

Oikology with Jamie & Filip Hord + Dr. Joe Ferrari

Ologies Podcast

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Oh hey, it's the poppyseed bagels you've been enjoying more lately because it doesn't matter now if you have seeds in your teeth, Alie Ward, back with another episode of *Ologies*. A beautiful, calming, aesthetically pleasing, orderly episode of *Ologies*. We all need this one. This one will transform our lives. It's gonna renew our spirit. It'll be challenging, and cathartic, and gutting, and sentimental but soothing, and will usher in a new era. It's gonna be dusty, it's gonna be broken, but it's gonna end up organized. This one will make you throw out your stained pajamas your ex's mom gave you for Hanukah. This one has been waiting for you, and it's here. You're here.

But first, let's thank the folks who make it happen, like everyone at [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://www.patreon.com/Ologies) who spends \$1 or more a month to submit questions and make the show happen. Thanks to everyone who's wearing [OlogiesMerch.com](https://www.OlogiesMerch.com) stuff, and who rates the show and subscribes to keep it up in the science charts, and of course the folks who leave reviews. I promised to read them all, and I do, and as proof I pick a new one. And this week, thank you to inherindan; first time listener, first time reviewer, they say. They wrote:

After digesting a few episodes and hearing that people in scientific fields talk like me (which I think is normal), it's inspired me to enroll back in school and eventually get a degree in geobiology. I love bar work, but this podcast made me miss my first love, learning.

Inherindan, yes! That's amazing! As someone else who lived on tips from behind a bar for many years and missed learning, that makes my whole damn day. Hell yeah, boy howdy.

Okay, so, oikology. Let's unpack this, shall we? Oikology is an obscure but real word that comes from *oikos*, the Greek for 'home' or 'the place where one lives', and it means 'the science of housekeeping'. And in this episode, we dipped in to chat with not one, but *three* oikologists! The first two are a married pair of professional organizers who work and live in Manhattan. As soon as I came across their name I fell down the gleaming, inspiring rabbit hole that is their Instagram, and I begged them to talk to me. The third is an Ologies encore, a returning guest who I roped into chatting because he happens to be one of the leaders in research on the topic of clutter. Indeed.

We cover causes of clutter, its psychological effects, mess and gender, ADHD, anxiety and depression, indecision, KonMari and other methods, when to DIY and when calling in a pro might be your next step, virtual organizing, how many pants is too many pants, the areas of the house that collect the most clutter, unneeded gifts, and how to step-by-step conquer the monster in the closet – which is made of stuff that you don't need.

Also, a dispatch from the frontlines of my own battle, and the results of the advice that I shamelessly gleaned from these interviews. So roll up your sleeves and get pumped for the wisdom and research of Dr. Joseph Ferrari and fellow-oikologists of Horderly, Jamie and Filip Hord. You heard that right.

Jamie: Yeah, we just have one headphone in each ear.

Alie: Here's how I found out about you guys: I was just going through a magazine, having a nice leisurely read, and I came across this article about organization. I saw a mention of your company Horderly, and then I realized that was your last name. And... I'm so sorry that you get this question probably every single day, but you are declutterers with the last name Hord... is that related at all?

Jamie: Well, when we came up with it... We like to think of the word 'horderly' more as in 'orderly' rather than 'hoarder'. That was actually one of our worries when we first came up with the name, which didn't take us long, but our clientele did stray the other way.

Aside: Jamie says that they specialize in clutter and organization, but their clientele tend not to be folks who hoard.

Filip: I mean, we work with each other, *[all laugh]* so we work with Hords, just not the hoarding type, necessarily. We still have clients that maybe have hoarding tendencies and have issues that way, but decluttering is definitely our specialty. It works out; the name helps quite a bit.

Jamie: Filip likes to say I married him for his last name. *[Alie laughs]*

Filip: The timing worked out perfectly; we got married a month before Jamie founded Horderly and decided that she wanted to be a professional organizer.

Alie: Well, it's kind of a beautiful moment when you look at the name and realize, "Oh, *orderly!* I'm looking at the word 'orderly', that's so exciting!"

Jamie: You'd be surprised how many clients we get just because they're like, "I really just decided on you guys because I liked how it went with your last name."

Filip: Branding win.

Alie: *[laughs]* It's perfect. I don't know if you know this, but there is an ology, it's called oikology, and it is the study of households' orderliness. Did you know that?

Jamie: I learned that from you!

Filip: We learned that from the initial email, but it's definitely interesting. We're going to have to start using it.

Jamie: Yeah.

Alie: And your Instagram is *goals*. It's just gorgeous.

Aside: If you need some inspiration of what a closet or pantry can look like, they're Instagram.com/Horderly. It's just tasty. It's so nice. And for another hashtag that can calm an anxious brain, look up #knolling. This is when you take objects, like everything in your purse or a drawer; you arrange them in an orderly fashion at right angles; and then take an overhead photo. Oh! It's like chaos calmed.

Knolling was coined – sidenote – in 1987 by Andrew Kromelow, who was a janitor in a furniture shop. He called it that after the designer Knoll, whose furniture is very right-angular. So yes, #knolling, which is beautiful, but unrelated to Jamie and Filip's Instagram, Instagram.com/Horderly. At present, Filip and Jamie have 146,000 followers. Why? Because *[dreamy sigh]*.

Filip: Those are real clients, too. That's the thing that people really like about our Instagram; it's very real, and it's not necessarily minimalist. We don't believe in getting rid of everything and living extremely minimal, but it's real people, real clients, real closets, real kitchens. Like you said, it's 'goals', but it's achievable goals.

Alie: Tell me a little bit about your backstory. I understand, Jamie, that you're a little bit Type A, perhaps? Always a little orderly, right?

Jamie: *[laughs]* Yes. You could say I was born this way, or I definitely grew up this way. I'm very neat-freak, OCD, organized; and I didn't necessarily realize this myself until people started pointing it out and saying, "You're so organized." My first idea of organizing was... Someone said I remind them of Marie Kondo, and I was like, "Who's Marie Kondo?" That was my first inspiration of all of this. *[clip of Marie Kondo: "I'm so excited, because I love mess!"]*

Then I started organizing on the side of a full-time job – I was working 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, so I would organize after work, in the evenings and on weekends. And it wasn't until I really started working with these clients and realizing... I was learning more about myself when I first started, because I didn't realize not everyone thinks the same way I do about a space or about stuff.

Filip: If we hadn't been dating for ten years, and I told her how she was many times, working with clients definitely brought it to light.

Aside: Jamie says that part of becoming a professional organizer means learning not just what works for her, but what works for each client. So different folks might like different levels or types of order.

Alie: And Filip, what's your style like? Are you more... freeform?

Filip: Yeah, I'm just a regular Joe, I guess? *[all laugh]* Jamie would call me a collector. I am not a professional organizer; I wasn't born this way. I'm more of a professional talker; I'm kind of all over the place, and she is very particular. But it's something people can learn, and that's why we love explaining our story.

The way I would've been without Jamie was very messy, but with Jamie – and the way that she is and what she's taught me – I'm an extremely organized person now. I'm very... even particular, I'd say; it's not only rubbed off on me, but it shows that it's definitely learnable, and that's what we teach our clients. I've learned to love organizing and being organized.

Jamie: He's living proof, for sure. A lot of clients don't believe their husbands can get on board with it, and I'm like, "Listen, it can happen. I promise."

Alie: Do you think there are any gender differences or, having done this professionally, do you see that women tend to be more organized, or in couples that one person is more organized than the other?

Jamie: Not necessarily. Within a couple, there's usually one person that's a little more organized, but when it comes to gender it could go either way.

Filip: I feel like a lot of finance guys, the husbands, seem extremely organized sometimes, or maybe not organized but very particular. "Don't touch my ties, I know exactly where every single one of them are!" It's usually one way or the other. Typically, one person's very organized, one person's not. Or they *think* that they're organized.

A lot of people *think* that they're organized, which is completely fine; that means that it's half the battle for us. All I have to do is put in the right systems, and then you'll keep it maintained.

Aside: Let's take a little detour from New York to Chicago, where one Dr. Joseph Ferrari is doing academic research on the topic of clutter.

Dr. F: Okay, hello?

Alie: Hello!

Dr. F: There you are!

Aside: You may be familiar with his voice and his other area of expertise; you met this charismatic DePaul University professor in the Volitional Psychology episode on procrastination, wherein I learned I'm a 'proc', and that done is better than perfect. Perhaps after that episode you purchased his book, *Still Procrastinating?*, which has a permanent residence on my nightstand when I need a pep talk.

Anyway, when I interviewed Dr. Ferrari in February, he mentioned he was also researching clutter, so of course I got him on the horn. His colleague is Dr. Catherine Roster, a consumer psychologist and industrial organizational psychologist at the University of New Mexico. They partner with ICD, the Institute for Challenging Disorganization, and NAPO, the National Association of Profession Organizers – to which Jamie, of course, belongs.

The Hords say that more women reach out for organizational help than men, so I asked Dr. Ferrari: is one gender neater than the others?

Dr. F: Is there a gender difference in clutter? Now *this* I can answer: No.

Now let me tell you what made me explore that question: when Dr. Roster and I did our national study with clutterers, we had over 2,000 people who responded to our national survey on clutter. Out of that study, we found only 50 men answered the study. So the first question I asked the experts was, "Is this a gender thing? Is it that women have the clutter problem, and men don't?" And the ICD experts said, "Oh no, no, no, men have clutter problems, but men don't *view* it as clutter. Men view it as 'my toys', 'my stuff'."

I have a lot of these baseball knick-knacks... It's not clutter, it's my toys. It's part of my man-cave. [*Alie laughs*] Women see it as... To me that's fascinating. I think your listeners would like to know that there's a gender difference in how it's perceived, not a gender difference in how it exists. Women are more likely to go for treatment, to make that phone call or email message to the declutter expert to deal with it than men.

Aside: I also asked Dr. Ferrari why? Why, why, why clutter? Why do you exist? Entropy and chaos are the ways of the universe, but why can't we have better control over it?

Alie: I have a question about the cause and effect of clutter. Let's talk first about cause. Is it indecisive tendencies? Is it a lack of self-esteem? What's causing us not to be able to open that closet and go through it? I'm talking about myself.

Dr. F: Sure. Several different kinds of things. Indecision is one of those factors, you mentioned that. We published that, we found that, and this is not surprising, it's logical, but it's the first time anybody's shown that indecisive people have a hard time getting rid of stuff. Because

they don't know what to do with it. Do I keep it or not? "To be or not to be," as Hamlet would have said. Do I or don't I? Think of Yoda, "Do or not do, there is no try." Either you get rid of it, or you don't. Indecision plays a role with people to do that.

In one of the major papers we published on home and clutter that got a lot of attention, we found an inverse relationship between life satisfaction and clutter. What does that mean? It means the more clutter you have, the lower your sense of life satisfaction, the less satisfied you are with life. That's fascinating in our culture – our disposable culture that says, "No, buy more, have more!" – actually you're hurting your image and your view of yourself; you're going to be less happy the more you have. So I think indecision is one of the variables, one of the factors.

And then there's the emotional attachment, "I can't get rid of it, because it brings back this memory, because it reminds me of that or this, because it reminds me of the kid." Sure, your kid did lots of beautiful artwork when they were a kid, and you've saved it all. Did you need to save it *all*? Maybe you could get rid of some of that.

Aside: Which of course leads to the question, when is it hoarding? Since 2013, Hoarding Disorder (HD) has been recognized as its own disorder by psychologists' Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, and it's classified under Obsessive Compulsive and related disorders. A few symptoms are 'persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions regardless of their actual value', and it says this difficulty is due to a perceived need to save the items and to distress associated with discarding them.

A few studies have shown some improvement in Hoarding Disorder with medication; Paroxetine or Paxil may be promising, and the serotonin-norepinephrine uptake inhibitor (SNRI), Venlafaxine or Effexor, showed a decrease in hoarding symptoms in 70% of participants, although the study was really small. ADHD medications can also improve the focus needed to tackle the sometimes-distressing process of accumulated stuff if it gets to the point of hoarding.

Dr. F: Now remember, clutter is not the same as hoarding. There's a number of people who have explored this topic. We see hoarders on TV, but hoarding is not the same as clutter. Clutter is not considered yet a psychological disorder. The way I conceptualize this is think of your stuff; a hoarder will have a lot of the same thing: toilet paper, toilet paper, toilet paper, toilet paper, toilet paper. Think of it as going vertically, where clutter is just a lot of stuff, more horizontally and broadly, "I've got too much paper; I've got too many knick-knacks; I've got too many dishes, too many mugs." It's a broader concept.

Hoarders are clutterers, but clutterers are not necessarily hoarders. There is a tipping point, I think, from clutter to hoarding, when it becomes too much. When is that tipping point, Dr. Ferrari? I can't tell you, we don't necessarily know, but there's a point where it becomes really interfering with the quality of your life.

We find this in office clutter. A paper we have coming out this year looking at what impact office clutter has on productivity and your ability to do things. And it does impact. There are people who say, "No, no, no, I know what I've got." Well, it takes you longer to find that object than if you were organized. I remember there was a famous industrial organizational psychology study done a number of years ago that found that people will spend up to three hours a week finding things on their desk that are literally arms-length away. You know,

“[banging on desk] Where are those keys? Where’s that thing? Oh, where did I have that paper?” It’s there, but because the desk is so disorganized, they can’t find it. Three hours a week lost on finding something should be readily available.

A graduate student of mine, Trina Dao, just published her master’s thesis that looked at how it leads to less employee satisfaction. The more office clutter you have, the less satisfied people are with their jobs, less productive as well. I think the overload, just having too much because it got out of hand, is an issue.

Aside: But, says Dr. Ferrari, like conquering addictions or starting a new diet, an individual can be led somewhere, but you can’t make behavior happen. Sometimes, we’re just a bunch of unthirsty horses standing over a trough pissing our loved ones off.

Dr. F: I don’t think we can force other people to go through it. They have to do it at their own time; they get what we call in psychology ‘Reactance Effect’.

Alie: What is that?

Dr. F: It’s called the ‘Oh Yeah’. I’m from New York, as you know, so I like to call it the *“[indignantly] Oh, yeah?!”* People are going to do something, but as soon as you pressure them to do it, they come back and go, “Oh, yeah?! Well, now I’m not going to do it!” It’s called ‘Psychological Reactance’, or sometimes called the ‘Oh Yeah Effect’, “Oh, yeah?! Now I’m not going to do it.”

It’s one of the reasons, if I digress for a minute, why “Please Don’t” posters don’t work; it’s the “Thank You For Not”-posters that work. You’re much more likely to get people to do things if you say – let’s just take smoking, because it’s an obvious example – “Thank you for not smoking.” People will say, “Oh, I’ll put the cigarette out.” But if you say, “Please don’t smoke,” people are likely to say, *“[indignantly] Oh, yeah?! Well, I wasn’t going to, but just because you told me I can’t, I’m gonna do it now!”*

Alie: The ‘Oh Yeah Effect’.

Dr. F: The ‘Oh Yeah Effect’. Anyway, you can’t force people to declutter, because then they’ll come back and say, *“[indignantly] Just for that, I’m not gonna go it. How dare you?”* We have to let people do it on their own time, create settings that encourage them to do it, to go through the piles.

Aside: And, maybe, get a little help.

Dr. F: I think that’s again where these decluttering experts can really step in and help us; they can teach us some tricks, some toys, some techniques.

Aside: I asked the experts, Filip and Jamie Hord, when that is.

Alie: What do you think is the tipping point where someone says, “You know what, I need some help with this” versus “Eh, I’ll look at some blog posts, or I’ll just drink four shots of espresso and put on some Lizzo and just do my best to power through”? When does it become professional?

Filip: It’s usually, “I tried to do a glass of wine with my girlfriend, and we just ended up drinking the bottle of wine and never ended up doing it.” *[all laugh]* But I’d say the tipping point of when people reach out is life events. It’s when something is happening. They’re about to

have a second child, or they have a growing family, or they're moving. There's a huge amount of people who say, "I do not want to deal with boxes, because the last time I moved, there were ten boxes that lived under the stairs for the whole time I lived in that apartment or that home, so I'm not dealing with it."

And then there are the clients whose high schooler is going to college, or they're down-sizing; it's always a life event. It's less people that just hire us out of nowhere, unless they've found out that professional organizing is a thing, because of the mindful movement that is going through the world. It's a new type of mindfulness; maybe they haven't had friends over in four years because they're ashamed or such, so getting organized is definitely the answer for a lot of people.

Alie: Did *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* help your cause too? Because people started to realize, "Oh, I can maybe find more peace, or more calm, or less anxiety by changing my environment. We can all live a little better."?

Jamie: It was Marie Kondo's first book that brought it to my attention, so yeah, definitely.

Filip: The show came out last January, and it was massive. We're very involved in partnership with The Container Store as well, and their numbers, our numbers, our followers, our clientele... We had to quadruple our team! It is life-changing; our actual mission for Horderly is that we want to change our clients' lives through organizing, and it is very life-changing.

Marie Kondo definitely has her methods. Where Horderly may be different, and professional organizers may be different... I know the book is called *Tidying Up*, but it is not tidying. Getting organized takes work and hours and days. The funny thing about the Marie Kondo show is that she checks in, and tells them what to do, and then comes back a month later. It's not because she's busy – of course she is – but it's because it takes a month for this family to actually do the work.

Aside: Marie Kondo, an adored and now celebrity organizer from Japan, is a global icon of just excited, loving, and non-judgmental organization and decluttering who has changed so many lives. I asked Dr. Ferrari how her methods stack up to the academic research.

Dr. F: This concept that you may be hearing – touch it and see if it gives you joy; keep it if it gives you joy – is really a myth, it's really inaccurate. That's what I wanted to explain: why is that inaccurate?

Touch it to see if you're going to keep it. What industrial organizational psychology – consumer psychologists, like Dr. Roster – has found is that if you go to the store and you touch something in the store, you're much more likely to buy it and keep it. So this idea of touching it and seeing if it gives you joy, right there, you've biased yourself to keep it. That's what the research shows.

The ICD experts have said the same thing. What they've said – and I thought this was a good example – is that if you go to your closet... There's three target areas, I've learned, where people have the most clutter: in the kitchen, in the closet, and books, these seem to be the big three areas. What the ICD members say, is don't start going through and buying containers from The Container Store and start putting stuff in there. No, no, no, you organize first.

You look, and you see, “My god, I’ve got 12 spatulas. Do I really need 12 spatulas? Holy cow, there’s 18 pairs of blue pants. Wow, I’ve got a dozen of that beige blouse.” So what they want you to do, is organize first. Then bring in the expert or a friend and have them touch the item and say, “Do you need this?” Because if you organized and then touch it, you’re more likely to keep it. I find that interesting, that we’re told to touch it and see if it gives us joy, while the research and the experts in the field are saying, “No, don’t touch it, you’re going to keep it.”

Now, listen to the word ‘joy’, “Touch it and give you joy.” When there was a national attention on all of this last year, the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, a bunch of newspapers contacted me and Dr. Roster because we have the only studies on home and clutter, and said, “Hey, what do you think of this new campaign, these new Netflix shows?” And I said, “I don’t think ‘joy’ is the right word. Joy is not what’s being talked about; we’re talking about *happiness*. Does it make you happy?” And happiness is a very different emotion than joy.

Aside: Ah, the victim of translation! So, maybe have a friend or a pro hold things up for you instead. Also, I love Marie Kondo. I want to be her friend. I want to hug her for a prolonged period of time.

Dr. F: Joy is a much deeper emotion. The Christmas carol that we sing doesn’t say, “Let’s have happiness to the world,” it’s “Joy to the world,” because there’s a difference in that word. Joy is deeper, much more stable emotion. Happiness is a transient – if you would – temporary state or emotion. It’s not the same. I was interviewed by a Japanese reporter who was interested, and I remember this reporter clearly saying, “You know, you’re right. The translation of the word is not ‘does it give you *joy*’ but ‘does it give you *happiness*.’” It’s a translation error that’s come up. Then this reporter said, “But of course, joy will sell more books.”

Aside: Quick side note, I looked this up, and he’s right that the Japanese word Marie Kondo actually uses is ‘tokimeku’, which translates in English to ‘flutter’, or ‘throb’, or ‘palpitate’. Kind of like finding what gives you little butterflies, so does something spark visceral lepidoptera – which is probably not going to move any books either.

Her KonMari method advises you to hold or touch the item, and then just feel if it gives you an emotional boner or if it bums you out. In looking this up, I learned that this is in part inspired by the Shinto religion, in which organizing is a spiritual cleansing practice.

Now, if you’ve ever heard that cleanliness is next to godliness, you can thank 1700s Methodist minister John Wesley for that little nugget that everyone’s elders may have uttered at some point.

Just a little personal history: my own grandparents used to have this fun little game called ‘Inspection’, where every time they visited our rooms had to be perfectly clean. They would give my eldest sister Celeste a roll of quarters, and my middle sister Janelle a roll of dimes, and then me, the youngest, the least pay: I got a roll of nickels. Then my grandpa would inspect our rooms with a white glove, checking for any dust on windowsills or shelves, and making sure that our beds were made to military standards. And we would get docked a coin for every imperfection. I was six!

I've talked to so many therapists about it over the years, so just never do this to children. Luckily, my parents were sweet, they were chill, they had a very practical philosophy: have a place for everything, then just put everything in its place.

Anyway, speaking of methods: while Jamie was inspired by Kondo, she has her own way of doing things.

Alie: What is the Horderly approach like? What is your methodology, where would you tell someone, "Here's where you've got to start."? Do you have to get into a mindset first, like an athlete, or do you just have to get in there and do the work?

Jamie: You definitely have to get into a mindset first. The clients that we work with, they have to be on board and want this. We don't work with someone who is trying to force their parents to get organized. We need to talk to the client first and make sure they understand what we're about to take them through, and they have to be on board. At Horderly, we've created an 11-step process that we take all of our clients through.

Filip: It was 12 steps, but we had to take a step off for business reasons.

Jamie: We give these steps to clients... or anyone that wants to tackle a space on their own, this works. But when we go through these steps with a client, we only need them there for a few of the steps, which is at the beginning, the middle, and the end.

Filip: So basically the whole time. [*all laugh*] Just kidding!

Jamie: Yeah. We do the dirty work; we make it super easy for them to edit. I'll just take you through some of our steps.

Alie: Yeah, bring it on!

Jamie: The first step we need them there for is to give us a tour of the space, and we need to talk to them about helping them prioritize. Because most people, as much as they want to get the whole house done, it definitely takes time – organizing a space definitely takes longer than most people think. And then we do the full pull-out of the space; we like to pull everything out because it's easiest to start with a blank space. Also, when you're pulling everything out, you really touch on everything through our editing process – which is our fourth step.

A lot of people will try to edit their clothes just hanging in their closet. And that's not as effective, because you're so used to your clothes hanging that way that you're just seeing them as you see them every day, and it's not going to really make you consider each item. So it's so important to pull everything out [*man angrily shouting: "I said OUT!"*] and then sort everything. So put all your jeans in one pile, because your jeans might be spread all over the place. Once you have those items all together, you're going to be able to really realize how much you have, and then really consider how much you actually need.

Aside: Okay, so I just went around the house, and I counted: I have four pairs of jeans hanging in two separate closets, eight folded in the linen cabinet that serves as a dresser – don't ask me about it – two in the laundry, and then one on my body. Fifteen pairs! Just an army of neglected denim, hiding in dark spaces, ready to choke me. Ferrari echoing in my mind: [*slowed-down echoing Dr. Ferrari: "Eighteen pairs of blue pants?!"*]

And that doesn't count the seven pairs of black and brown pants. And the one pair of white jeans I bought, still adorned with tags, because I am too afraid to wear them and immediately smear them with mustard or Dorito dust.

So okay, Jamie and Filip and Dr. Ferrari all say: pull everything out and organize it into piles. What next?

Jamie: And then you edit. When we do the full pull-out and sort, this makes it super easy for the client to just walk through with us and make those decisions. If you're someone that really struggles with editing, and letting things go, and making those decisions, it's so helpful to have someone or a professional there, asking you the right questions to make your decision easier.

Filip: But also to hold you accountable, really.

Jamie: Yeah, and hold you accountable. We have lots of clients that say, "Oh, we've already edited everything."

Filip: Every one of our clients is like, "Oh, I've gone through everything; don't make me get rid of anything!"

Aside: Okay, to recap their steps: they walk through the space, and then they organize items by arranging them into like piles. And then what are the next steps? And can you skip any? Are there any negotiable steps?

Jamie: Our steps are non-negotiable. We do still touch on everything with the client, even if they don't get rid of anything. That's fine, but we still want to touch on everything with them. And if it is a client that said, "I've already edited," it's so funny because there'll still be five bags of donations after we go through it, and they'll be like, "Oh, that's so funny! I just edited, but for some reason, going through this process with you, I got rid of so much!" That happens every time, and it's funny.

Alie: Is it difficult, sentimentally, for people to get rid of things? How do you deal with the psychology of, "I don't want to get rid of this, because I feel bad, because it was a gift; I don't want to get rid of this, because then I'm saying goodbye to an era; or it's a waste if I get rid of it." How much do you have to put on your psychologist hat when you're dealing with these edits?

Jamie: It's definitely hard for some people, and that might be the sole reason that they're calling us. But then again, some clients are super-fast going through the editing process, they don't have attachment to anything, and they'll just be like, "Donate, donate, keep." Super-fast. The clients that do struggle, we like to really dive deep, and ask them to understand why. Because we don't have the personal attachment that they do to their items. If it's an old telephone, and they start to get emotional, we don't understand that. You really get to know the clients through the editing, diving deep and understanding why it's meaningful to them. We're not forcing our clients to get rid of anything. People might be holding onto things for the wrong reason. It might bring sad or bad memories, and we want to help them get past that. We like to explain to our clients that now is the time to let go, working with us. You've made this big step to go through this process with us, and now's the time to not feel any guilt, not feel bad because you paid however much money for a certain item. It's going to feel so much better on the other side.

Filip: It's all about asking the right questions. If they purchased something that is expensive, and they don't want to get rid of it, or it was a gift... When was the last time you wore this? When was the last time you used this? And if they say, "Two years ago," we can make up rules with our clients; like, "Okay, the rule now is a year or longer, or two years or longer, or five years..." Whatever the rule may be, let's make up a rule together, and figure out how long it's been since you've used it.

If you used it two months ago, then obviously go ahead and keep it, and we'll circle back later to see how many black T-shirts you actually have, and that's kind of the point. But then, the way to really start – if you're going to be organizing yourself and trying to help yourself get organized and declutter and detach from certain things – the biggest recommendation would be to start with simple things. Start small, start easy. Don't go straight to old photographs, and memorabilia, and jewelry.

Alie: That's the worst!

Filip: Yeah, work on it. Work on your detachment and your decluttering so by the time you get to those memorabilia, you're in the letting-go mood.

Jamie: "Keep the best of the best" is something you can really tell yourself through editing. You don't have to keep every single card that was written to you; you don't have to keep every card from your mom; keep five of your favorites, and so on.

Filip: And another thing for letting go of things... A lot of people are like, "Wow, that was a gift! Oh my gosh, I spent so much money on this! This is so important to me because of this, but I don't even like it" – which happens a lot. Just say, "Okay, we're going to donate it to a good cause, first of all, so feel good about that. And second of all, someone else is going to receive this, and on the receiving end they may *love* it, absolutely love it." It helps people, just by hearing that from someone, whether a professional or a friend, it helps them let go. This may be for a good cause; someone's going to love this really ugly sweater.

Aside: The movement toward organizing seems to have swept America, but is that because of our capitalist vibes of excess? What is happening? I asked Dr. Ferrari.

Alie: What about culturally? Between, say, Swedish folks in some studies, and Americans, and perhaps Japanese culture... Are Americans worse with clutter?

Dr. F: The short answer is that we don't know. You have to understand that the studies that you have, less than a handful, are really the only psychology studies we've ever done. The Americans, they found, have \$33 billion worth of used old technology in their house. Well not just their house... All the old cords, all the old laptops, desktops, phones – as I said before, people have on average three phones. That's interesting to me, and so we wanted to see: why is it?

That's the big question: why are people holding onto their clutter? And I've given a number of motivational talks – and perhaps your listeners will invite me locally, looking at this kind of thing. I tell people the problem is not abundance. We are a nation with abundance, we have a lot of stuff, yes, but the problem is attachment to that abundance. We can't get rid of it. And when I've given these talks, one of the big things that I will hear from people is, "Yes, I'd love to get rid of it! But I don't know what to do with it. I don't know where to place it."

Aside: He says, contact an ICD expert at the Institute for Challenging Disorganization, or a member of NAPO, the National Association of Professional Organizers, like the Hords. You can easily sell things online or locally, you can donate them. You can contact local donation centers to see which are open and how they're handling donations amid COVID-19 restrictions.

Just yesterday, Jarrett put up a posting for a chair we didn't need, and we were gonna put it in the garage – more on all of this in a minute – and he put it online, saying it was free, and within an hour we had 40 people who really wanted it. So I'm all about exchanging goods, it's part of the 'reuse, reduce, recycle' edict. And just like you have molecules in your body that were once a frog or a cloud or a chicken, what better way to give life to an object than to let it become part of someone else's life, right?

So aside from apps and determination, and maybe caffeine, what else do we need?

Alie: What tools would you say are essential? Hypothetically, let's say your name's Alie Ward, you host a podcast, and you have a closet that since you moved in a year ago is still just absolutely like a war zone. What tools does a person need? Is it about a playlist? Is it about a label maker? Do you need some good containers? What are the essentials? Do you just need a bunch of Hefty bags for donations? What tools do you need to get ready for this?

Filip: Jamie just got excited when you said you have a cluttered closet. She was like, "Ooh!"

Jamie: I started tapping, I'm like, "I wanna go organize it!" I was imagining it in my head, and I was like, "Ooh!" I was imagining the after. I don't even know what your closet looks like!

Filip: Jamie's drooling over just the description of this messy closet. It's so funny.

Alie: It is a disaster; I will send you a picture. It's one of those things where things fall out of it when I open it. It's in my office, my master bedroom is my office, and it's just... wow. There's old recording equipment in there, there's books I haven't read, gift-wrap stuff... If there were a bowling ball, it would fall off a shelf and definitely give me a concussion. It's one of those.

Jamie: Oh no.

Aside: I will bravely post before and after photos on [Instagram.com/Ologies](https://www.instagram.com/Ologies), and I'm sorry, and you are welcome.

Jamie: There's so many different tools. Crank up the music if that's your thing, if that's going to keep you going for sure. Before we work with someone, there's no preparation needed, because we want to see the space as-is, but we do like trash bags ready for your donations. That way you can toss your donations straight into the bag and not look back.

Filip: Black trash bags, don't look back.

Jamie: Cleaning products to wipe down the space after you fully pull it out.

Filip: The biggest tool is having enough time. It's going to take you all day, and just understanding that it's going to take you all day... So if you need music, if you need booze, whatever you need. You definitely need some trash bags.

And the funny thing is if you're tackling it yourself, pull everything out – like the first couple of steps for Horderly's process – and you're going to have to put it back at some point. Just

don't give up halfway through. So pull everything out, and have trash bags would be the first step.

Jamie: That's so true. Giving yourself time is the biggest tool, if we can count that as a tool. Putting it in your schedule, putting in your calendar, "I'm organizing my closet this day." That'll hold yourself more accountable, because otherwise you're going to say, "Oh I need to organize my closet," and continuously think about that and then feel guilty that you're not getting to it. Really put it in your schedule and schedule out enough time to complete it.

Aside: This had been on my mind for a year. And this Saturday, I had this whole episode to research and write, but there was an internet outage in our area. And I stood in front of the closet, and I thought of Jamie, and Filip, and Dr. Ferrari, and Marie Kondo, and I thought, "I love mess. Let's dive the fuck in." We put on Lofi Chill Beats on Spotify, and we got to work. I recorded part of the process:

Alie: Okay, this is a diary-like check-in. Jarrett and I are finally cleaning the office closet.

Jarrett: [in the background] "Indeed."

Alie: We are in it! We're so deep in it. Jarrett, how does it feel?

Jarrett: "It's a thrill. It's a real thrill."

Alie: We're like... mile seven, mile ten of a marathon; it's starting to hurt, and there's no end in sight. But I'm happier already. I even said to myself, while I was looking through a box of giftwrap, "This hurts. This hurts me." So, it's not fun, but it's thrilling, and I already feel less depressed. Okay, this was just a quick check-in.

Jarrett and I pulled everything out. We started sorting it into piles. And y'all... we did it! We did it! While each item did not spark what I would call 'joy', getting rid of garbage, and donating to a good cause, and getting rid of that chair, and turning the closet into a recording booth instead of talking into my laundry pile – I'm in the recording booth, this is the first episode ever recorded in it! – all of that served as kindling for what I would call a joy bonfire in my heart.

So why did I wait so long? Why did I do it?! I am here from your future to tell you: organize the mess that you don't want to. It feels so, so, so good. So good! But other than an internet outage, what else would Filip and Jamie say that you need?

Filip: Besides that, Jamie would say a label maker. I know she would.

Alie: Yeah, I saw your Instagram. I was like, "Oh I bet she's got a label maker that she likes." Do you have one that you like more than others?

Jamie: Oh, I don't leave the house without it. *[Alie and Filip laugh]* It just goes with me everywhere. We use the P-Touch CUBE Plus. It's a Brother.

Filip: It's a very technical term for a label maker.

Jamie: It's Bluetooth-operated and it automatically cuts the label as it comes out.

Aside: Side note, I just purchased one of these for \$39.

Filip: If you make as many labels as a professional organizer would make, you would definitely want this one. Otherwise, I think any of the... We typically get the Brother ones, or the ones

from The Container Store, they have a generic one there. And there's reasons, I don't know if you want to dive into why we label everything...

Alie: Yeah!

Filip: It's so helpful for routines and maintenance.

Jamie: Creating the habit.

Filip: Miss Alie Ward, you've pulled everything out – you want to get an organized closet, I understand. Now you've got to put everything back. How are you going to keep it that way? How are you going to keep it organized? Even if we come in there, Jamie would say putting in the systems takes 75% of the battle, but 25% of the battle is keeping it that way and maintaining it.

Jamie: You definitely have to put some work into it after it's organized.

Filip: Putting in those habits and creating that maintenance... And labels are the biggest help in that, especially in spaces that are shared, like kitchens. Maybe you have a housekeeper, or a nanny, or your family, or your kids, even; they all need to know where everything goes just as much as you do.

Labeling is one of our very last steps in our process. Label everything, even if you think it's ridiculous and you live alone, label everything. Then once you... After 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, once the habits are routine and kick in, go ahead and peel it off. Or keep it there, if it's a communal space and you have other people using it. Because not only do you know where to find things, but much more importantly: you know where to put things back. That's the purpose of the labels.

Alie: In your house, what is the stupidest thing you have labeled? What is the most ridiculous, superfluous, but comforting thing that you have a label on?

Jamie: I don't have many things labeled.

Alie: Because you've got it on lock, right? It's in the zone. [*all laugh*]

Jamie: Filip and I are really on the same page. We're renovating our house right now, so things are landing in new places, and we're really figuring out the new space. If I'm putting something somewhere new, Filip and I have that conversation so that we're both on the same page.

Filip: Trust me, we're very tidy people. Labels are extremely helpful to the majority of the population, and they are helpful for us as well. We do have the labels all over the house, don't let Jamie lie.

Jamie: I'm trying to think, what's the silliest...

Filip: I'm looking around my office right now... [*all laugh*] But we don't even have a kitchen installed right now, so it's really hard to say where labels are. We don't have a laundry room right now. Our downstairs is in shambles, just because of construction, and it's on hold during this time. So... [*to Jamie*] Do you have your label maker labeled? I feel like you should.

Aside: Quick aside, if you Google Image search 'labeled label maker', you will be rewarded with evidence of many like-minded fellow idiots who have done this. Please trust I'm gonna be labeling mine when it arrives. Also, google 'label maker pet' and you will find that many

humans have gently adhered a sticker to their animal's forehead bearing the words like 'dog', or 'cat', or 'Bailey'.

Oh, and remember those old school labels that were raised? You turned a wheel, and you punched the letters in, and they turned up white? Those are called DYMO, and you can get new versions or the vintage ones super-cheap.

Now what about costs for a pro-organizer? Rates vary from \$40-200 an hour, with an average of about \$100 an hour.

Alie: How does a person know how much time they are going to need a professional organizer? Do you think people are like, "I only need you for two hours," and you're like, "No way, dude! This is a 12-hour job." How does someone know?

Filip: That's my fun job, quotes and things like that. First of all, the client, if they're anywhere near us – I think that's happened one time in five years, where they were like, "I think I need 36 hours," and I'm like, "Wow, I think you *do* need 36 hours! That was a good guess! Have you worked with us before?!"

We don't even do less than six hours. We will do four hours, but typically six hours is the minimum, because, again: our mission is to change our clients' lives through organizing, and no way in hell you're going to change anyone's life in four hours in organizing. Because 11 steps of a process... I can't walk you through the 11 steps in four hours, much less pull everything out and have the time to put it back!

It takes some time, and some time to adjust to when we quote. Our actual business model is really stupid, because we don't want repeat clients. We want to teach you how to get organized and stay organized, so it's not the cheapest service in the world – although it's decently affordable for most people, and it's getting more affordable the more organizing grows.

Aside: The Hords say that average unpacks for a move are 50 to 100 hours, with big houses taking about 100 hours, so like a nice couch that you wouldn't wanna barf on, or a classy bedroom set – hiring professionals is an investment.

Alie: But that's something that will last them for years and deliver actual mental health benefits every single day.

Jamie: And give them time. We save clients so much time – I don't know how many hours a year – if you want to put it that way, and time is money.

Filip: The mental clarity of getting organized; we haven't really talked about the clarity from being organized, or the time you're about to save in your life. We promise clients we're going to save them headaches, which is a given; time, which they won't really realize until after the place is organized; and money, and they cock their head at that one. But we're going to save you money in the long run. You're never going to have four turmeric in your spice cabinet when we're through with you, and you won't ever buy four turmeric again. The same goes for black t-shirts, and underwear, and socks.

Alie: I also think we buy things thinking that they will make us happy or solve a problem, but the thing that we buy doesn't deliver the mental health benefits we hope. I imagine that after

you declutter, and you edit, and you go through all this; you probably have a peace of mind, you're not trying to fill a chasm with items anymore.

Jamie: That's very true. When we do the full pull-out of a space, it can be very daunting to some clients to see everything all at once pulled out, a kind of...

Filip: ...awakening.

Jamie: Yeah, and that can be the start of a change of lifestyle when it comes to purchasing things.

Aside: Wait, side note, did I just buy that label maker to fill a hole? Am I ever even gonna use it? What if I don't? Why don't I just write labels on masking tape? Or is that weird for my boyfriend, to see everything in the house labeled in my handwriting? That seems kind of passive aggressive. Maybe impartial labeling actually is worthwhile, I don't know. As long as I have a space for the label maker to live. Maybe I should get rid of another item.

Filip: And then we teach the one-in-one-out rule, which is: don't go buying another whatever, unless you're willing to part with one that you have. Everything's tidy, everything has its home, so you know where everything is. You can focus more on what you love now. And that is the minimalism goal, right? You have few things, just what you need.

The essentialism goal, which is what we teach our employees and our clients, is that you have everything that's essential to you and that you love. It's what Marie Kondo preaches, she doesn't necessarily need to get rid of everything either – of course, that helps – but it's that essentialism goal, which I think is just so powerful. Knowing what you have and loving what you have.

But if you need that coach to check in with you while you're going through either the day, or just that one closet, or your entire house... Having just a few check-ins is extremely valuable. Just to have that professional opinion, like, "Why don't you put your spices in this cabinet because of this reason?" We're in kitchens all day, every day. We see all the products, all the things, all the junk from our clients. We work with all the different personality types, so we know how to organize any space in any situation.

Jamie: You'll learn so much through going through this process on your own. You'll learn a lot about yourself. If you're constantly telling yourself, "Why am I not organized? Why can I not stay organized?" Go through this process, do it the right way, and you'll learn through going through the process.

Filip: And then you'll be addicted.

Jamie: Yeah, it is addictive.

Filip: You'll take it to work, you'll take it to your friends, you'll organize your parents' house... It is truly addictive and it's the simple pleasure of clarity.

Alie: It's like real life *Tetris*. [*Jamie and Filip laugh and agree*] "Oooh, that could go there! This could be minimized..."

I have so many questions from listeners. Can I ask them?

Jamie: Absolutely!

Alie: Okay, I told them I was interviewing you guys specifically. I was like, "I reached out to kind-of-a-big-deeeaaalll organizers." People are very excited.

Aside: Okay, before I get to Patrons' questions, which you can submit if you support the show for as little as a dollar a month, first we will hear from sponsors of the show who make it possible for us to donate to a charity each episode. This week, our oikologists chose DressForSuccess.org, which is a global not-for-profit organization that empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing a network of support, professional attire, and the development tools to help women thrive in work and in life.

We made a second donation in Dr. Ferrari's name to ICD, the Institute for Challenging Disorganization. Their mission is to provide education, research, and strategies to benefit people challenged by chronic disorganization. They say that they understand the brain has a lot to do with a client's ability to be organized, and to maintain organizational and productivity systems. Brain-based challenges, whether congenital or acquired, they say, directly impact organizational skills. They have free resources, including a 16-page guidebook to assess cluttering versus hoarding that's up on their site at ChallengingDisorganization.org.

Donations were made possible by sponsors of the show who you may hear about now.

[Ad Break]

Okay, your questions! Let's pull 'em out!

Alie: I thought this was a great question. Megan C asked: Any advice for people with mental blockers like depression, or ADHD, or anxiety, or executive functioning stuff, that prevent them from actively organizing? If someone is maybe a little bit... scatterbrained, I'll call myself, how do you tackle that?

Jamie: Work with a professional to keep you focused and accountable.

Filip: Yeah, you need accountability; you need somebody there focusing your attention to doing it, to going through the process.

Jamie: Be okay with asking for help. It's okay if you can't tackle a space on your own.

Alie: I imagine once you have a system too... It's setting up the system more than adhering to it that seems like it would be the problem.

Jamie: Yeah, lack of a system is usually the problem. We can look at a disorganized space, and that's usually the answer.

Filip: We can teach kids how to keep their toy room organized. Just by having the right system in place, toys won't end up everywhere. It takes 15 minutes at the end of a session to tell the kids where everything goes. And if the kids can do it, trust me, you can do it too, and keep it organized once the system is in place.

Aside: Side note, some habits and processes can be learned early, and it may be helpful for those struggling with conditions like ADHD. In one 2010 study called "ADHD Prevalence and Association with Hoarding Behaviors in Childhood-Onset OCD," it was reported that roughly 42% of the participants with ADHD also had hoarding, compared to 29% of participants without ADHD.

So if clutter is something you have struggled with, and you have a therapist, bring it up and you may be able to detangle what's happening behind it. Because you deserve to feel better!

You deserve the time and effort it takes to clean things, and you deserve to get rid of stuff that bums you out. I am also talking to myself here.

Alie: Brendan Kaylor wants to know: Why do I always end up shoving everything in my closet or a drawer rather than not being lazy? Why do we do it? Why do we out-of-sight-out-of-mind things?

Filip: Because you don't love the way it looks. If you love the way it looks, you will want to keep it maintained. The same reason that we recommend that you don't share spaces with other people – other than kitchens and things like that. If you have your own closet, and you make it look really, really pretty, and buy all the nice hangers and the cute bins that you love, and you hang everything and get it organized, you're going to love it and you will not treat it that way.

Jamie: You can definitely get away with – if you're more on a budget – shopping the house with what you have. But we love, when possible, streamlining the products, using matching bins, really giving it that beautiful touch. Functionality is always first, but then mixing in that beauty is important. We feel it's very important for maintenance, wanting to keep it that way.

Alie: So it's not indulgent to make it pretty, you need that as the reward?

Jamie: A little bit, yes.

Filip: Absolutely! If you do it yourself the right way, and spend a little bit more money on the right products, then not only will it last longer and be more sustainable, but you're going to love it and you're going to keep it that way a lot longer. You're going to get tired of those wire hangers soon enough.

Jaime: It's so much easier on the eye too. A really simple, good example is hanging clothes on a million different hangers. You could easily have your clothes organized, but if the hangers are all the same it's so much easier on the eye.

Filip: Easier to shop your closet. [*clip from Mommy Dearest: "No wire hangers EVER!"*]

Alie: Jessica Chamberlain wants to know: Any strategies for couples who disagree on what to keep?

Jamie: Not to be repetitive, but work with a professional.

Filip: A mediator.

Jamie: We play couples therapist all day, every day. It's so funny to see the couples fighting about something, and then I'm like, "You know what, let me work with your husband. Just him and I."

Aside: Jamie says they usually cooperate easily with a professional.

Jamie: You might get in arguments with your husband about organization. That's normal for a lot of couples.

Alie: Right. Right outside, I have a really lovely view in my office. And my boyfriend, Jarrett, is very athletic and he chose, literally right in my eyeline, to hang a broken boxing bag. [*all laugh*] Why do you own that?!

Jamie: Nooooo! Okay, put him on the phone, let me talk to him! *[laughs]*

Alie: He has since taken it down, and we have replaced it with a lovely hanging chair, but it was one of those things where I was like, “Oh, this is going to be a discussion.” It was held together with tape, and he used it every once in a while, but I was like, “What?!”

Jamie: “When should I bring this up?”

Aside: I just want you to know that I initially cut that whole story out, but Jarrett, who helps with assistant editing, was like, “Leave it in! I’m not ashamed!” So, there you go.

I don’t know, for some reason broken or faded athletic equipment outdoors just really pushes my sad buttons. I didn’t want to speak up at first because didn’t want to offend him, but I did. Now the bag is out of sight; he puts it up when he wants to use it... It’s all good – we’re talking about it on a podcast.

Alie: I thought this was a really good question. Sage Alyxander asked: How do I declutter without losing interest three minutes in and playing with a cool thing that I found? Megan C had the same question.

Jamie: That is one of the biggest problems with organizing on your own: not completing it and getting distracted by what you find.

Filip: Go through the process, pull everything out. That’s the biggest tip right there, pull everything out. You might get distracted by the little things, but... tunnel vision. You’ve got to have a goal and complete it. Set aside that time. But getting distracted happens so much, especially with our clients...

We’d go through things, and they’re telling us a long story about every single article of clothing. They’re like, “I wore that last at this time and this,” and it’s just... Bring it back to center, here we go. What we do with clients is actually start holding up the next thing to edit. They’re holding one piece of clothing or something, and distracted by it, and we’re like, “Okay, what about this? No, *this*, what about this?”

Alie: So you keep the train, just moving, moving, moving.

Filip: You’ve got to keep the train moving. I hate to be redundant with hiring a professional; it’s definitely helpful. There’s a reason that people hire therapists, physical trainers, and everything else. Try not to get distracted, I know that’s a stupid piece of advice, but yeah.

Aside: Okay, I knew this would be of interest to a lot of folks, so I looked up some tips for housekeeping if you have ADHD, or are just an alive human who does not want to do this shit. Psychologists say that folks with ADHD prefer to keep their stuff in full view as reminders to return or repair it, but then that clutter ends up being demotivating. Having a clear bin for “stuff to deal with later” can help.

Other tips I’ve seen for ADHD and cleaning are setting a timer, seeing if you can beat the clock, and then rewarding yourself if you do. Or taking before and after photos as incentive. I also like to do time-blocking when I clean, like telling myself ahead of time that I’ll clean the kitchen from 12:00–12:30, and vacuum from 12:30–12:45, and so on. That way I know what task I’m doing, and I need to catch the next train to make the schedule. Toot-toot! All aboard! Clean house.

Anyway, I can tell you from experience: I have known Jarrett for 9 years, and his room in his old apartment looked like a *Law & Order* episode about a ransacking, or like he had been storing the Holy Grail in his hamper, and someone was desperate to find it. One time, he forgot he left raw pork on top of his fridge, and then the next day he cooked it and ate it to the horror of literally everyone in his life!

Since then, he's been clinically diagnosed with ADHD, which explained so much, and this morning he woke up earlier than me and he cleaned the entire kitchen. He told me that it helps to turn on a TV show on his laptop and listen or watch it via headphones, because then as he cleans – or does whatever boring chore is on his list – his attention wanders to that fun distraction instead of random places. He says it's like if you had to pour water on a table, and to direct the flow you made a channel with another thing to hold your attention.

I can also tell you from experience, I get so much cleaning done listening to audiobooks or to podcasts. So if you are decluttering while listening to this, I'm right here with you! I'm non-creepily holding your hand. Also, donate some of those vases you never use. Oh, and you can give those old towels to an animal shelter, they're going to love it.

Okay, onward.

Alie: Talela Manson, first-time question-asker, wants to know: Why does a clean room feel refreshing to look at? Why do we feel happier when we don't have a huge pile of clothes on the ground?

Jamie: Ah, yes. Such a good one. Tidy desk, tidy mind; tidy space, tidy mind. It's like a weight lifted off your shoulders. When you look at a cluttered space, or a pile of clutter, it weighs you down.

Filip: What you see is what you get; it's what happens in your mind. If you have a cluttered home, your mind is cluttered, your family is cluttered, everything's cluttered. Having a clean space, and an organized space, and a tidy space means your mind is clean. Your mind is clutter-free, your mind is organized, and it's refreshing. Absolutely.

Aside: I was curious exactly why, and one article in *Psychology Today*, written by psychologist Dr. Sherrie Bourg Carter, outlines eight reasons "Why Mess Causes Stress," and I will paraphrase. Essentially, by clearing clutter and getting organized, we're less sensory overloaded and our mind has more space to relax and be creative. We don't have this nagging feeling of needing to work. We feel less ashamed, and more proud of ourselves, and then we get things done faster because things don't get lost.

This explains why I can be having what feels like a depressive episode for weeks, until I just fold all the laundry that's been sitting on a chair for 15 days, and suddenly I'm a new person! So folding underpants: it's like free therapy.

Alie: I love this question from Rachel Weiss, they asked: What is the easiest thing you think everyone should be doing to declutter their home? Like, what's step number one?

Jamie: Prioritize is number one. Especially right now, you sit in your home, and you think of all the things you could do. You could literally organize every space in your home right now, and that's going to really weigh you down and overwhelm you, and then you're not going to get anything done because you're going to be super-overwhelmed. So prioritize: pick a space

and just focus on that, and work on that space until it's done. Don't think about the other spaces yet, just hone in on that one area.

Filip: Don't even start with the kitchen. Start with the pantry in the kitchen, or start with the junk drawer.

Jamie: The kitchen is a huge project. Start with the junk drawer, then start with the other drawers, and then...

Filip: Yeah, and then you'll be inspired. Like we said, organizing is addictive. It's because you have that clean feel. Once it's clean, once it's organized, you'll be addicted to it; you'll have that sense of accomplishment that'll keep you going.

Jamie: And all areas lead into other areas, you'll find that once you tackle that first space. When you organize your closet, you're going to have a little pile from your closet that actually belongs in your bathroom. You're not going to put that back into your closet, you need to put that in the bathroom, but now you should probably do the bathroom next, you know?

Aside: Wait, wait, wait, back to junk drawers.

Alie: What does your junk drawer look like?

Jamie: I don't have one. [*Alie gasps*] I don't have a junk drawer. I've never had one.

Filip: What would live in a junk drawer? Batteries go in the toolkit; pens go on the desk... I don't know, what else would go in there? Scissors! Scissors go in the desk as well, but we have one pair of scissors with the larger utensils in the kitchen. So the junk drawer, you just don't need it.

Jamie: I've always been one to not have a junk drawer.

Alie: That's amazing. I'm gonna make people post photos of their junk drawers for this, because I want to see 'em! You're going to love it, Jamie. You're gonna be like, "Oh, look at all these junk drawers!"

Filip: Well, we organize junk drawers all the time. It's all about containment. Go find the little organizers and bins that go in the drawer to contain your stapler, or your scissors, or your pens.

Jamie: It creates structure in that drawer, and you can even label each little divider, like 'batteries'. You can really dive deep and have fun with it.

Alie: That's such a good challenge. That is what I will be doing [*singsong*] tonight.

Aside: Okay folks, post a before and after photo with the hashtag #OlogiesJunk. After we finished recording, the Hords said that they do virtual consulting, so I'm gonna put up a post on my Instagram this week, and we will pick an Ologite to win a free session with them. Is that nice?! So rather than having the experts come to your physical space, this is an option they were rolling out anyway, and as it turns out: it's perfect for the times at hand.

Also, that junk drawer? Once you organize it, you can call it a 'multipurpose drawer'. That's what some people do, because most of the stuff in there is hella functional! I keep screws, and batteries, and scissors... I mean, think about it: you probably use that drawer more than any other in the house. Maybe even more than the one your toothpaste goes in. Is that weird? Speaking of weird...

Alie: Laura Darnell wants to know: How weird was it when you first started going through other people's stuff? And my follow-up is: have you ever found anything embarrassing? Like, "Oops! There's a box of butt plugs." What do you do with that?

Jamie: Oh, we've seen it all. We will know you like the back of your hand by the time we're done working with you. And we tell a lot of clients that, especially the clients that are very nervous at first. No judgment here, it's what we do and we see it all. We create homes for everything, no matter what we find! If it's a keep, we'll create a home for it. There's definitely been some homes or some labels that... Maybe not labels, but...

Filip: We won't get into too many celebrity stories. [*all laugh*]

Alie: I'm sure you're like, "Ooh, do I create a label for that?"

Jamie: Yeah, there usually is a question, like, "I probably shouldn't."

Alie: Oh my God. I loved these questions from Kata Zarándy, Loki, and Annie C, who asked: How long you are supposed to hold onto gifts that are not spot-on?

Jamie: Ugh. Not at all.

Filip: Not at all. Say no to freebies!

Jamie: A lot of people worry about, "When that person comes over, they're going to ask about it." No, they won't. Don't make that an excuse to keep it. Focus on yourself.

Filip: It took me a little bit of time to be able to get a card from my mom – sorry Mom! – and just throw it right into the trash once I read it. I love it, but at the end of the day I don't need to keep that, and she doesn't remember sending it. She's not gonna be like, "Where do you have your Easter card? I sent that two months ago!" It took a little bit of time getting used to that though.

Jamie: Again, keep the best of the best. I keep a few items in our guest bedroom, items that were special to me. It might not be my style for our home, and I'm not going to hang it anywhere in our home, but if it has meaning, keep it. Definitely try to enjoy the meaning out of it. Try not to just stuff it somewhere.

Aside: Dr. Ferrari also touched on this. Every year we accumulate more stuff, and older folks may therefore struggle more with this.

Dr. F: Another common comment I hear, particularly among seniors, is, "Well, I want to give it away to my family, but my kids don't want it. My grandkids don't want it." Okay, well, give it to somebody else. Alright? Sure, your millennial kids don't want the fine china. People don't want that anymore. People aren't into sterling silver, or they're not into all this cut crystal, but somebody might be.

Go to your local Habitat for Humanity, where they're rebuilding a house for somebody. They'd love to have those dishes. Sure, *your* family can't use it, but another family could. Look at that house you just saw on the news that burned down, where people lost everything. Maybe they can use your dishes, maybe they can use those pots and pans, maybe they wouldn't mind eight spatulas, you know? There are ways of giving it away.

You leave a legacy. That's what we're called to do. And you know, Alie, that's one of my things: leave a legacy. What are you doing to make this world a better place? That's the problem.

Aside: Remember, it's *you* that means a lot to people, not what you give them or leave behind. People are gonna remember laughing, and birthday cakes, and hugs, and the way that you made them feel loved. Not 15 bowls and two butter dishes.

Dr. F: Your family doesn't want it, that's fine, but give it to a new family, a new tradition. My parents started decluttering when they were alive. Their point was, "We want to give you kids" – there's four of us kids – "We want to give you the gift of not having to go through all this clutter. And while we're alive and we're still sane, and we're still cognitively there, we want to see you enjoy it. So come take this, come take that. Let me give you this so I can see you enjoy it." That's a beautiful thing to do.

Aside: So don't feel like you have to give unwanted gifts or else people will forget you. Now, speaking of gifts, when it comes to buying them, I am the worst! I just freak out, and I end up sending things 6 months after someone's birthday.

Alie: Okay, I have terrible gift-giving anxiety, where I am so afraid of getting people things that they don't want, that they then have to deal with, that I end up procrastinating on gift-buying, or I just don't know what to get. What kind of gifts do you give people, knowing that you don't want to clutter anyone's house? Do you give gift cards? Experience gifts? What do you do?

Jamie: First of all, that's great that you think that way. I think that's important for people to keep in mind. Especially for those people that get gifts that they don't know what to do with, keep in mind: are you gift-giving to people? Don't give your clutter to other people as well. But definitely, instead of things, gift experiences. If they have kids, maybe that's a fun trampoline place, or something where they can get out and enjoy experiences together rather than a thing, an item. But also feel free to give a gift and say, "Don't feel obligated to keep this."

Alie: [*singsong*] Gift receipts!

Jamie: "Donate it if you don't love it."

Filip: I don't give gift cards, I think I grew up not... [*to Jamie*] Do you give gift cards?

Jamie: Oh, I don't give gifts. I'm awful.

Filip: No, like gift cards.

Jamie: Oh. Gift cards... Meh.

Alie: Because a lot of times you might not use them.

Jamie: Well, it's also... You don't want to give a gift card to Gap, and then they go buy a ton of clothes, you know? It's promoting purchasing more clothes that they might not need.

Alie: I do think a fun thing to do, especially if you're broke, is to take all of the gift cards, and gift certificates, and gift cards that have like \$5 on them, and then – when we can go out again – make a day of just running through all your gift cards. You've got \$3 on a Yogurtland? You're gonna go get yogurt that day.

Jamie: Let's go to Yogurtland today! Yes, I love that.

Alie: Do that.

I loved this question from Tara McNee, who apparently has been reading my diary: Why can't I put my laundry away after it comes out of the dryer? It sits on the Laundry Chair for weeks. What happens?

Jamie: Ooh, treat laundry like groceries. [*clip from Brooklyn Nine-Nine, Jake Peralta says, "Noice!" and gives a high-five*] When you bring cold groceries into your house, they have to go in the fridge, right? So as soon as laundry is done, just get it all done. Treat it like groceries, like they're going to go bad if you don't put them away.

Filip: Jamie dumps it on our bed. We can't sleep at night unless we fold the laundry. That's a great way, just getting in the motion of pulling it straight out of the dryer and dumping it on the bed. Then you've got to have discipline for all of this. It's just like getting a six-pack or doing a juice cleanse, you've got to have a little bit of discipline. If you can *not* take the laundry from dumped-on-the-bed and put it on the other chair, like just sweeping it under the rug... You've got to have a little bit of discipline; make restrictions.

Aside: If you've ever slept a full night nestled in clean, unfolded laundry, like a rat: I see you, I am you. Now, it occurred to me in the making of this that managing clutter isn't about more frequent marathon cleaning binges; clutter is caused simply by a failure to put things away in the first place, in the moment. So organizing isn't about these big corrections of mess so much as it's just about making it easier to put things away so you don't have big clean ups waiting. Making it easier to do it as you go, so it doesn't creep up on you.

Filip: If something needs to go upstairs or downstairs, Jamie might not want to run upstairs and run back downstairs and run upstairs, but she'll put it right in the way of the door. It needs to go out to the trash? You can't even exit the house without taking it with you. It's like prepping yourself up for future success.

Jamie: Yeah. Moving things towards where they need to go if you can't get it there right away. But don't create a pile on your steps, and then continue passing it. Every time you go up the step, if there's something there that you put there earlier in the day, take it up. Take it closer to where it needs to go.

Aside: Dr. Ferrari said that the main areas of clutter are closets, kitchen, and books. And a lot of folks asked about the last one, including Dawn Ewald, bookstore-lovin' Brad del-Munns, Poppy Milliken, Kata Zarándy, first-time question-askers Manuel González and Sarah Kulig, and Zoë Buckley and Amelia Heins, who specifically asked this next question.

Alie: Someone asked: When it comes to bookshelves: alphabetical, topic, color?

Jamie: It's personal preference. I personally love to organize the books by color at a client's house. But I always ask them how they would prefer it first, before we organize them. Definitely personal preference. We actually just organized Filip's – Filip is a book lover, a book collector.

Filip: A hoarder of books. [*Alie laughs*]

Jamie: We just organized his library style, so by category, and within category, alphabetical.

Filip: I didn't want color-coordinated, and neither did Jamie, so it actually forces you to have different sizes and different colors if you go by either alphabetical or by category. And I made up my own categories, I don't go by the library.

Alie: Did you use a label maker? Yay or nay?

Jamie: No. They're on exposed shelves.

Alie: Oh, okay. And you know what goes where. That's how I did my books, too.

Filip: We had sticky notes. The sticky notes were very alive while we were sorting and putting them up.

Aside: You got extra books? Patreon Loki wrote in and said: You could take the books to a VA (they always take them), a hospital, a nursing home, or a donation center. Although check ahead of time to see if they're accepting donations right now.

You could also consider building a freestanding little library in your neighborhood. Once I was very sad and lonely, and I happened upon a little library. And in it was a book about love and relationships, and I was like, "[*weepily*] I do have to accept and love myself first!" But remember, we're not sure how long SARS-CoV-2 can live on surfaces. Scientists estimate up to 72 hours, so perhaps a little library equipped with a can of Lysol? Or a good post-vaccine project? Filip and Jamie say that Goodwill in some cities is accepting donations straight out or via pre-paid shipping bags, so you can look into that locally, too.

Jamie: But don't let that stop you from making those donation piles right now. Most importantly, when you do make them, make sure you label them 'donate' so that when the time comes that you can donate those items, you don't fish back through them and start pulling things back.

Filip: We were actually interviewed not too long ago about this donation question, and what I think would be smart, and what we have actually done literally in our car... We're not driving anywhere, or very seldomly at least, so when we can drive somewhere again in the – hopefully – near future, the donations are in the back of the car. It's not like we need trunk space right now. So Jamie and I put our donations in the back of our car because when we can drive we'll be able to donate, hopefully.

Alie: Smart. That's great.

Aside: Oh! I didn't ask the oikologists about movies or TV shows.

Alie: Jamie, when you were growing up, did you ever identify with Monica on *Friends*? Were you like, "Why does everyone give her a hard time for being so organized?"

Jamie: *Friends* was definitely one of my favorite shows when I was younger, and Monica was always my favorite. [*clip from Friends, Monica: "I know!"*] I related a lot to her. Not the room though, that she hides from everyone.

[*clip from Friends*]

Chandler: "Oh my god!"

Monica: [*gasps*] "How did you get in there?!"

Chandler: [*giggles mischievously*] "You're messy."

Monica: [upset] "No! You weren't supposed to see this!"

That was a fun twist. Whatever producer threw that in, that's funny.

Alie: "That's not how we are!" The last two questions I always ask: what sucks the most about being a professional organizer? What is the hardest thing, or what is the most irksome? What is the one part about your job that... Do you ever get into someone's house and you're like, "Woah, dude!"?

Jamie: Not necessarily. Like I said earlier, we see it all. Nothing really fazes us at this point. We just want to help.

Alie: Or having to haul things down steps in New York?

Jamie: Oh, that's one of my favorite parts! It's our workout for the day, for sure.

Aside: See, this is one of the reasons why an organizer can really be worth the money. Now, Filip says one thing that they both love is seeing the clients' reactions to their newly-organized space. It's like the moment at the end of a haircut, when a barber styles your hair and then you walk out of there confident, feeling transformed. You're like in slow motion on a runway, and everyone's like, "Whoa, what a fox!" But instead, that's you thinking that about the shelving in your garage. Just horny for organization.

Alie: What's the thing you love the most about professional organizing? Like what is the thing that just gives you butterflies? [*"Tokimiku."*]

Jamie: Ah, just everything about it. Changing our clients' lives, of course, and making that difference in their life. My favorite part of organizing in general is the mindfulness of it all, that mental clarity after going through the process of understanding what you have, knowing where it belongs... It's just such a mindful process. One of our employees, her favorite part of organizing is having the control, being the coach.

Aside: They said that organizing can scratch an itch that this employee just missed while she was on vacation.

Filip: She came back from a 45-day backpacking trip over the globe, and she said, "I need to get back into someone's home so I can control them. [*all laugh*] I need to control a client." It's that perfectionist mindset. When we hire our employees, we have the most difficult questions, tricky questions. I have to see that you're a perfectionist. You've gotta be a little crazy to do this, because nobody in their right mind wants to schlep 10 bags in a cab across New York City to Goodwill or from The Container Store.

Jamie: That that being said, it's not about perfectionism either.

Aside: Jamie jumps in to note, "Perfect in whose eyes?"

Jamie: It's not about having everything perfect in the way that you read or see that it should be. It's about curating your space in an organized way that works for you. That's why it's so important to go through these steps.

Alie: It's so inspiring. It really is. It makes me feel like, "Okay, I'm not the only person with a chaos closet in my home. I can do something about it." It's just coming up with a system and that it's doable.

Jamie: Yes. It's very doable.

So ask orderly people disorganized questions, because there is no shame in entropy and you deserve peace and beauty, should you want it. Maybe you don't. That's a-okay too!

You can follow the Hords at [Instagram.com/Horderly](https://www.instagram.com/Horderly). They have a website at [Horderly.com](https://www.horderly.com). Dr. Joseph Ferrari is a professor at [DePaul University](https://www.depaul.edu), and he's on Facebook. I will add links in the show notes to them and to the sponsors and the charities we mentioned.

We are @Ologies on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) and on [Twitter](https://twitter.com), and I'm [@AlieWard](https://www.instagram.com/AlieWard) on [@both](https://www.instagram.com/AlieWard). Thank you to the family of Ologites supporting faithfully on [Patreon.com/Ologies](https://www.patreon.com/Ologies). You can also join the [subreddit Ologies Podcast](https://www.reddit.com/r/Ologies), or the [Ologies Podcast Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/OlogiesPodcast) group, moderated by the wonderful Erin Talbert, who I have known since we were 4. I remember once she was not allowed to go outside to play, so I came over to help her clean her room so she could, and we organized her colored pencils for an hour. And then we were like, "I guess we should tackle the big things first, huh?" So Ernie, I just want you to know, I think about that moment at least twice a week.

Also, thank you also to Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch. They are the hilarious hosts of the comedy podcast *You Are That* and they also help me manage merch orders, which are a little delayed because of COVID, but the warehouse is shipping as fast as they can.

Thank you, Emily White and all the transcriptionists making the transcripts available. They're free at [AlieWard.com/Ologies-Extras](https://www.alieward.com/Ologies-Extras). Thank you, Caleb Patton, for bleeping episodes to make them kid-friendly. They are also up at that link, which is gonna be the show notes.

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And of course, thank you to the guy with a 'Best Dude' sticker on his forehead, Steven Ray Morris, who hosts the *Purrrrcast* and *See Jurassic Right* podcast. He lead-edits; the episode had a lot of bits, a lot of pieces, and 41 asides. He stitches it all together with Jarrett. Nick Thorburn wrote and performed the theme music.

And if you stick around through the credits, I tell you a secret. This week's secret is that I will pull out a book from my embarrassing-book box, and I will read you the first sentence I thumb through. So, this could be a diary, it could be a book that would make me actually literally perish from mortification.

Let's go. Okay, I'm in the closet. I'm gonna give it a go. Are you ready? Oh boy! What's it gonna be? *[singing]* What's it gonna beeee? *[books tumbling and shifting]* Oh my god. Okay. Closing my eyes. Picking a book. Oh god. Please don't be embarrassing, please don't be embarrassing. What am I doing? Why am I doing this? Why am I doing this? Um... Oh my god. *[Alie stops moving books]* Oh my god! *[excitedly]* Oh my god! *[laughing in awe]*

It's the book that I got from the little library! It's called *Love and Awakening: Discovering the Sacred Path of Intimate Relationships*. I can't believe I picked this! This is amazing. It says, "Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that needs our love." I send you into the world with that. *[lets out a breath]* Thank you, John Welwood, for putting this book together so that I could find it in a free library from someone who was decluttering.

With that, go do it. You're gonna be so happy that you cleaned that thing that you didn't wanna clean. Okay. Or not. Take a nap, that's also okay.

All right, berbye!

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