

# FAMILY LINK

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## IDECLUTTER FROM THE HEART

### This Column Was on My 'To Do' List



By Ellen Smith

It is the last night of our cruise to Alaska and I am in our stateroom lying on an extremely comfortable bed resplendent with pillows that are full but not so fluffy that I sink down into the innards and my breath is stifled. The room is comfortably cool and peaceful, even sound-proof. My husband is sleeping, yet I have been lying awake for an hour. My body knows I must wake up at 6:00 a.m. to be out of our cabin with suitcases and all by 7:30. Perhaps I am nervous I will not hear the alarm; however, I always hear my alarm at home. What's different?

The clock continues ticking while I breathe rhythmically and use mantras that translate into calming thoughts. This is not working. It is time for a new approach. When my mother-in-law couldn't sleep, she would make lists in her mind. By the time she was finished, she told me she would feel calmer and have several lists to put down on paper in the morning. She had a great memory, which perhaps, could be attributed to making these sleepless night lists. For me, it would be wiser to write everything down, but I don't want to get out of bed to get my phone or to get a pen and paper and run the risk of waking my husband. I will be like my mother-in-law and make mental lists.

First list is gifts we still need to buy.

Next list: (groan), scheduling appointments with doctors—the dentist, the eye doctor, the physical therapist...

Shepsi's needs: an appointment with the groomer, order food.

I miss using my mobile phone's list app, "Keep." I tell myself the main thing is to open my mind and do a brain dump of absolutely everything that jumps into my thoughts. There is no right and wrong. There is just what comes out in the "dump." Later I will type it all into

"Keep," Google's note-taking service described as "part of the free, web-based Google Docs Editors suite." I am not techy, but when I found "Keep" on my Android phone, I began to play with it and got a bit creative. For instance, I use my Keep app to store names of services or products I use infrequently but want to have at my fingertips. Instead of digging around my phone's contacts, I consult my Keep app and instantly find what I seek, like a business card or a product description. Of course, you can locate countless apps that offer more sophistication and are designed to be used by teams of people for managing large projects. These apps charge a monthly fee and offer various bells and whistles. "Keep" is perfect for me.

Sleep is still not coming. So, I continue constructing lists.

The self-care stuff: the hairdresser, the sheitel macher, the nail salon. I will be sure to remember to bring my gift certificate for a manicure.

I guess I am obsessed with to do lists. I love feeling that I am getting things accomplished which further motivates me. Motivation is crucial to getting our work done. When we complete individual tasks, our brains release dopamine which causes positive feelings such as happiness, pleasure and motivation. The simple act of checking off an item on our to do list can deliver pleasure and a great sense of accomplishment.

To do lists are bound up with time management, one of the executive functions we rely upon to help us manage our day, even for those of us whose management of time is not one of our strengths. When I see my clients need guidance with their time management skills, I recommend they contact Debra Levy, PCC, PCOC of A Life that Fits. Debra is an ADHD and executive function coach for adults.

During our recent conversation, Debra defined four aspects to incorporate into the to do lists we create for ourselves:



#### "Shepsi's To Do List"

1. Vet
2. Get belly rub
3. Dog park
4. Cuddle



1. When preparing to write a to do list, we must "empty our brains" by physically noting everything down, be it on paper, a white board on a wall, or on a mobile app. Spoiler alert: From this I learned that the lists I have been composing in my mind will be meaningless until I transfer them to somewhere I refer to frequently.

2. The place we choose for our lists to live must be accessible, convenient and consistently consulted. For example, a shopping list on our phones will work well for its portability. Hanging a calendar, no matter how striking its photos, in a room we rarely enter, will not remind us of a crucial meeting.

3. Our to do lists should be aligned with our calendars, including essential details such as locations of appointments and store hours of the places we need to visit. Phone alarms can be a significant aid throughout our day.

4. Instead of listing an entire project on our to do list, which can present as daunting and intimidating, we can break the project down into small steps, order the steps and assign each step a time. We can even estimate how much time each list item may take to accomplish. In this way, we are less likely to procrastinate and our projects are more likely to be achieved.

Be sure to contact Debra at [alifethatfits.com](mailto:alifethatfits.com) for more of her expertise.

I have met a few random people who do not like using a to do list because it makes them feel stressed. I think they are relating

to each task as if it is a heavy weight hovering over their head. I invite these individuals to start a list on a small scale and give emphasis to how free they will feel as they accomplish their tasks, while keeping Debra Levy's recommendations in mind.

Final list: Groceries to fill an empty refrigerator after a vacation. Thanks to Debra, I realize I am being too vague. Time to make a detailed list.

Ellen Smith is Central Jersey's Kosher Organizer and a member of NAPO, the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals. For over 15 years, Ellen has helped people restore order and create calm in their homes and souls. See Ellen's work on Instagram @ideclutterbyEllen. Contact Ellen for a complimentary phone consultation at [ideclutter407@gmail.com](mailto:ideclutter407@gmail.com).

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