Homes SUN

GET AND STAY ORGANIZED

Home organization apps can help but what's really needed is a change in living habits

LAURA BYRNE PAQUET
Special to Postmedia Network

Recently, I spent hours scouring my small house for a particular shirt. After combing through every closet, dresser and storage bin, I finally found it wedged behind some large sweaters in a drawer.

Surely, I thought, there has to be a better way. I immediately wondered whether someone had invented a closet organization app. A quick trip to the App Store revealed that many people had, and I downloaded one called Indyx. Since I've also been trying to get a grip on my kitchen, I also downloaded a pantry organization app called KitchenPal.

Were they the solutions to my disorganization dilemmas? Well, yes and no.

THE THRILL OF VICTORY

At first, I was delighted with both digital tools.

With Indyx, you can snap a photo of each of your clothing items. The app strips all the background from the photo, so your familiar clothes look like cool items on a retail website. You can then sort the pieces by colour, brand and even when you last wore them.

KitchenPal has a similar structure. Just scan product barcodes (or enter information manually) and the app creates a searchable database of everything in your pantry. When you use something up and delete it, the app automatically adds it to a shopping list.

All of this made me feel virtuous and organized. Until it didn't.

THE AGONY OF DEFEAT

I'm no clotheshorse, but I couldn't take a photo of every shirt, sweater, scarf, purse and pair of pants in one afternoon. Doing the job in stages, I quickly became confused. Had I already logged this item on Indyx or not? Checking took time, and I found my enthusiasm flagging.

The problem was even more acute with KitchenPal. I didn't realize how often things moved in and out of our kitchen until I started trying to record them all. Forget keeping up with the Joneses. Keeping up with the eggs, milk and bread was turning into a full-time job. I began thinking I was so disorganized that not even an app could help.

And that, say professional organizers, is the downside of apps.

"There are some people, certain personalities, for whom that system could work," says Charlie Bourgogne, owner of Ottawa's Organisation'elle. "And there's others for whom it's going to actually complicate life and give them more stress."

Clearly, I fall into that latter camp. So is there any hope for me, or am I doomed to spend my life searching for cornstarch and camisoles?

START BY DECLUTTERING

Decluttering is a whole other article, but it's a crucial first step, say professional organizers. After paring your belongings to the essentials, assign everything to its place—clothing items grouped by type and colour, for instance, and baking ingredients stored together on a specific kitchen shelf. Once you know what you have and where it is, you can develop tactics for keeping things organized.

Homeowners increasingly desire clutter-free kitchens. *NATIONAL KITCHEN AND BATH ASSOCIATION*

Categorize clothing by type and colour to make it easier to find your favourite items. *CASS HENRY, TRANSFORMED SPACES*

Storing similar foods together in clear containers makes it easy to see what's running low, even without an app. *CASS HENRY, TRANSFORMED SPACES*

SOME APPS TO TRY

If you are digitally inclined, here are a few home organization apps you could test drive.

■ **FOR FOOD:** Pantry Check, KitchenPal, Out of Milk, My Pantry Tracker
■ **FOR CLOTHING:** Fits, Indyx, Whering, Pureple
■ **FOR DIGITIZING KIDS' ARTWORK:** Artkive, KidArt
■ **FOR ORGANIZING STORAGE CONTAINERS:** ToteScan, BinsAndBoxes

ALTERNATIVES TO APPS

"All of these apps require a new habit to be created in order to use them," says organizer Cass Henry of Ottawa's Transformed Spaces. "My suggestion: Try them out, see if they work for your personality style and if they don't, don't be afraid to choose a different method."

Instead of a kitchen app, Henry uses the notes app on her phone for shopping lists, and she has seen clients use a family group chat to track what groceries they need to buy. Bourgogne advises clients to snap quick photos of the fridge and pantry shelves before heading to the supermarket, as a quick visual reminder of what they have on hand. She is also a big fan of hanging as many clothing items in closets as possible, noting that items in drawers are often harder to see and organize (as my shirt search revealed).

BE DISCIPLINED

Remembering how much effort it took to declutter will help motivate you to maintain order, says Bourgogne. She advises clients to spend a few minutes at the end of the day putting everything back where it belongs.

Henry urges clients to clear excess and spoiled items from their kitchens weekly, to review their stock of bathroom items and other staples monthly, and to purge closets, basements, garages and storage lockers seasonally. "So often, people are going out and buying more and more, forgetting that they already have so much! More isn't always better," says Henry.

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Finally, resist the urge to compare your closets or your organizational methods to some lofty ideal. "It's not about perfection, ever," Bourgogne says. "It doesn't matter what the magazine's Instagram or your neighbour's house looks like. It has to work for your family."