



## GREEN AND ORDERLY

A Stony Brook professional helps her clients get green while they get organized

by Bernadette Starzee

Professional organizer Eileen Koff has adopted the environmental motto "reuse, reduce, recycle" as her mantra. As owner of the organization company To The Next Level in Stony Brook, whose business is about 75 percent residential, Koff helps her customers get their stuff in order in an environmentally responsible manner.

So-called green organizing is a growing trend among professional organizers, one that emphasizes using recycled and/or biodegradable products; reusing products rather than buying new ones; and limiting the amount of unwanted items going to landfills by donating, selling and recycling as much as possible.

When Koff meets with prospective clients, she introduces the concept of green organizing early in the conversation. "It's not usually in the forefront of their minds, as they have accumulated too much stuff," she said. "But I find that the minute I open my mouth and tell them what I do and why I do it, they are 100 percent receptive."

Koff endorses several specific products. "Number one, I look at the packaging," she said. "I stay away from anything with a lot of plastic." The FreedomFiler filing system, which Koff said is simple to use and has minimal, recyclable packaging, tops her list of recommendations.

However, before buying organizing supplies on behalf of her clients, Koff looks to reuse what they already have in the house. "I usually find that by the time I'm called, people have already tried multiple times to get organized on their own and failed. So they already have all the bins," she said. She emphasizes "repurposing," or reusing items for something other than what they were originally intended. "For instance, if homeowners have old wooden doors



Eileen Koff

in their workroom, we might use them to make cabinetry, so they don't have to buy more raw materials," she said. "Or repurposing might be something as simple as using a shoebox to store tax documents."

Beyond reusing, Koff encourages her clients to reduce what they have, and what they buy going forward. "The square footage of our homes has almost doubled to accommodate all the stuff we have," she said. "It's important

to reduce shopping, and to hone in on what's important. And just because you bought it doesn't mean you have to keep it."

When it comes to unloading items, Koff shares her knowledge about how to donate or discard them properly. "When people know that what they want to get rid of will be of help, it's easier for them to let go," she said. "They find it wasteful to just put their belongings in a dumpster." For instance, Habitat for Humanity has "re-stores" for used and surplus building supplies and materials. Organizations such as Big Brother Big Sister and the Salvation Army distribute used clothes to the needy. Web sites like Freecycle.org allow users to list items they want to discard – for instance, a treadmill. "You leave it on your curb with a note, and the person who responded to your post comes and picks it up," Koff said. Old rechargeable batteries can be brought to RadioShack for recycling.

As it is potentially harmful to throw them in the trash, Koff brings expired medications to pharmacies for proper disposal, and light bulbs, solvents and other items to the local waste depot. To keep the green trend going, she helps her clients set up recycling centers in their homes, typically in a mud room or garage.

Koff views sharing the knowledge she has accumulated about green organizing as somewhat of a calling. "As an organizer, I am given the responsibility to transfer my skill set to my clients, and I am in a unique position to educate them one-on-one," she said. "What better captive audience than someone who is saying, 'My lifestyle isn't working anymore; I need to simplify and make adjustments.'"

Certified professional organizer Eileen Koff of To The Next Level has been transforming disorganization into order since 1998. You can reach Eileen Koff CPO at: **631-553-0068** | [Eileen@tothenextlevel.net](mailto:Eileen@tothenextlevel.net) | [www.tothenextlevel.net](http://www.tothenextlevel.net)

For more "Green" tips visit my blog at <http://to-the-next-level.blogspot.com>

### fact:

Power plants emit 40 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide pollution, the primary cause of global warming.

Source: NRDC

The green guide

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