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## Redondo Beach woman helps clients get organized

Redondo Beach woman helps clients get organized and retake control  
Redondo businesswoman helps clients get organized and in control.

**By Shanna Thompson Daily Breeze**

Close to New Year's 2000, an orchid plant Marilyn Crouch tended to for years began to bloom for the first time.

Excited by the new development, she secured a chopstick to the stem with a twist tie to the support the flower. A week later it was dead.

In her efforts to protect the bud, Crouch had inadvertently choked off the new growth -- a realization the then-corporate business manager likened to her own life.

Crouch worked hard at her job at TRW, not realizing, until the moment she saw the dead orchid, that she was cutting herself off from the type of professional life she actually wanted.

Soon after the orchid incident, Crouch quit her job to re-evaluate her life.

"It was like I turned 40 and I said, 'You know, there is more to life than working in a corporation,' " she said.

After nine months of soul- searching, Crouch combined her desire to help people and her natural creative talents and became a professional organizer.

Now, in her fourth year of running Avenues to Organization out of her Redondo Beach home, 45-year-old Crouch is successful and happy. She is past

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president of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers and has been featured as an expert on Fox 11 News.

"It fit into everything I wanted," she said. "And I'm not kidding you, I don't look back."

With any home or office organizing project, Crouch said, the first step in helping the client achieve order is sorting. But she recognizes that the task can be emotional and daunting, so Crouch takes a gentle approach to the process.

"By the time someone calls me, I'm honored ... because to get to that place in your life to say I need help, that's huge," she said. "I really get to make a difference."

After Phase One is complete, it's time to set up what Crouch calls "systems." Anything from a CD rack to drawer files to garage storage qualifies as a system. The goal is to identify a client's needs and find a solution that he or she can maintain after Crouch leaves.

Crouch is quick to differentiate between cleaning and organizing, saying that her methods give people the tools they need to maintain an uncluttered existence. Her clients range from people with health issues such as attention deficit disorder to clients who have recently had a life change, such as a divorce, to overwhelmed doctors, lawyers and writers.

The result is that people find themselves in a situation that brings them embarrassment and even shame. Friends and family often don't understand, Crouch said, and only offer advice such as "just clean stuff up."

With her strict code of ethics and guaranteed confidentiality, Crouch is a solution for people who feel paralyzed by the state of their personal environment. Some may never open their blinds and are reluctant to let people into their homes for fear they might be judged.

"Disorganization is really a symptom of something else," Crouch said. "They are just overwhelmed people. It's like life is happening so fast that they can't keep up."

Recognizing that external disorganization is often an extension of internal turmoil, Crouch recently

incorporated life coaching into her business. She describes a life coach as someone who holds individuals accountable and helps them reach their personal and professional goals.

It's different than therapy, which delves into past issues, in that life coaching pinpoints the current status of a client's life and helps him or her determine where they want to go.

"I'm organizing the outward environment for people, and there is something to be said about organizing our internal self as well as the external," she said.

At the end of any organization process, Crouch said, her clients' lives are back in control and their outlook is more optimistic. She has even been credited with saving a marriage.

"There is a huge sense of relief. I'd say the majority of clients hug me when I leave," she said.

"They are so happy. It changes their lives."

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