

Secrets to How the Swiss Stay So Organized

Contributed by Anita Dobin

The Swiss are known as the "keepers of the world", with good reason, their city, shops, hotels, restaurants and trains run like clockwork and look great doing it. So how do they do it and how can their methods be translated into your own home life?

Secret 1: Everyone participates. All Swiss citizens feel responsible for their environment and they actively participate in keeping it orderly by following the rules of good citizenship. Evaluate your family, does everyone participate in keeping the home clean and clutter free? All the members of your family, including the children, are "citizens of the world". This means that everyone should shoulder the responsibilities of the home. Even the youngest members of the family should be encouraged to do simple chores. They can be as simple as helping mom put toys away at the end of the day or for older children, vacuuming the floor. Chores should be treated as a normal part of daily activities where everyone pitches in, they are neither to be used as a punishment or be paid as a reward.

Secret 2: Having too much stuff. Americans are enamored with stuff. We have too much of it. We shop till we drop, buy on impulse, purchase what we don't need, already own or think we can't live without. Is it really necessary to own 6 pairs of jeans, a teabag squeezer, or a brush to clean mushrooms? Swiss refrigerators and closets tend to be small so they don't buy more than can be stored and they tend to use up what they have before buying more. They are avid recyclers and have been for many years.

Secret 3: Smaller goals = larger accomplishments The Swiss take a two hour leisurely lunch. They would rather tack on an extra hour to their work day than give up this civilized tradition. Realize that meeting your goals is good but they don't need to be accomplished in one day. Doing a thorough job takes time so build in rest periods. For large projects such as cleaning out a very cluttered space — break up the work into small time increments to make the task less over whelming. Allow 15-30 minutes a day and stay focused on the task. Creating a schedule helps too. Devote one day strictly to the laundry or food shopping. Assign a day for cleaning bedrooms and bathrooms only. Again, small tasks make the job bearable. Find a system that works for you and remember that initiating a good habit takes at least 30 days before it takes hold — so keep at it. Anita is a professional organizer and home stager in the New York metro area. She has been featured in HOME magazine and believes that everyone benefits from leading a more organized, clutter-free existence.