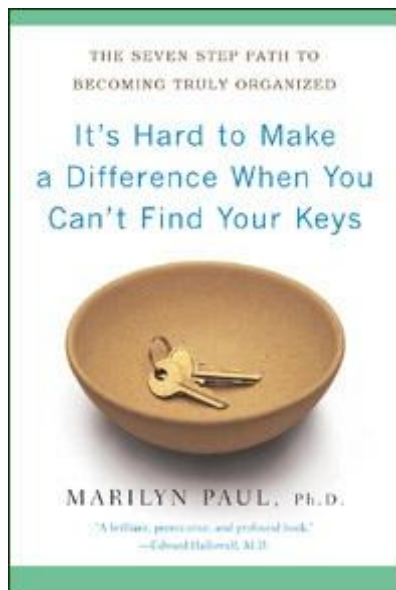


## It Is Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys



In short, if you have trouble organizing your life or always feel like you are behind the magic eight-ball, then read this.

This is an interview I did on April 12, 2010. It's just sat on my harddrive collecting digital dust. Now there is nothing better than fresh, original content that is authentic and real.

No need to sign up for anything. I owe this to Dr. Marilyn Paul as well. She gave her time and I failed to do anything with this. In the interview you'll here me reference a site called BrainPowerTips.com. It was an old project of mine I had over two years ago. I ended up selling it to someone else. I had lost interest needless to say and was, well just that, lost.

It's time to reserrect this great advice. I suggset you check out her book also, which is available on [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) (no affiliate link). **It Is Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys** has 27 reviews and is 4.5/5 stars. You can also visit her on the web here at [MarilynPaul.com](http://MarilynPaul.com).

The book doesn't waste your time and it isn't some useless time management approach book. It's lifestyle change - how you organize your life - it's the grey matter between your ears is what she gets at. If you can follow a 7 step proven formula that shows how to change without pulling your hair out, then you can't fail at this.

She talks from the heart, is real and is authentic. She talks from experience, not from some BS academia principles.

If you can read, listen and follow directions, then you can do this. Time mangement and all those old technicques are a thing of the past. Your to-do is supposed to grow smaller, not bigger. PDAs, on-line to do lists and everything else makes you a victim of your own poor time management. We will ourselves with all the things we think we need to do. If you can't even manage your own to-do list, it surely makes it more challenging in the art of getting things done.

### **So here's the expert from It Is Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys**

Download the MP3: [It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys](#) (Length: 34 Minutes, 5 Seconds). No need for signing up. Just right click and save.

Or just read the entire transcript below. Just warning you, it is "9 pages" long.

**Matt:** My name is Matt Santi and I ran a blog at BrainPowerTips.com and today on the line I have Dr. Marilyn Paul. She is the author of a book called It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys published by Penguin Copies. It has been chosen as the best book by Spirituality and Health magazine with 140000 copies sold worldwide.

For more information you can check out her website at [MarilynPaul.com](http://MarilynPaul.com) or go to Amazon where you can also check out her book. She's a strong advocate of rethinking what getting organized means. Often we think that getting organized is finding a place for keeping everything neat. So Marilyn we'll go on and open up this call today and I'm just curious what does it mean?

**Marilyn:** It's exercise on organizational behavior like focusing a group on a new goal is one you need a purpose, you need a deep reason for changing your behavior. Why do you want this so badly that you will overcome your own resistance? Two, what do you want it to be like, what's your vision? People talk about visioning all the time well you can apply it to getting organized or managing your time better, how would you like it to be?

Number three is okay you know what you want where are you now? Just as clear a picture as you can get of what are you doing. And what's your environment, what's your boss asking of you the whole nine yards of where are you now, what's your current situation?

And then you need support, so number four support, these are the first four steps in my book. And then five are, well what are the strategies, how do you actually change a habit in the moment? Well one thing we know about habit change is you work on one at a time, one habit.

Sometimes people start as simple as putting their keys in one place or hang up their coat or re-filing each file when you are done with it put it back. Or with your email just get into the habit of deleting.

It's amazing how many people have 1000 emails in their inbox partly because they hit reply and forgot to delete. So there's we know changing habit we know a lot of how to do that, it works. You have to put a little focus on it, take action and then step seven is going deeper, what are some of the deeper issues that might keep us stuck?

Why on a deeper level might we want to run late? Is it possible that we want to sabotage ourselves? I had to look at those things it wasn't so easy for me to change. I'm so much more organized now that my life is completely different from when I started this. And I've worked with hundreds of people also and I've seen their lives change.

**Matt:** So you kind of touched based on going deeper like focusing on the root cause of an issue as to why someone is disorganized.

**Marilyn:** Yes.

**Matt:** Are there any simple processes say for example I know a lot of people journal to gain insight and reflect upon their lives. Is there any techniques or anything like that that maybe somebody can employ relatively easy to gain some of that insight?

**Marilyn:** Well I think journaling is great. I think journaling particularly if you are stuck around procrastination. It is to journal by giving voice to the part that you are trying to stuff.

**Matt:** Right.

**Marilyn:** Let the parts out that want to procrastinate, like I'm not going to do it no one is going to tell me what to do. I am simply not going to show up on time because I don't believe in it. So give it a voice and let it rip so journaling I think is fantastic for going deeper.

I also think it's really helpful to have a buddy, you know sometimes going deeper if someone else is traveling with you is where you sort of take turns and just say, "I can't seem to get started today." And get some motivation and encouragement. That's another way to go deeper.

Another thing that I also have in my book this is, there's a tool called Cognitive Restructuring where you actually start speaking to yourself in different ways rather than you are running late you say, "Oh you are such a jerk, I can't believe that you came late and you are giving a presentation, everyone is waiting for you, you are such a jerk."

There's another way to talk to yourself which is, "Yes I'm late this time, let me have a look at the choices I made that led me to be late to this important meeting. I'm going to take a deep breath and calm down and recommit to being on time the next time." So you treat yourself much more kindly. That's another way to go deeper.

**Matt:** So in essence the Cognitive Restructuring you are essentially rewiring your brain by talking to yourself, is that kind of the big picture idea out there?

**Marilyn:** Yeah I think from what I understand and you probably know a lot more about this than I do but that as we take new actions and talk to ourselves in new ways, we actually create new nerve wiring, we rewire ourselves. So the new action, and one thing I would say to people for who are trying to change a habit, the first couple of times of doing something differently it sometimes can feel like pushing a boulder uphill.

You are torn and it feels really hard and to take a simple example of just going through your email and remembering to delete feels like it takes forever. It really doesn't. and slowly as you do it more you get faster and faster and faster. You get better at it, you get used to it and you have a new neural pathway.

**Matt:** And that becomes the new habit.

**Marilyn:** And that becomes the new habit.

**Matt:** And then also too you mentioned about finding somebody, finding support. One of the ideas that you come across a lot is resistance from other people. You say I'm going to make a change, somebody starts talking about it to their friends, their family and they are met with negativity.

**Marilyn:** Yeah.

**Matt:** How do you recommend somebody's goal is to get organized and to commit to it, I want to make my life more efficient. Do you recommend that they talk about that goal, their new hope to their friends and family?

**Marilyn:** That is such a great question because I think a lot of the nub of it is who you talk to and who you get support from. So first of all people too often don't like to admit, particularly at work that they really struggle with disorganization. So you could put out a few fillers like, "Sometimes I procrastinate on stuff do you ever do that?" It's just like a little filler but if somebody says, "Oh no I'm totally top on things" don't go there.

I had a friend I really struggled with bill paying and one of my neighbors I knew she was very organized and I called her over to my house. I said, "Can you help me figure out how to get my bills paid" and she looked at me I showed her the mess on my kitchen table. She looked at me and she says, "Wow I didn't know there were people like you." So that was not support, I dropped that right there.

That made me feel terrible. So what we are doing when we are looking for support is putting out fillers, looking around for other people tend to run like we want, see if someone is open to growth and not blaming. My system is not about, "Well they made me run late, they made me run late, they gave me too tight a deadline of course I couldn't".

It's not about blaming other people. It's about becoming more effective and taking responsibility which actually feels great in the end, so it's much better than blaming.

**Matt:** Okay another question I wanted to ask you is so often times like I'll read on an article on like Google and Yahoo or you'll pick out a lot of organizational type books and they talk about making to-do lists, any advice on that because it's so easy to write down a hundred different items on a piece of paper but then I'm like where do you start.

**Marilyn:** Okay I think that's great. A couple of people have what I think is a fantastic idea. I think David Allen has this idea he wrote Getting Things Done, also Stephani Culp who is another author. Get a couple sheets of paper write down everything, everything you can think of that you have to do. That's like your huge massive to-do list, it's probably overwhelming, it's several pages long, fix the windows, re-cork the bathroom, it's personal stuff, it's work stuff, get some new software, whatever is on the list, put it on the list so you get it out of your head and on to a list.

But that's not your to-do list. Your to-do list is for me what you are going to do today and that what I have every single day are my goals for the day and my goals for the week. What I absolutely intend to get done. So what's the relationship of today's to-do list and this week's to-do list is to keep those in front of me.

I look at the master list which is probably ever growing and then this is a frame of mind exercise. I get really, ruthlessly realistic. I could send that thank you note or not, I'm going to call the plumber and get that thing corked or not, or I'm going to go to go to the [inaudible] whatever.

And then either figure out a time in the future I often put things on my calendar or drop it. Now all of us have too much to do, I don't know anyone who doesn't have too much to do. So we are going to be juggling a lot and getting used to doing things a little less perfectly, delegating as much as we can, letting things go completely but even letting go of the idea that once something is on your to-do list it doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to get it done. You have to work with those items.

So the to-do list is not just about the list, it's about your attitude towards the action, your willingness to be less perfectionist. But what you do need and what I find so helpful is just somewhere I know everything is listed so I'm not trying to remember things.

I'm a sticky notes person, if I think of something I'll write it on a sticky and stick it on my computer and after a while that doesn't work for me. So a to-do list is a system to track action items so that we will have a place to put them and a time to look at them.

A number of people recommend like a monthly or a weekly review so at least once a month or once a week you pull out that long list and you look at it. Things age, you'll cross things off, you'll delegate them and then you'll start making your weekly or your daily to-do list.

**Matt:** Just out of curiosity because I know so many people nowadays have BlackBerry PDAs, any kind of personal device they can just bring with them literally on the go. And a lot of times they come with word processors in them. What if I want to use a BlackBerry instead of good old pen and paper?

**Marilyn:** You know everyone just needs to decide what they like. I don't think there are any rules. If someone likes their BlackBerry that's the absolute best place to keep, it's a fantastic place to keep their to-do list as long as they'll keep up with it. Some people like pen and paper.

When I first did this exercise with David Allen I did not have my computer with me so it's all pen and paper but I think it's great to find software or even just a huge Word file where you've got your list of action items.

**Matt:** Okay so you would be a total proponent for using technology only if it makes sense for that person and they are 100% comfortable using that. Will that be correct?

**Marilyn:** Absolutely, there's no point shunning their apps there's iPhone, there's all kinds of great technology. The challenge of course for those of us who tend to be disorganized is let's not wait for the perfect one. Ask around, see what other people are using, use your PDA or your iPhone or whatever you are using to keep you up to date.

Now having said all of that, with our to-do list it's both the technology whether we are using technology or pen and paper and also learning to watch ourselves actively take on more than we can do. There are 10000 good ideas of ways we could be spending our time today, each of us and we need to limit it or we will exhaust ourselves.

So ultimately the reason I love the work on time management getting organized is that it really brings us back to deep self knowledge. We need to know what we want, what we are about in life, what our skills and gifts and talents are and to learn with difficulty probably for many of us to say no even to stuff we love because if we over commit and our plates are over full living our life can become very unpleasant.

**Matt:** So what way would you recommend that somebody can say no comfortably and easily to somebody?

**Marilyn:** The way I know to do that is practice. But the first way of saying no if someone makes a request is to say I'm not sure I can do it, can I get back to you. The very one is the best tools in the time management book is, "Thank you for the request can I get back to you?"

If they say, "No you can't get back to me I need an answer right now." Sometimes what I say is if you need an answer right now what I will say is, "I'd rather turn you down than let you down." It's better for me to say no I can't do it." than to say yes and then not do it because I can't get to it.

So those two phrases, "Can I get back to you on that?" and "I'd rather turn you down than let you down." Those are a couple of things. I mean there is a lot, this is the core of it.

**Matt:** Okay, just out of curiosity by saying to someone I'll let you know, is that putting off the decision?

**Marilyn:** Here's what's challenging for most of us. Most of us when we get a request we tend to want to say yes. If we say yes and we actually can't deliver we have made more of a mess than if we say, "Can I get back to you on that". And so what can I get back to you on that means is I need to check my schedule, I need to check what's on my to-do list, I need to really make sure that if I say yes I mean yes.

We have an epidemic in our workplaces and people making commitments to do things that even they know perfectly well they are not going to be able to do or if they don't know they can't do it they are like the way I used to be which was yes to everything because I wanted to do so much and then not delivering. When you don't deliver if you make a commitment and you don't deliver you are creating chaos for other people.

**Matt:** Okay, along the same lines there between people, between personal requests, business requests. How do you recommend, do you recommend somebody separating the two so they don't get totally bombarded?

Because when you are at work you focus on work and when you are at home you focus on family type of life. Do you think it's best to keep those separated or integrated, what's your take on that?

**Marilyn:** I keep them separated, that's the type of person I am. I've worked with people who keep their, I'm not an integrator I don't do well looking at my work list and discovering that I need to call my son's teacher for example. It's not good for me, mine are separate. Some people are more integrators and they want everything together. Their day sort of go from 7:00AM to 10:00PM and it's sort of a seamless flow of work and home and they do very well with that. I prefer to keep things separate.

**Matt:** Okay so again it's going to be what's going to work for them versus any [boiler or template] yes or no answer.

**Marilyn:** Yeah I would say for most people it's probably wise to keep them separate but I know a very successful CEO and she's on all day long with her kids and her work and she manages that. She wouldn't like it the other way, it would feel too compartmentalized for her.

**Matt:** Okay I see. So going through this self-discovery process of yours, you finally realized enough is enough, I can't continue living like this anymore. Just out of curiosity the specific event that took place was when your colleague said, "I can't work with you". Was there anything else prior to that, leading up to that or after that or that was the moment in your life where you just finally go it's time for a change?

**Marilyn:** It's a great question because actually what had led up to that was quite a probably a year of my saying to myself, "I've got to get organized." Setting aside Sunday mornings to get organized and then getting everything out, trying to organize my files or whatever and then realizing that I wasn't getting anywhere and sort of spinning my wheels.

But I had known for at least a year that this really needed to become priority but I really did not know how to get organized. So if you get real let's just say today is the day you finally grasp that being disorganized is a lot more cost than you've been willing to admit, you've got some really good reasons to get organized.

You want to keep your job or save your marriage or start going out on a date which you haven't done because you are always working late, whatever your good reason is.

Then the next step before you start 'getting organized' is to ask yourself what do you want and to start creating the images and the pictures and the affirmations for how you want things to be. So often we just dive in and say okay I'll clean out this far drawer or that closet but that's not the place to start.

What do you really want? Get some support, read some good books I have a workbook that you can download for free from my website. You can also download the first chapter of my book for free for people to see if they like it and you start creating a plan. And then you start getting organized so it's really important to remember that organizing is not just having a place for everything but the habits to go along with it.

So it doesn't matter if you've got a fabulous professional organizer which I highly recommend to people, you get them in but if you haven't learned how to put the brakes on some of your own chaos you'll just create the chaos all over again.

The wonderful thing about getting organized is it's manageable, you can do it. It takes time it does, takes longer than we think but you start creating a little bit of space, your anxiety goes down, you find some time in the day or early evening to exercise, your sleep improves, you stay more on top of things because you have a better to-do list. Things really look up.

**Matt:** Okay just out of curiosity are there any personal organizers that you could recommend? Anything that is at Basic Staples of Office Depo or just anything that's going to work for that person?

**Marilyn:** What I use is some materials from a group called Lavenger.com and I also like Curvy what Curvy offers. If you go to Staples I think you'll see the—I'm not sure Frank and Curvy planners offered it on Staples but they are online. Julie Morgenstern has some good material. The other resource that I think is great for people is a website called Napo.net and there you can find a person. That's the National Association of Professional Organizers and if you go there and type in your zip code—

**Matt:** Is it good?

**Marilyn:** You'll get a couple of people's names near you so there's no lack of help out there. Recently in the New York Times there was an article about iPhone apps for getting organized. I think if you go to NYTimes.com and type in iPhone apps you'll get some helpful information.

**Matt:** Are there any apps that you have had experience with, say for the iPhone or the BlackBerry?

**Marilyn:** I have an iPod Touch which I really love. I don't do well with that type of keyboard. That's not my strong point, I like things so I keep myself organized on since I'm a Mac person on Entourage which has your mail and your task list and your project center and your address book in that. A lot of people have Outlook if they have PC and that's pretty basic. Some people like remember the milk, the lap I think?

**Matt:** Yes.

**Marilyn:** That's a nice way to keep sort more of a daily to-do list.

**Matt:** Okay cool, so just couple of follow-up questions because I need to wrap things here, just real quick Napo

**Marilyn:** Napo.net

**Matt:** Napo.net, if I'm a person looking to go ahead and hire a personal organizer would you recommend that I stick only to that website as far as somebody who would be accredited or is it a certification. I mean what could people tell that this person is legit versus somebody who's just like, "Oh I know how to organize?"

**Marilyn:** Yeah that's a really good question. I think the thing with the National Association of Professional Organizers is that people join, they get some training, they are meeting with other professional organizers pretty much monthly and we now know that it's not—I do recommend that people generally go with someone who is a member of NAPO.

That being said I have to say that there might be resources right in your own house, in your neighborhood, friends of yours who are gifted organizers so not to overlook them even if they are not a member of NAPO. So you definitely want to know about NAPO and that's NAPO.net and you can find someone through them but what you mostly want is someone who does not shame you, who doesn't make you feel bad in any way for how you do things now.

And after you've had a session with them, you feel inspired you feel I can do this, things are looking up space is being created and that they give you a lot of support that way.

**Matt:** Okay and do you personally offer personal consultations for people looking to get organized or do you mainly just focus on business, change management?

**Marilyn:** Right now I have a coaching business where I work with people at all levels in different organizations who really do want to become more organized, manage their time better and people can contact me through my website that you mentioned MarilynPaul.com and people are welcome to just contact me if they have questions and I really love the coaching, I love the coaching because I've been there, I love people who are trying to do a lot with their lives and have just over committed themselves and helping people live saner lives.

**Matt:** So for my final question for today, how to get some enthusiasm to the people who are disorganized, what would you say to somebody, for some words of encouragement saying that just because you are this way today doesn't mean you can't be this way 30, 60, 90 days out?

**Marilyn:** Yes okay, so if someone feels hopelessly disorganized the very first place to start is to look in your life for where you are already organized. There's always something, you are probably brushing your teeth or if you are not brushing your teeth you might be sitting down to eat. It's not like I'm totally disorganized and somebody else is totally organized, it's a continuum and we need to at the very beginning, start saying this is a learning process.

I need to learn some skills, I need to manage my ADD brain someone may have Attention Deficit Disorder but it can be done. So you look at it as a learning process this state is not fixed, I can learn something new. I myself resisted learning some new skills, I didn't really want to learn how to put things back, I had an aversion to it but I have since learned that the more of this little stuff I can do the more I can accomplish in my life and I am getting in my way much less.

**Matt:** Okay cool, just one follow-up question

**Marilyn:** Sure

**Matt:** You talked about resistance, what do you personally do to get over that hump, that brick wall that you keep running into? What do you use to just kick start yourself?

**Marilyn:** When I run into a brick wall I am the type of person who just needs exercise actually and self expression. There are times when I thought I'm driving myself crazy because I can't seem to unless I went through my cell phone search too many times I thought I'm really just driving myself crazy.

So I had to go through a little commitment to myself, I know where my cell phone is right now so I can tell you all of this but one of the things is sort of like no don't—you know I'd leave my cell phone in a pocket or in a pocket book or in a jacket pocket and I had to walk in the door and say where is your cell phone and put it down in one place, put it down in one place.

So for me keeping that energy moving through yelling, talking to myself, putting music on, getting exercise and just saying, "I will tell you and your list" because I really can say this if I could get more organized really anyone could. I wish I had pictures and testimonials from people. I always ran late, my house was a mess. I'd walk in the door and tiptoe around a pile of dishes in the sink. Really if I can get organized anyone can.

**Matt:** Okay so overall Marilyn you focus on taking a holistic approach, get into the deep root causes of why somebody is procrastinating or not making a decision and then also more importantly to—just because someone takes an entire to-do list say it's four pages and they pour their heart and soul into it. It's okay to delegate and give up a little bit of that control. Is that...

**Marilyn:** Absolutely, and the thing about organizing because it's so real like you are either washing this dish or you are putting it in the sink. You are reading the email, you are dropping it back into your inbox that there's both a chance to look at yourself do the inner work but there's also this wonderful chance to clean up the mess and cleaning up the mess if each of us on this planet left the planet a little less messy, a little more orderly, a little more accessible we would really be in great shape.

The challenge is we take on too much, we overdo it. We buy too much stuff, we take on too much stuff and then we don't know how to de-clutter and create order. So this is the deeper order on the soul level, the spiritual level. It's also on the surface level and it's also helping us connect better with other people.

So there are a lot of good reasons to take action. The thing that I will say is if someone listens to this and says, "Okay I'm there I want to get organized," they go home and say, "argh lovingly messy," is give it time, keep going, do an hour a week or two hours a week. Little by little you'll clear it up, you'll get the skills, you'll get the mindsets and you can do it.

**Matt:** Okay so starting with the baby steps before we learn to run.

**Marilyn:** Yes.

**Matt:** That makes total sense. Well just to go and wrap things up today I just want to say thank you for your call. And I was wondering are there any other services or products that you could recommend to people that would be interested in getting more organized and enable to manage their time?

**Marilyn:** One thing also people can do I'll just say is I have a workbook on my website if they want to get started like today they can go and just download the workbook. So that's one thing that's also free.

If people like to call I am going to be putting up some recent workshops that I've done on my website so people will be able to sort of go through a workshop and I will just say for me I would recommend my book for people who really struggle with chronic disorganization, again it's hard to make a difference when you can't find your keys. And that is really part of a journey. So there's lots of good stuff out there and I wish you and your listeners just all the best.

**Matt:** Alright Marilyn well thank you for your time, I appreciate this and I actually learned quite a bit myself today.

**Marilyn:** So glad to hear that.

**Matt:** Thank you

**Marilyn:** Well thank you for having me Matt, it's great to talk with you and let me know if you have any further questions or thoughts or comments.

**Matt:** Okay definitely.

What did you think? How do you hack time management principles? Leave your comments below.