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Dana Korey of Del Mar is queen of all that is clean



Maybe it was the lizards living on the living room table.

Or perhaps the fact that my office had been dismantled and I've had to relocate my computer to my son's bedroom — which houses a boom box, Nintendo game

and dirty socks — in order to get any work done. Either way, when I saw the commercial for a company called Away With Clutter, I was intrigued.

We attempt to keep things together during normal times, but remodeling is about as far from normal as it can get. Even without the lizards taking up residence on the coffee table while my son's room gets a new ceiling, things were getting out of hand.

Do people really call someone else to dig themselves out of their houses and offices?

They do, said Dana Korey, owner or, as she likes to call herself, "chairman of order" of Away With Clutter.

"Clean and organized are two different things," she said, sitting cross-legged on a couch, her bare feet tucked neatly under her. Her blond streaked hair is pulled behind her ears and the chocolate-colored turtleneck sweater and flare-leg pants seem color-coordinated with the pale beige couch in her Del Mar home, the company's headquarters. She is relaxed and yet animated when she talks about helping people find order in their lives.

"Our concept is that you need to have access to what you want when you want it," Korey said.

Korey didn't start off being the queen of all that is clean and uncluttered. But after years as a corporate events planner, a casting agent for movies and television and work in advertising and sales, she had honed her ability to organize and prioritize. So when some chronically disorganized friends in Del Mar were planning to sell their house — she called it "clutter central" — Korey told them they had to make some major changes if they had any hope of getting offers.

Overnight, closets were straightened, kids' toys and trophies disappeared from living spaces, cookies were baking in the oven and flowers added color throughout the home. The house sold, the real estate agent was impressed, and Korey's business took off.

You may have seen her small "Got clutter? Get Solution!" signs posted all over North County. She ran small ads in local papers and, after awhile, businesses started calling her to do in offices what she was doing in homes. Now some 26 organizers throughout the state work under the Away With Clutter umbrella, and plans include franchising the business.

She joins an industry that is amid a growth spurt. Books such as "Organizing from the Inside Out," by Julie Morgenstern, are strong sellers. A host of Web sites, including the wildly popular organizing and inspirational site, <http://www.flylady.com>, are encouraging tens of thousands of people to examine their lives and make them simpler and more functional.

"We start with a consultation to find out what people need and what they want to do with a specific space," Korey said.

"And we ask them to think about this for all the things they just can't seem to part with: 'Do you love it, do you use it, does it serve you?'"

When it comes down to it, most of us just keep too much stuff around. Maybe we're afraid if we file it away, we'll never find it again. Maybe the sentimental value is so strong that it's almost impossible to part with (think Aunt Martha's vintage 1970 dinnerware). Whatever the reason, it's given Korey and others like her a booming business even in these bust times.

Unfortunately, though, we never did get around to talking about how to organize those lizards.

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