

# Ms Blaelock's Book of



# Minimally Viable Housekeeping

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Alexandria Blaelock

**Available in**

Hardback ISBN: 978-1-925749-02-1 (MSRP US\$25.95)

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-925749-01-4 (MSRP US\$15.95)

eBook ISBN: 978-1-925749-00-7 (MSRP US\$3.75)

at: Amazon, iBooks, Kobo, Smashwords, and all good bookstores

For bulk orders, contact [orders@bluemerebooks.com](mailto:orders@bluemerebooks.com)

<https://www.alexandriablaelock.com/book/minimally-viable-housekeeping/>

Publisher Site: <https://www.bluemerebooks.com/>

Author Site: <https://alexandriablaelock.com/>

**Contact:** Anne Busby

+61 (0)3 9758 1378 (recording service)

[abusby@bluemerebooks.com](mailto:abusby@bluemerebooks.com)

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# Introduction

IF YOU COULD SEE MY FACE, it would probably have the perpetual scowl of someone who is a full-time creative, full-time business operator, and full-time home manager. And I'm lucky - some have a fourth full-time job caring for their children or parents and some are full-time educators of their children too.

And somewhere in there we have to care for ourselves as well, or we'll go nuts, and there may be carnage. Or worse.

Perhaps you're one of the lucky ones, and your partner recognises the value of your non-home related jobs and puts their dirty underpants in the laundry hamper and their dishes in the dishwasher. But more likely, you're trying to juggle one or more paid jobs with a side gig/income producing hobby and still maintain some sort of order in your home.

It's bloody hard work.

You *are* a unique and special individual. I believe you were put on this Earth to do something magnificent. You might disagree, but whether you believe in a Deity's plan, or the randomness of evolution doesn't matter. There is only one of you,

with your unique gifts and talents, and the opportunity to make this planet better than it is.

Having said that, maybe your magnificence is a well run and comfortable home. If so, this book is probably not for you. You should move onto advanced home management techniques like the psychology of comfort, interior design to nurture young brains or home care of the terminally ill.

Similarly, if you've a full-time housekeeping career running a hotel or some other kind of residential facility, you can move on too. Find a different type of continuous professional development program.

If, however, you're neck deep in activities related to one or more jobs and finding housework a time-sucking imposition you could do without, then you're in the right place.

Despite what most people think, historically speaking, it's only relatively recently that women's choices were reduced to marriage and staying home to care for their house and family. Yet even in today's "liberated" world, the background belief that a woman's place is in the home survives.

In some cases, the cost of replacing a housewife is so high many families have no option but for someone to stay at home. And with the gender pay disparity, that's usually the wife.

Even though some high-powered female executives would like a wife to take care of the housekeeping, it's more likely her partner feels it's best done by her. Regardless of the work she does, her hours or her income. Or how many breakfast meetings, networking events and late-night business deals she's responsible for.

And regardless of her income, she (and you) are guilt-ridden for not doing what you think is required of a "good" wife. And good, in this case, is both a general moral expectation and an indication of satisfactory performance.

## Minimally Viable Housekeeping

So, how much does a good wife cost? Well, it depends on whether you're talking about her replacement cost (to buy all the services she undertakes), her opportunity cost (the loss you face without her), or compensation cost (for her death or disablement). And whether you're talking about the quantity or quality of her work.

It doesn't help that many people believe it's a woman's nature to care and nurture (as opposed to her circumstances making it necessary).

And following this, that women don't need formal education for it because they instinctively know how to care for their homes and families.

It took women like Catherine Beecher (1800 - 1878) and Ellen Richards (1842 - 1911) to push for formal domestic science education covering the basics of food and nutrition, budgeting, resource management and sewing. Not just at school, but university level too.

More recently, domestic science seems irrelevant in the face of technological changes including chemical cleaning products, ready-made meals, refrigerators, and dishwashers. We are once more thrown back to instinct and the assumption "mother knows best". Along with "cleanliness is next to godliness" and "women's work is never done".

I learnt about being a housewife during the 1970s and 80s. I learnt from my mother, who learnt from her mother during the 1930s and 40s. And my grandmother learned about housekeeping from her mother in the 1910s.

There's quite a lot of difference between Grannie's childhood home and mine - my great Grandpa worked in a coal mine, and they rented a cottage owned by the business nearby. Great Grannie cooked over an open fire and didn't have running water or electricity. She didn't go to school, couldn't read,

didn't know anything about germs, only that hard work was her lot in life.

And to make matters worse, my parents thought a good education was critical for a better life, (I was the first to get a University qualification). They believed it was more important I spend time studying and preparing for University entrance exams than doing chores, so when I left home to live in student digs, I had no idea how to cook or clean. I more or less made it up as I went along. So much for instinct.

But like you, I'm sick of having that argument about who is and isn't pulling their weight in the housework department. It's time to cut the crap and figure out what is and isn't necessary, and how to get it over in the shortest possible time so I can get on with the activities I think make life worth living.

So, from here on, I'll be referring to housework as housekeeping because my *work* is writing and editing.

I ensure the tasks required to keep the house in a reasonable state get done - I *manage* the housekeeping, but I don't necessarily do it myself.

As a youngster in primary school, I learnt the basic 5W1H research/problem-solving technique, and this book applies that technique to housekeeping:

- **WHAT** exactly is this housekeeping of which you speak?
- That sounds boring, **WHY** do it?
- Okay maybe, but **WHO** does it?
- And **WHEN** does it get done?
- And **WHERE** does it all happen?
- But **HOW** does it all get done?

## Minimally Viable Housekeeping

We'll look at each of these questions, figure out how they apply to you, and what your version of minimally viable housekeeping looks like. Which will be different to mine because we're not living the same life.

To help with this, I'm going to use the Julian Fellowes' TV series *Downton Abbey* to illustrate how the housekeeping got done in a late Victorian era country house.

You don't need to have seen the show because I'll explain the concepts, but if I mention Mrs Hughes or Mrs Patmore, it may be easier for you to understand what I am trying to say.

*Downton Abbey* is, of course, fiction and doesn't include a lot of everyday household activity, but it's a good representation nonetheless.

And for a little modern-day action, I'll compare this with hotel operations.

But before we get into the nitty-gritty, I'd like to warn you about what Christine Frederick (1883 - 1970) called "Competent Counsel".

She was a domestic scientist and advocate of scientific home management in the days when running water and electricity were only just becoming household realities.

She wrote books applying efficiency and productivity principles in the home but is mostly forgotten aside from academics (and me).

One of her tips I'm fond of is to make a comfortable place where you can rest (nap even) between heavy chores. A nest if you like - pets optional.

Anyway, Mrs Frederick argued there's no place for common sense in housekeeping, and housekeepers should stay up to date with the latest changes in technology and practices that could increase the comfort and ease of housekeeping.

For which, you take “competent counsel” (expert advice) from books, magazines, appliance manufacturers and government departments.

And while I agree you should stay up to date, and upgrade as appropriate, I also think you need to be a little critical (in the academic sense) of the advice given and question the source’s credentials and motive:

- Is the magazine advising you on achieving a bum of Kardashian proportions, how to apply the latest smokey eye makeup, and please your partner in bed a credible source of housekeeping advice?
- What sort of commission arrangement does the vacuum cleaner salesperson work on, and does this affect the reliability of their advice?
- Is the scientist telling you to wash your towels every other day with antibacterial detergent, paid by the manufacturers of the laundry detergent? What kind of towels were they researching? What were the experiment parameters? Did the research relate to disease transfer in bathrooms or bacterial contamination of food or kitchen surfaces? Has the media misrepresented the outcome?
- Is the government department looking after consumer or other interests?

And for that matter, even me - while I want you to feel comfortable and in control of the housekeeping you do (and not feel guilty about what you don’t), I also want you to buy my books, so I get a couple of bucks after I’ve had them made.

CHAPTER 1



# What is Housekeeping?



WHEN I WAS THINKING ABOUT writing this book, I started asking people what they thought about housework and housekeeping. Not really surprisingly, no one knew what it is; most thought it was “just” cleaning. So, I asked a dictionary.

## Definitions

### *Housekeeping*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines housekeeping as *managing* household affairs. Housekeeping is also used to describe business operations that support productive work, and some biological processes; presumably the ones keeping us alive.

This notion of managing is important because managing is not the same thing as doing.

### *Minimally Viable*

Now we know what housekeeping is, what’s minimally viable?

It’s the smallest possible thing that will satisfy demand.

- A Minimal Viable Product consists of just enough practicality to satisfy purchasers. It might be a crappy second-rate product that’s not worth developing further for a higher paying audience, but that doesn’t matter. It is what it is, and that’s just enough.
- Your Minimal Viable Income covers your basic living costs. Of course, you want more, but it meets your needs. It’s just enough.
- The Minimum Viable Effort is the least possible amount of work an employee has to do to not get fired. It might be enough today, but if you don’t keep developing your skills, it might not be enough tomorrow.

### *Minimally Viable Housekeeping*

Minimally viable housekeeping is the least possible *necessary* housework. It's the essential stuff that must be done, even on the messiest kind of day which disappears, leaving your breakfast dishes on the kitchen counter, your clean clothes stagnating in the washing machine, and even worse, your dinner still in the freezer. (Ooh - let me just get something out for tea).

The minimum varies from person to person; you and your live-in partner (if you have one) need to decide what it is for your home. Particularly where your partner is the one who leaves the house to earn the money that puts the food in the freezer in the first place.

They might think it's a reasonable expectation that your part of the bargain involves clean toilets, ironed shirts in the wardrobe, and hot dinners on the table.

But the fact they're the breadwinner doesn't relieve them of all household responsibility, so it's good to synchronise expectations, regardless of the difficulty of the conversation.

## **Housekeeping Duties**

Now, as you know, I'm a writer, so, I know words have power. So, before we move on, let's take a look at the difference between professional and amateur housekeepers.

### *Professional Housekeepers*

For a start, professional housekeepers get paid!

When you take a job housekeeping for someone else, you get a job description that describes what to do, and how you'll do it. Let's use a hotel maid as an example.

**Purpose:** to maintain a clean, sanitary, comfortable and tidy environment.

**Responsibilities/Duties:** (what hotel owners expect) protect hotel property, keep guests happy, and comply with policies and procedures.

**Knowledge/Experience/Capability:** (what you need to meet your employer's expectations) understands cleaning products, techniques and methods. The physical stamina and mobility to bend, reach, kneel, and push/pull 15 kg (33 lbs) through the day.

**Competencies:** (generic abilities you need to meet your employer's expectations) customer focus, attention to detail, and honesty.

**Tasks:** (defined pieces of work) distribute linen, towels and room supplies using wheeled carts, restock room supplies (drinking glasses, soaps, shampoos, writing supplies, mini bar), and check all room appliances are in working order.

**Hours of Work:** (expected time commitment) for example, full or part-time, nights, weekends, on call.

### *Amateur Housekeepers*

Whether they are enthusiastic or not, amateur housekeepers are unpaid and untrained.

They don't have information to help them get the job done. Nor do they have a purpose, tasks, or responsibilities. They don't think about the policies, procedures, knowledge or competencies they need, and for the most part, they don't think about restricting the amount of time they spend on the job.

Instead, they do chores.

Chores are torturous things your parents made you do; you might make yours do some too. Some kids get pocket money, and spend it on lollies. (Mmmmm - chocolate mint balls).

You were never entirely sure what "tidy your room" meant, all you knew was you were confined to it until your Mum was satisfied with the results which generally meant you were

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## Minimally Viable Housekeeping

You could just feed your family, but you'll all be healthier and happier if you try to balance your nutritional needs, provide a variety of flavours and textures, and create a comfortable, stress-free environment to sit down and eat in.

A lot has changed in this area too. You probably aren't raising or slaughtering your food; you can access fresh ingredients jetted in from around the world, neatly packaged and shelved at your local supermarket.

You don't have to think about how to prepare an entire carcass before it starts rotting, and in fact, you may find it difficult to get half a side of beef or even a whole chicken!

Plus, you can buy your coffee ground and roasted, or ready-made so all you need to do is add hot water!

You also have a range of electronic appliances that can help you quickly and easily prepare food. Like, whip up cake batter in a matter of minutes rather than laboriously beating by hand with a wooden spoon. Or a couple of minutes in the microwave rather than a hot oven for an hour.

And for that matter, not having to keep an eye on the fire to ensure it doesn't go out before your cake is cooked!

### Cleaning

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, clean is a word of many meanings.

It can be an adjective (describing word) meaning:

- Free from dirt.
- Morally uncontaminated (pure or innocent).
- Free from irregularities; having a smooth edge or surface.
- Giving a clear and distinctive impression to the senses; sharp and fresh.

It can be an adverb (changes the meaning of other words):

- To be free from dirt.
- To emphasise the completeness of a reported action, condition, or experience.

A verb (doing word):

- To remove dirt.

A noun (naming word):

- The act of cleaning something.

It's also used informally to describe

- Defeating or beating someone (cleaning someone's clock).
- Eliminating corruption or inefficiency (cleaning house).
- The absence of restraint (clean sheet or slate).
- Behaving better (cleaning up your act).
- Honesty (come clean).
- To be blameless (have clean hands).
- Not getting involved in illegal/immoral activities (keeping your hands clean).
- Confession (make a clean breast).
- Be thorough (do a clean job).
- Remove bad influences and prepare to start fresh, or win everything (clean sweep).
- Take all someone's money (clean out).

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CHAPTER 2



# Why Do Housekeeping?



WHEN YOU WERE VERY YOUNG, you wanted to know everything.

- Why is the sky blue?
- Why does that lady's face look funny?
- Why can't I sing that song?

Why, why, why you demanded, until your parents threatened you with grievous bodily harm. And probably a bit more after that until they shouted at or maybe smacked you.

Annoying as you were, you needed to know the answers because they helped you understand the universe and your place in it. You learned how to behave appropriately and safely around other people.

As time passed, you started experimenting on your own. You learned not to touch red (hot) things because it hurt when you did. You learned not to poke ants with sticks because they ran up the stick and bit you.

And when you brought flowers in from the garden, you were rewarded with hugs.

Every action you took brought some kind of result, and you used those results to figure out how to be safe in the world.

Later still, you came to understand that eating food that smelled a bit funny made you ill, that when you visited your friend with chicken pox, you caught it too, and if you didn't take care of your cuts they didn't heal well. You learned that you needed to wash your hands a lot so that you didn't get sick.

And when it comes to housekeeping, there are a few whys as well; though you get to choose those yourself.

## Your Vision

I think the most influential housekeeping Why is your vision of your ideal future. You're probably not intending to live in a cardboard box under a bridge, but without a conscious effort to avoid that future, you could end up there.

It's more likely you imagine living in a clean and comfortable home, married to someone wonderful with a couple of angelic kids or pets who adore you. There's probably fresh air, good health, and a great deal of sunshine and happiness.

Bringing visions to fruition starts with setting goals and trying to achieve them - the clearer your vision is, the more likely you are to get there. You can focus on living in a clean and comfortable home every day, but someone wonderful and kids might take a little longer.

### *Your Home's Purpose*

On a related note, your home's purpose provides another housekeeping Why.

In days gone by that might have been security, requiring a castle (with moat and drawbridge). Or perhaps home was a factory producing food, clothes and the other necessities of life. Or a battery farm producing the next generation of labourers to power the nation.

These days you probably have a different idea, though it may seem as esoteric to others:

- A soothing sanctuary from the hustle and bustle of life.
- An educational establishment for learning exciting new facts.
- Vegan Vittles test kitchen.

These are just three that I've heard, though of course, people didn't actually describe them that way.

If you take a moment to imagine what those places look like, you might come up with something like a:

- Clean, calm and uncluttered house, with white or pale pastel walls. The rooms are scented by fresh flowers and net curtains wave in the breeze from the open window. You can hear the tinkle of a water feature from the garden.
- A dimly lit library with dust motes floating in the sunlight. There are red leather Chesterfields, wood occasional tables, floor to ceiling shelves stuffed with books, magazines and papers. In fact, probably all the flat surfaces are covered with stacks of books, magazines and papers. (Ah bliss...)
- Stainless steel kitchen counters and appliances. White subway tiles on the wall and an easy-clean linoleum on the floor. A massive pantry full of fresh produce, herbs and spices, and mysterious packets of exotic ingredients. Open shelves with assorted cookware stacked in easy reach.

And as you can probably guess, each of these homes requires different levels of care and attention.

- Daily tidying up and putting away, changing the flower water and throwing out the dead/dying blooms. Regular vacuuming, dusting and curtain washing.
- Removing used crockery and cutlery daily. Now and again conditioning the leather seating, rearranging the stacks for ease of passage, and filing the papers. Shutting the door so no one can get in there and mess it up (because you know exactly where everything is).

## Minimally Viable Housekeeping

- Cleaning (maybe scrubbing) floors, walls and surfaces at least once daily. Frequent stock takes and shopping trips to replenish supplies. Having the plumber, electrical and dishwasher service company on speed dial.

In general, we don't tend to consider the implications of some of our choices on other aspects of our lives, so if you want to minimise your housekeeping commitment, you may need to reconsider your home's purpose as well.

### *Your Purpose*

Some people have steadfast opinions that their purpose in life is to create an immaculate home. That's fine, but if that's your purpose, then you might as well put this book down now because that purpose doesn't leave any space for anything other than continuous ongoing cleaning and tidying until you die. Not spending time with your partner, or your children, or even flicking through a magazine.

But if your purpose is to inspire and motivate your children, you need to make the time and space to develop that.

You can only use each hour once, so you've choices to make about what tasks you undertake as well as how much time you give to them each day.

For example, you might want a clean and uncluttered home because you need a feeling of lightness to inspire yourself before you can inspire others.

So, you decorate your home with built-in cupboards, streamlined furniture and a minimalist design aesthetic. You choose to vacuum every morning and imagine you're vacuuming up distractions that could take you away from your work.

At the end of the day, you put everything away so you can spend your evenings with the people and activities that

nurture your soul. And when you start in the morning, you see an expanse of emptiness waiting to be filled.

## **Your Health**

Your future vision of good health in part relies on good house-keeping to eliminate or minimise the risks of tiny invisible things like germs, gas leaks, and allergens that can make you or your family ill.

You're managing indoor air quality by:

- Choosing building products and finishes that don't off-gas pollutants like volatile organic compounds or formaldehyde that irritate eyes, nose and throats.
- Not allowing people to smoke indoors.
- Vacuuming up dust mites and allergens to minimise eczema, asthma, and other respiratory issues.
- Cleaning bathrooms to minimise mould spores that aggravate asthma, and lead to nasal irritations.
- Opening windows to allow fumes like carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide (that can kill in sufficient concentration) to escape.

You're also making strategic decisions about furnishings:

- Household plants to improve air quality.
- Easy to clean furnishings and fabrics.
- Low emission, easy to clean floor and wall coverings.
- Wood, gas, or electric heating with adequate air filtration and external venting.

And what you do inside it:

- Are shoes on or off.
- Are pets in or out?
- The types of air fresheners and cleaning products you use.

### *Your Abilities*

It might be that your physical or mental capacities, dexterity, stamina and ability limit what you can reasonably achieve.

For the sake of your self-esteem, it's important to be honest with yourself about what you can do, and what you need help with. Life is stressful enough without believing you can't even keep up with the cleaning as well.

For example, temporary or permanent sports injuries, as well as being painful, can limit your physical ability to bend, reach, or grasp in the course of completing your tasks. They can also impede your mobility, or your ability to sit or stand for long enough to get them done.

### *Your Safety*

The main reason we live in buildings is that they offer a level of protection from the weather, enemy armies, and man-eating predators. You can be reasonably secure in the knowledge that when you go to sleep, you will wake up in the morning. Those things are more or less taken care of when you shut the door.

But if you don't take care of your home, you can create other risks that threaten your safety; obstacles to trip over, objects that fall on you (or you fall off), or that can choke/suffocate you. Sometimes small poisonous creatures like snakes and spiders depending on where you live.

You can use the same regular habits and long-term risk management systems to care for yourself and manage household risks. For example, minimising your risk of carbon monoxide poisoning by servicing your gas appliances, installing detectors, and keeping your house well ventilated.

### *Exercise*

My usual approach to cleaning is to get it over and done with as quickly as possible.

At least it was until I got an activity tracker and started getting serious about improving my health. I wouldn't say I welcome or seek out the opportunity to trot backwards and forwards throughout the house picking things up and putting them away, but it might be a more useful way to add a few hundred purposeful steps than doing laps of the garden.

Plus, you can burn off a couple of hundred calories by pursuing your cleaning with vigorous intention, as opposed to listless, half-hearted, dragging your feet to get the job done. Particularly more physical tasks like making beds, moving furniture (to clean underneath it), and scrubbing bathtubs. And if you have a garden, getting out there and weeding, raking, or pushing a lawnmower.

Not only that, an activity like mopping floors will help with flexibility, balance, and strength. And washing windows (by hand with a spray) does the same.

You could also include specific muscle building exercises in your cleaning routine, such as lunging while you vacuum and squatting or doing leg lifts instead of bending. Doing it faster burns even more calories too! Just Google "housework workout" for more ideas.

If exercise is one of your reasons, you may need to allow more time to get it done, because washing dishes by hand can take a lot longer than stacking the dishwasher. Or you could

challenge yourself to get more repetitions in less time, but be mindful of your safety while you're doing the exercises.

You could also take a brisk walk around the block to develop your fitness, stamina and resilience at the of your “work out” before you shower and move on with the rest of your day.

## **Other People’s Expectations**

In the early days of writing this book, I ran a little survey to find out what people thought about housework (see Appendix B: Housework Survey Says: What You Really Think About It for the results).

I was interested to find that far and away the biggest house-keeping motivator is fear of what other people think. Peace of mind came second, but only very slightly more important than concern about rodents, bugs, germs and the like.

I suppose it’s not really that surprising when we can’t help but judge others by the condition of their clothes, cars, and houses. When we see people who don’t look neat and clean, we assume they are somehow less capable than “normal” people who present themselves in a way more acceptable to us.

When we see cars full of old takeout containers and empty drink bottles, we might think the owner is shiftless or homeless because they can’t even put their rubbish in the bin.

Similarly, when we visit people’s homes, and they are littered with papers, stacks of books or magazines, and other personal items, we can’t help but wonder if it’s safe to sit down.

And if the sink is full of unwashed dishes, and the bin needs emptying, we might worry that the place is unhygienic and refuse a drink in case we get ill. We might even cut our visit short and leave quickly.

To an extent, you have to think of your future self as a judgey person too. One day, you’ll decide to sort out old

photos, and as well as wondering where you were and how you knew those people, you'll probably be a little shocked at how messy your house was.

And a little embarrassed that you were socialising next to a basket of laundry, a stack of dirty dishes, or a bowl full of rotting fruit. And you might realise that if you throw out all those photos, you won't have any left...

Don't be disheartened, it's not your fault. It's just that you didn't learn how to take care of all this.

You might have been told to clean your room, but not what cleaning was - I'm fairly sure I'm not the only person on the planet who thought that shoving everything under my bed or in the wardrobe was all that was required.

You didn't learn the Why of cleaning your room, and if your mother was like mine, you never needed to because sooner or later, she caved and did it for you.

And so, your home has become an extension of your bedroom, except your mother doesn't clean it for you anymore, so it doesn't get done. You don't put anything away, or in the bin - it's all out there for all to see. And you're so used to the stacks of stuff, and drifts of detritus that you just don't see it anymore.

It's not the nicest motivator, but if all else fails, invite someone round to eat and get it done.

## **Summary**

- Work to achieve your vision of the future.
- Understand your home's purpose.
- Discovering your Why may be the most critical house-keeping task you complete.
- Staying healthy is a pretty good motivator.
- If all else fails, invite someone for dinner.

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MINIMALLY VIABLE HOUSEKEEPING IS ABOUT effectiveness and efficiency; getting the right stuff done with the minimum of effort.

My first holiday after my kidney transplant was to Italy, where I naturally spent a bit of time poking about Roman ruins. I was intrigued that their design and construction assumed there would be slaves to take care of them. Not only could you enjoy the pleasures of running water in your latrines, but you wouldn't see slaves carrying urns of water to refill the cisterns because your villa included a warren of service corridors.

Similarly, historic houses like Highclere Castle required an army of domestic servants to keep the house operational, and used a bunch of service areas to hide it from view.

Given how hard I sometimes find taking care of my modern open plan home with my modern appliances, I can imagine how hopeless I might have felt when my maid gave notice for a better paying job in a factory, and I faced the prospect of doing it all myself.

Fortunately, Mrs Frederick comes to the rescue. Firstly, by reminding us that we can set whatever standards we like, and then encouraging us to take advantage of the benefits of machinery, efficient methods, and well-trained children.

You don't *have* to feel like a slave in a never-ending battle to get it all done, let alone done as well as you think it ought.

At the end of the day, you should be relaxing instead of dashing about flipping light switches, stacking and running the dishwasher, pulling clothes out of the dryer, plunking kids in front of the TV or iPad, and microwaving popcorn completely oblivious to the fact that everyone else has clocked off.

But, of course, to do this you must get your head in the right place. Getting your house in order, ship-shape Bristol fashion is a job, and like any other flexible worker, the more effective and efficient you are, the more time you've left to spend on the

things that make your life worth living. And as it's your ship, you can get it done the way that best fits you and your family.

## **Housekeeping Philosophy**

Your first step is to develop a philosophy of home care. It sounds like a lot of effort, but it's just making some decisions about how you're going to take care of your home in the future.

For example:

- It takes less time to clean a smaller house than a big one so you'll always choose a smaller.
- It takes more time to clean a lot of small items than fewer (or no) big ones so you'll minimise the ornaments and trinkets that you display.
- It takes less time to clean things that aren't there, so you'll be very careful about what new things enter your home.
- You won't do tasks that require extra effort so you'll store your tools and equipment where you can easily access them without bending, lifting, or climbing.
- It's less effort to move things once so you'll bypass the counter and stack your dishes in the dishwasher as you go.
- Tasks with low set up costs take less time and effort when done frequently so you'll sharpen knives regularly and pick up pet poo daily.
- Tasks with high set up costs take less time and effort if they're done infrequently so you'll do your ironing once a week. Or not buy clothes that need ironing.

I don't mean to imply that you must do any of this, these are just some examples to get you thinking.

## *Philosophical Conflicts*

Now and again your housekeeping choices will conflict with your universal decisions.

For example, your core belief in protecting the environment would normally lead you to choose products and supplies that support those beliefs like reusable instead of disposable, or elbow grease over chemicals.

In general, core beliefs take priority, but at times they can be overridden by other demands. Perhaps you're having a MASSIVE party and prefer to avoid an equally massive clean up, so you'll use disposable plates, glasses, cutlery and tablecloths. (Though having said that, most hire services collect unwashed supplies because they have to rewash them anyway).

An extreme example is when winning wars is more important than not killing people.

Housekeeping is rarely the difference between life and death for humans, but now and again it will be life and death for creatures living in your house.

## **Your Professional Job Description**

The next step is to get clear about what needs to be done, and you might find it helpful to write a job description (there's an example in Appendix C). Things to think about include:

- What is your purpose?
- What are your responsibilities?
- What knowledge and competencies do you need to fulfil them?
- What equipment do you need?
- What are your hours of work?

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## Minimally Viable Housekeeping

Or removed and replaced with one that sits on the counter or drainer.

- Your dish towels are stored inconveniently far away from the sink, so you'll find somewhere closer to put them.
- Your dish cupboards are inconveniently far away, so you'll relocate them or use a trolley.

The important thing is not to change the way you complete your tasks to accommodate the quirks of your home but to adjust your home to fulfil your efficiency needs.

And to keep notes so when it's time to renovate or buy a new home, you can include your needs in the construction.

## Standardising Housekeeping

We all have tasks that seem to take forever, and these are the ones that will probably benefit the most from standardisation.

It's likely that the physical elements of housekeeping (cooking, cleaning, caring and property management) will take up the bulk of your housekeeping time.

These processes consist of many tasks, for example:

- Cleaning involves dusting, sweeping, mopping (or scrubbing), and polishing.
- Caring can include lifting, washing, toileting, medicating, plumping pillows and so on.

It's physical labour, and each step requires muscular adjustments. Perhaps you need to activate your core so you can lift heavy loads. Or balance on your toes so you can reach high items. Or bend to pick items off the floor.

This range of movement can be helped or hindered by your room layout.

## *Standard Operations*

The most efficient clean moves top down, then dry to wet. Your workflow proceeds from ceiling to lights to pictures and mirrors, to ornaments, tables and horizontal surfaces, then furniture, rugs and flooring. Debris is dusted to the floor, gets sucked up by the vacuum, followed by mopping.

And like our maid, it's more efficient to clean in a circuit than to trot backwards and forwards - clockwise for right-handers and anti-clockwise for left. However, if cleaning is part of your exercise plan, keep trotting!

Hotel check-in and out schedules being what they are, maids have to clean room by room, cleaning each on in a circuit starting with the bedroom and ending with the bathroom.

- Bend and pull to strip the bed, bend, lift and carry the linen, towels and rubbish to the cart.
- Bend, lift, push and pull to remake the bed.
- Reach and move your arms dusting from top to bottom.
- Bend and push the vacuum wand forwards and pull backwards.
- Bend, reach, push and pull while cleaning the bathroom.
- Use back and arms to swing the mop from side to side.

But just as office workers lose efficiency when they change tasks (e.g., answering the phone while reconciling accounts), maids lose efficiency when they change tasks too.

Not only are they making the mental and physical effort of swapping; warming up and readjusting the muscles for each task in each room, they're carrying their tools room to room

too. The continual swapping not only takes up time but adds a physical load that can be more tiring than the tasks themselves.

At home, cleaning by task eliminates the swapping. For example, dusting all the rooms, then vacuuming all the rooms. Similarly, any specialised or irregular tasks like washing windows. It also gives you the opportunity to store your task related tools as you finish each one.

Your process might look like this:

- Collect your tools (dusters, vacuum, bin and mop) and leave them outside the first room.
- Starting in the first room, pull back the curtains and open the windows, and do the same in the rest of the rooms in your circuit.
- Beginning again at room one, dust (top down), put the rubbish in your bin, and the same for the rest of your circuit. If your cupboard is nearby, put your dusting tools away, if not, leave them outside room one.
- Vacuum all rooms and put the machine away/leave it outside room one.
- Mop rooms as appropriate.
- Put your tools and supplies away.
- Close windows, adjust curtains, and close doors as appropriate.

### *Standard Conditions*

The main reason housekeeping was such hard, physical labour and took such a long time was because most homes didn't have running water, electricity or gas delivered to their homes. Everything was done by hand, from carrying your buckets to and

from the well, to growing your own food, to keeping the wood fire going all day so you could cook dinner.

By comparison, we have it easy, but we can make it easier by taking advantage of all the tips and tricks to make physical tasks easier and therefore quicker.

You already do this to a point by arranging furniture, centralising storage and getting efficient appliances. You just need to be a little more methodical to ensure you get the best possible results with the least possible effort. Or as business people call it, leverage a small investment for a larger return.

Remember, standard conditions aren't just effective for you; you can use them to trigger housekeeping behaviours in those sharing your home. Every family is different, but things like basketball hoops over the linen basket, submarine stickers in the toilet, and bowls of fruit on the counter can encourage the formation of habits that reduce your housekeeping effort.

## Layout

It's easy to think we could just replicate a hotel room layout to improve our cleaning efficiency, but hotel rooms are essentially single-purpose rooms where one or two people sleep (and bathe) for a night or two. They don't take into account daytime activities, long-term storage or your personal taste.

When you start thinking about a room's layout, the most important factor has to be its purpose(s). While your bedroom's purpose is still primarily for sleeping, you may also read, exercise, mend clothes, craft, watch TV, listen to music, pay bills, run your business, and so on.

So how exactly do you manage all that?

Julie Morgenstern, author of *Organizing from the Inside Out: The foolproof system for organizing your home, your office, and your life* suggests starting with the "Kindergarten Model."

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