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HEADLINE: Get New Year's off to a stress-free start

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With 2009 here, it's time to get your life back on track. Try these strategies to help guarantee your success.

Set realistic goals. Call them resolutions or goals for the New Year, either way it's important to reflect and think about where you want to be a year from now so that you have milestones to work towards.

The important factor in goal setting is to be realistic. Set yourself up for success by defining attainable goals based on your schedule and time availability. Plot your milestones towards each goal on a calendar. Being visually reminded will help keep them on your radar and motivate you.

Don't forget to enlist the help of others to achieve your goals. It could be identifying a running partner to jog with several times a week, hiring a personal chef to prepare a week of meals or arranging a monthly date with your best friend to visit the local museums.

Organize. Lots of time and energy is wasted when people are disorganized. Think about all of the time you've spent looking for important documents or return receipts. Or consider the money spent purchasing duplicate items because you couldn't find the original item.

Take advantage of the cold winter months when you don't want to go outside to tackle one disorganized space each weekend. Once you've weeded out the things you don't need and have identified a place for the items you're keeping, your life will suddenly become a whole lot clearer.

The key to organization is to define a home for each item. Consequently, others know where to find it and, also important, where to return it.

If you're not sure how to start, invest in a couple of sessions with a professional organizer. An organizer can teach you how to create an inventory of your items and evaluate what you need and what to get rid of, in addition to organizational strategies.

Schedule. Use your calendar to keep track of life's events and to communicate better with your family. Everyone will find it easier to know where they need to be at what time and how they're getting there if you have one central schedule to check.

Remember to add home maintenance reminders to your calendar, such as having windows washed, fall leaf pick-up or when to change the batteries in your smoke detectors.

Don't forget to schedule time in for yourself. There may be one Saturday morning a month where you stay in bed and watch movies or you might attend a weekly yoga class.

Everyone needs to identify what helps them rejuvenate and schedule regular time for those activities. If you're not in a healthy frame of mind, you may be less productive at work and have a harder time being supportive of your friends and family.

Streamline. Find ways to accomplish more at any given time. Take note of important birthdays in the upcoming months and make one trip to the store to buy birthday cards months in advance. You'll save lots of

time and stress as you'll never be without a card.

Buy presents in bulk. For example, purchase a case of wine or take advantage of home sale items, such as candles, to have on hand as thank-you gifts for last-minute dinner invitations with friends.

If you attend many children's parties, find a good toy or book and buy multiples as gifts to store in your closet. Be prepared and purchase a stock of gift wrap for birthdays and multi-purpose occasions so that you don't need to visit the store each time you want to give a gift.

If you have the storage space, buy supplies such as paper goods, detergents, dry foods and your favorite personal products in bulk. It'll save you time and frustration when you run low.

Delegate. You don't need to do it all. Think about what is most burdensome or time consuming in your life and identify resources that can help you get it done with less hassle.

Does cleaning your house top the dread list? Hire a house cleaner to come once a month to tackle those windows and baseboards. Your weekly cleaning will be more maintenance than deep clean.

Grocery shopping got you down? Take advantage of the supermarket delivery service or hire someone to handle the big grocery shops periodically, leaving you to only pick up fresh items.

Do you feel guilty because you aren't able to take your dog on long walks during the week? Hire a dog walker to come one day mid-week for an extra long walk with your pooch.

Take advantage of this quiet period to do some organizing and planning to start the New Year on the right foot – with less stress.

Chantal Boxer is the co-founder and vice president of *Fini Concierge*, which provides comprehensive personal assistance and concierge services to those with limited time.

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Highlights: Fini Concierge