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## Julie Morgenstern puts your home, and your life, in order.

Julie Morgenstern is an organization and time-management expert, business productivity consultant, and *New York Times* best-selling author of five books, including *Shed Your Stuff*, *Change Your Life*.

### “My kids’ rooms are a mess!”

**J**ulie Fagerholm Alexander, 42, thrives under pressure. She’s a single mom to Madison, 12, and Quinn, 9, works from home as a bookkeeper, volunteers at the kids’ school, and is writing a memoir. But her packed schedule means some domestic tasks go undone: Clutter dominates every room of her Aurora, IL, home. What’s more, during the stressful aftermath of her divorce eight

This four-part plan uncovers what the clutter in your life really represents—it’s never just about the stuff—and helps you discover your authentic self. The acronym stands for Separate the treasures, Heave the trash, Embrace your identity from within, then Drive yourself forward with your life.

Before starting the process, we did some pre-SHED prep work to determine which problem area to tackle first.

after the cleanup. She wants to stay on top of her work, spend quality time with her kids, and finally dig into that memoir—all goals that were tough to pursue while constantly battling a mountain of stuff.

Now that Julie could imagine a life on the other side of the clutter, it was time to roll up her sleeves. To speed decision making on what to keep

category boxes and tossing items she knows she doesn’t want or need. The non-office boxes can be stored for the moment; down the road Julie will need to put SHED to work on them. (I advised her to label them with a to-be-SHED date to ensure the project will get done.) For now,



Toys, books, and games had taken over every square inch of 12-year-old Madison’s bedroom.

HAND  
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## Get Organized

years ago, both kids began sleeping in Julie’s room; now their own bedrooms are virtually uninhabitable, serving mostly as storage space for clothes, school supplies, and toys. Julie knew it was time for the kids to move back into their rooms and for her to start a new and clutter-free chapter in her life, but she had no idea where to start. So we got to work.

### Wanted: A room of her own

After a few minutes of talking to Julie, it was clear her house would benefit from a process I’ve created known as SHED.

Our conversation revealed that Julie was using a tremendous amount of energy to battle her clutter; in fact, she was thriving on the adrenaline generated by a search for a misplaced bill or assignment. This is what I call a meaningless obstacle, and Julie needed to harness and focus that energy into life’s more important goals by creating an organized and efficient space just for her—so we decided to begin with her home office.

To motivate Julie to dive right in, we discussed the identity she would embrace and the life she would lead

and what to toss, we created a list of the items Julie uses regularly in her office. This is what I call a “treasure guideline list.” It should include only items that will move back into the office once the space is cleared out.

Next, we focused on the items that didn’t belong in the area, like her kids’ old school projects. I recommended that Julie separate both her office and non-office items into categories, then place each pile into its own clearly labeled cardboard box. Right now, Julie’s primary concern should be sorting all of her belongings into

I want Julie simply to have one space of her own that’s organized and functional.

In the end, it took Julie about five hours to clean out her office and heave the trash. With her desk area now clear, she could arrange her office treasures into a system that worked for her.

### Teaming up

Although Madison’s eager to have her own room (she can’t wait to host sleepover parties), past cleanup



## Get Organized

attempts have never really worked. She always became frustrated because the job seemed so daunting, and Julie didn't know how to give her daughter the emotional support she needed, so they'd both end up in bad moods. This time, the two began by listing the treasures Madison wanted to keep (books, school memorabilia) and items that were okay to toss or donate (ancient school papers, old stuffed animals). Then, they worked as a team: Julie separated everything into category piles, which Madison would then sort through.

Because Julie had been through her own SHED process already, she was able to cheer Madison on during a potential meltdown, when the sea of piles they'd created overwhelmed her. Julie was able to show her the order that was slowly emerging: The piles of clothes would eventually go into the closet and books would go on the bookshelf.

Once they completed the hard task of separating and heaving, the pair worked together to paint the room according to Madison's specifications (white walls with hand-drawn designs), creating a vibrant space Madison can't wait to spend time in.

### What really matters

Physical objects aren't the only treasures in our homes. We also value certain routines and habits, which are vital to maintain even as an area is cleared out. This was key for Quinn, who wasn't sure he was ready to move into his own bedroom. So Julie and I discussed the intangible treasures (like their Saturday-night-at-home movie fests) that they may want to preserve once everyone has their own area. And Julie reassured Quinn that the family wouldn't grow apart but would have more spaces to hang out together. Also, after Quinn and his mom discussed

the clean-up process further, he became excited about the prospect of decorating his own room and having a place to go whenever he wanted time to himself.

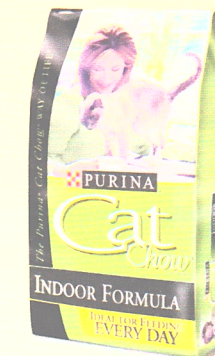
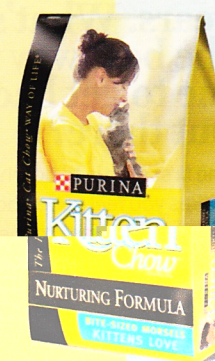
Because most 9-year-old boys don't have the patience to invest hours sifting through their belongings, I recommended that Julie accelerate the process by asking Quinn what he'd miss if the room were bulldozed tomorrow—either individual items (like an iPod) or entire categories (video games). I knew that a dramatic visual would motivate Quinn to uncover what's important to him.

Once Quinn was clear on what he wanted to keep, Julie made the process less daunting for him by separating his belongings into categories and heaving the trash. Then, she called her son in, setting a 15-minute time limit per pile for him to pull out his treasures. They donated or tossed the rest, creating a space Quinn could make his own by putting toys on his bookshelf and hanging some very cool beach-themed curtains.

Julie is the perfect SHED success story: She got to the root of her own clutter, mastered the process, and was able to teach the principles to her children. Now, the family can drive forward with their lives in a much more functional house as they continue to embrace the ultimate treasure: time together.

**JULIE'S REACTION:** I thought I was doomed to live in clutter forever. Once Julie Morgenstern helped me uncover the reasons behind my clutter, I was able to unearth my office and help my kids do the same for their rooms. I can't wait to SHED every room in my home!

Want Julie to help you organize your home, office, time, or priorities? Email [redbook@hearst.com](mailto:redbook@hearst.com) (subject: Organizing) to be considered for an organizational makeover.



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A Better Way of Life® Begins  
With Lifestyle-Specific Formulas.