

Cluttered lives spawn new profession

By Iowa News Service
For Gazette Special Sections

Every time Jennifer Robb found herself between clients as an optometrist in Iowa City, she would clear clutter, arrange books and file paperwork.

Robb had such a knack for organizing that her boss suggested she look into a career as a professional organizer.

That was nearly three years ago and Robb now has an ever-growing organizational company she calls Simple Organizing Strategies.

The industry of professional organizers is a booming one. This year the National Association of Professional Organizers counted roughly 4,000 members.

"There are all these home organizing shows, these home decorating shows. People are realizing this is a business," Robb said.

There's also an increasing demand for the services of professional organizers.



Iowa News Service photo

Joan Force goes through the "tool kit" she uses in her job as a professional organizer with Force and Associates in Cedar Rapids.

"I think we live in a society where we equate the great American dream with how much stuff we have," said Maggie Jackson, owner of Cedar Rapids-based The Organized Life.

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So you want to be a professional organizer

1. Do your homework. Check out Web sites like the National Association of Professional Organizers at www.napo.org and read up on the career at the library or book store.

2. Shadow an established organizer. This is the only way to see what the job really entails.

3. Register with NAPO. The organization has annual meetings, seminars and a national registry that can connect you with other organizers in the area and even drum up business.

4. Assess your skills. Do you like to work with people? Are you patient, empathetic, good

at seeing the big picture and flexible?

5. Think about how you'll handle details of the business like billing and hours. Some organizers collect at the end of the appointment; others bill clients. Each places different time limits on appointments.

6. Understand that the job can be unglamorous. It can be dirty and involve a lot of physical-labor.

7. Consider advertising. There's the newspaper, Internet, yellow pages, NAPO Web site. Word of mouth can be your most powerful method.

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That's where professional organizers come in. Professional organizers are typically self-employed so they determine their hours, fees and specialties. As a result, these specifics will vary from person to person.

Though the organizers are as diverse as the backgrounds that led them to the career, several universals hold true.

The profession is dominated by women,

who enjoy helping people, have strong interpersonal skills, can empathize with clients, see the big picture and have patience.

Take Jackson for example. She is an attorney by training and spent her career in higher education administration. In her personal and professional life, though, she was always organizing.

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"I wanted to be in a position where I could work with people one on one and make a difference for them," she said.

So, she started The Organized Life.

"It is certainly a fun job and it's very rewarding. You really get to help people. I really value that," she said.

That's one of the reasons Joan Force started Force and Associates in Cedar Rapids a year ago. After spending most of her professional career teaching in the criminal correction system, Force was looking for another way to help people.

"There is a lot of satisfaction helping people get a handle on their lives," she said.

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Stand out with accomplishments. Most people include a bulleted list of job titles and responsibilities. Dresen insists it won't stand out. Rather, he says, you need to talk about your key accomplishments. Performance evaluations from your previous jobs can provide you with objective descriptions of accomplishments to include on your resume.



Iowa News Service photo

With the increasingly active lives of many families, the demand for professional organizers to bring order to the home is growing.

Keep working on it. A resume is always a work in progress. Everyone in the workforce should keep track of accomplishments and update resumes frequently.

Working on a resume and cover letter can have another benefit as well. "The process of developing a resume is great preparation for an interview," Dresen says.