

Orderly

Being orderly is different from being full of plans or being organized. If John is full of plans it means that he will now, six months in advance, be looking into fare structures to Britain, cultural events in London, and contacts for a couple of British friends. If John is organized he will carry out his planful inquiries in suitably coherent segments: tomorrow he will check with travel agents—and make plans to call them back again; at the beginning of next month he will telephone Herb, a friend in Surrey, to ask when they can meet in London. If John is orderly, he will take and file careful notes on when he has made his various inquiries, and how he has replied to correspondents or booking agents.

Examples

1 Putting things in order

I am surrounded by papers and notes, but leave them be until a critical mass has been reached. I cannot predict the arrival of that critical mass. It may be that I have gotten up early on Saturday morning, the coffee is still waking me, and my autonomic system conceives a taste for bare surfaces. I inspect the post-it tab type notes on both sides of my desk, and begin dropping them into the 'circular file.' They chiefly record dates or addresses or phone numbers, and in almost all cases the actions they were there to trigger have already taken place. Why did I leave them there three or four, or more, days? Were they memorials to life in process, to things done? Were they codes for action to take, thus life drivers? When I have cleared the desk I feel good, lighter, more on launch pad; but something in me misses the in-the-sweat-of things-mode, life itself.

2 Thinking about being orderly

I often plan orderly things to do. I write down their names in a fastidious, overpriced, leather bound desk planner. In that planner there are hour by hour lines for each action to be performed on, say, Thursday October 1, between 7AM and 6PM. The lines are narrow, divided by the half hours—as though one's schedule were financial-accountant targeted—and inscribed in a slightly gilded 8 pt font: in short, classy. What I put on those pages, generally messily straddling several lines, is a mixture of things to do, things to carry through—pay property tax the following week, things to buy—dark chocolate, things to read—book titles. The final result of this book of order is a scribbled palimpsest, a pledge of interest in order. I seldom return to those pages, which seem to have discharged their function as elegant note pads, though on rare occasions I make my way back, and am surprised to see what I have forgotten.