

Organizer finds calm amid closets' chaos

By Tina Cassidy
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Ann Marie Williams does not seem flustered when she cracks open my closet door and finds a jumble of shoes on the floor, pants mixed with shirts hanging from the bar, and a cascade of blankets and fleece pullovers spilling from the shelves above.

"Take everything out," she said pleasantly.

This is where Williams, who four years ago quit her job in celebrity product placement at Reebok, began her session on helping me get organized.

Pro Shop Her business, Atmosphere Consulting, caters to the increasing demand for professional help to put in order the nation's vast amount of stuff: clothes, papers, toys, and equipment. And the change of season, especially between summer and fall, is particularly busy as people move, start a new job, put away the flip-flops and pull out the boots, or just try to make room for new purchases.

Although not everyone needs a professional organizer, Williams says many do because they feel overwhelmed, have difficulty deciding what to keep, throw away, or donate, or may be unsure how to better use the storage space they have.

"It's definitely a growth business," she says. "People are just really busy. We are a consumer nation. We have too much stuff."

Professional organizers have been around for awhile, but the recent spate of television shows that remake cluttered spaces into bastions of neat have helped propel the popularity of people such as Williams, she believes.

"What people don't realize is that it does take time to do it. And it does take discipline after the fact," she says.

She began my consultation by sorting the wardrobe by category, then color. Next, she worked with me to edit down the segments that seemed suspiciously



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Professional organizer Ann Marie Williams "edits" a bedroom closet and organizes shoes. Her company, Atmosphere Consulting, is based in Braintree.

large. "Do you need this many nightgowns?" she asked. I had to think for a moment, and then found a way to part with two.

Next she laid out three signs on the bedroom rug: "Consign," "Donate," and "Repair," and the piles accumulated on the floor. "You have to act on that right away," she said. "So it doesn't go back in the closet."

The biggest problem in my closet was not the clothes, which I had already savagely edited — except for the nightgowns — but the sheer number of handbags.

Williams suggested hanging my two-dozen handbags on a shoe rack clipped to the back of another door, keeping the ac-

cessories together and freeing up more space in the closet.

The solution was typical of those she recommends, explaining that not every organizational challenge requires an expensive gadget to tame the chaos. She also says it's helpful to have multipurpose storage, such as trunks that serve as coffee tables as well as a place to keep blankets or toys.

One of the biggest challenges Williams encounters is the large amount of sweaters New Englanders have. "People have a hard time getting rid of them," she says. "There's probably a nurturing connection." She encourages people to edit their sweater collections and keep them in tidy

piles with the help of clip-on shelf separators. Simple metal bookends also work the same way.

She says another cold-weather challenge for people who live in New England is shoes. "You often need to deal with it at the front door because they're dirty," she says.

Overall, when the job is done, clients are delighted.

"People feel better," she says. "It gives them clarity and calm."

PRO SHOP TV

Take a look at Ann Marie Williams' closet on NECN today. Or watch the video at boston.com/business.

The details

■ **How much it costs:** Professional organizers charge \$40 to \$200 per hour. Ann Marie Williams charges \$75. Closets can take four to six hours. A home office typically takes six to 20 hours. "Paper takes a long time," she says. The pace of the client is another factor.

■ **Finding an organizer:** There is no certification process for professional organizers yet — that's expected next year — although there is a trade organization, www.napo.net, they can join. Check references and make sure the personality is a fit.

■ **Save time and money:** Take everything out of the closet and sort by category. If all of your black pants hang together in the closet, you can find the pair you want more quickly, and may even realize that you don't need any more black pants.

■ **Out of sight:** To store seasonal items, make sure they are clean, especially before storing them in plastic containers, which can oxidize a stain. She recommends Space Bags (spacebag.com), which suck the air out of fabric and condense a mound into a thin, air- and water-tight container. "It won't get musty in the cellar," she says.

■ **Think out of the box:** Not every organizational solution requires a purchase of a bin. She likes to store handbags in other handbags, toys in shoe bags on the back of a door.

■ **Be prepared:** Make sure your laundry is done and dry cleaning picked up before you reorganize a closet.

SOURCE: Ann Marie Williams