the amount of time and the amount of energy they will take.

"There were many backward days before I learned to do first what is necessary."



and this encourages my husband to help me, ⑧ for he is no longer frustrated when he looks for the mop or the children's pajamas. . . .

In the days when I was trying to do as much heavy cleaning as I could in a day, my house was not particularly neat. Now I do only one *small* heavy-cleaning chore a day; or I do one big weekly project that I ⑨ work on a little each day. I may launder a pair of curtains by washing one day, starching the next, then ironing on the third day. Or I clean one window or shelf each day. . . .

3. PLANNING AHEAD MAKES IT EASIER

Planning ahead makes it easier to do less each day and to convert big tasks into little ones. Having a job before marriage helped teach me to plan ahead for a smoother-running household. Planning ahead reduces confusion, rush, and tension. It bears a direct relationship ⑩ to the pleasure and companionship I have with my husband and the enjoyment we share in our children. And it has been most important to me in feeding my family.

I have learned to make meals that I can prepare in the morning to lessen the evening pressures of the

"Planning ahead reduces confusion, rush, and tension. It bears a direct relationship to the pleasure and companionship I have with my husband and the enjoyment we share in our children."



⑧ Making it pleasant and significant for others in the family to help.

Sometimes homemakers could have more help than they do. (And sometimes they aren't willing to let someone else get into their domain!)

⑨ The value of a schedule and definite goals for accomplishment.

We do not all work in the same way. You might prefer some other system than Sharon's. The idea to think about is setting a definite goal for the big tasks and making a definite plan for breaking them up to fit your own energy and your own daily routine. This makes it possible to leave a big job before it's finished, knowing that you will come back to it. For Sharon, and probably for most of us, this makes for a more even tenor in our days than if we work to the point of exhaustion. (And usually you get more accomplished, too — as Sharon points out.)

⑩ Make planning a challenge.

Sharon makes planning a challenge — a means to an end — and because that end is so important to her, planning becomes exciting and interesting instead of a bugbear.

witching hour, when children have to be bathed, fed, and bedded before my husband arrives on his 7:30 train; meals that can be done the day before company arrives; and meals that are economical, yet have variety. . . .

I use leftovers in many ways to provide several meals from one order of meat. I have become a casserole queen. The money saved pays for other items in my budget, including the milk the children drink.

For women who are "creative" types and feel unattuned to domesticity, (11) cooking can be the saving grace. I grew an inch in maturity when I observed that the woman who bakes a beautiful cake is a most artistic individual. Adventure in cooking puts zest and spirit into a meal. It's an interest my husband and I have learned to share. On occasion I'm proud to serve him sherried chicken breasts in a chafing dish instead of plain fried chicken.

HOLIDAYS WITHOUT HARASSMENT

Planning ahead lessens many a housewife's dread of the holiday season. Last Christmas I was working on several big projects, among them the laundering of all the curtains. I told myself doggedly that the curtains should be crisp and snowy white for Christmas. My husband quietly watched the deterioration of our household while I worked steadily every day, laundering curtains. Finally he said, "Look — you'll eventually get the curtains washed, but the rest of the house will be a mess."

He was right. (12) I stopped the curtain project because I realized I had begun too late. By the time I baked and froze a special holiday cake, made a Christmas cloth and napkins, did a centerpiece I'd learned about at the Garden Club, and looked after my three in diapers, I had quite enough to do to greet Santa Claus. This year I will redye my Christmas cloth and napkins in *April*, long before summer beach days and fall cleaning.

ROUTINE—A GOLDEN WORD

Planning ahead includes a daily schedule. "Routine," once a black word to me, is now a golden one. It helps me complete my daily work and enjoy free time for my own interests. I had to become a clock watcher to develop a workable daily schedule. I now know the average number of minutes it takes me to feed and bathe a child, do the weekly marketing, clean the kitchen floor, and prepare dinner. If I have two hours at home before a doctor's appointment, I know how much I can do within that time. I do not

(11) Enjoy your work.

Here is one example of the enjoyment some homemakers derive from the creative and social aspects of work in the home. Aside from the goals one works toward, which make the means (organization and accomplishment of work) worth while — there may be joy in the work itself.

Because this is so, the social aspects of work become very important — the pleasure and sense of satisfaction in working together, and achieving goals together. When children help with household tasks, sometimes mother can work with them — not only to get the job done, but to give them the experience of shared accomplishment. Through such experience children sense parents' attitudes toward work and the zest with which they go about tasks. It can be a means of helping them build attitudes that will enrich their whole lives.

(12) Lend an ear to others.

Sometimes, an observer can be objective about your activities. It never does any harm to listen — then make your own decision about how to proceed.

"Routine helps me complete my daily work and enjoy free time for my own interests."



try to do more. I know whether to tell a friend to call at three or at four o'clock in the afternoon, and I know that I shall be ready for her at the time decided on. I plan my day so that I am not exhausted when my husband comes home. If we're going out for the evening, I'm not frantically dressing at the last minute. . .

THE ONE-TWO-THREE METHOD WINS

Perhaps these rules seem oversimple: (1) Do first what you must do; (2) try not to do too much in one day; (3) plan ahead. But they are basic, and disciplining myself to follow them has enabled me to control my day instead of bearing the brunt of it. The importance of this control can't be overemphasized, for it affects the very heart of your home life by lessening fatigue — that ever-present threat to matrimony. It helps keep romance in your life with the man you've married, and lets you enjoy your children more. It lifts the burden from a relatively unimportant part of life. Housekeeping ceases to be a battle front and becomes a background for living. . . .

Dusting my floors 13,000 times won't earn me a place in heaven when Gabriel blows his horn, but my efforts to become a good housekeeper have helped our family life. And I'll work hard to make any day of our life a better one.



A FINAL THOUGHT ABOUT SHARON'S STORY

Any homemaker can understand Sharon Corsiglia's sense of satisfaction in her accomplishment, when she says that following the One-Two-Three method ". . . has enabled me to control my day instead of bearing the brunt of it." But I wonder if homemakers stop to think about the kind of heritage they give their children in the way they organize the work of their homes.

Tasks can be managed in a way to give a sense of order and serenity and freedom in a home. At the same time, they can be managed in a way to help every person in the family develop to his full capacity. Thoughts on this latter point from two sources:

"Work in homes is a child's first acquaintance with work — how satisfying or dissatisfying it is, how difficult or easy, how essential to his existence, how important to

accept responsibility and to control and time events. Homemaking work can be the vehicle for his experimentation with task accomplishment. Failures may be less costly when they occur within the shelter of the individual's own family."²

And from another author:

"It is possible to manage these [household] tasks in such a way as to contribute to the family's development through providing experience of significance, permitting them to learn future roles by acting them out and relating themselves to others. . . ."³

The same author says: "Studies which have been made on the help homemakers receive from family members in our culture indicate that homemakers are more likely to perform household tasks themselves than to share these tasks with family members, . . . In short, children in the American culture participate in the tasks of the household to a very limited degree. This mode of management would appear, in light of the findings of anthropologists, to deny children the opportunity of valuing family roles and of making a meaningful contribution to their [family group]."

² Steidl, Rose E. and Esther Crew Bratton. *Work in the Home*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968.

³ Nichols, Adreen. "Organizational Processes Eliciting Help." *Journal of Home Economics*, Volume 58, No. 9, November, 1966.

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