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Faith Prior

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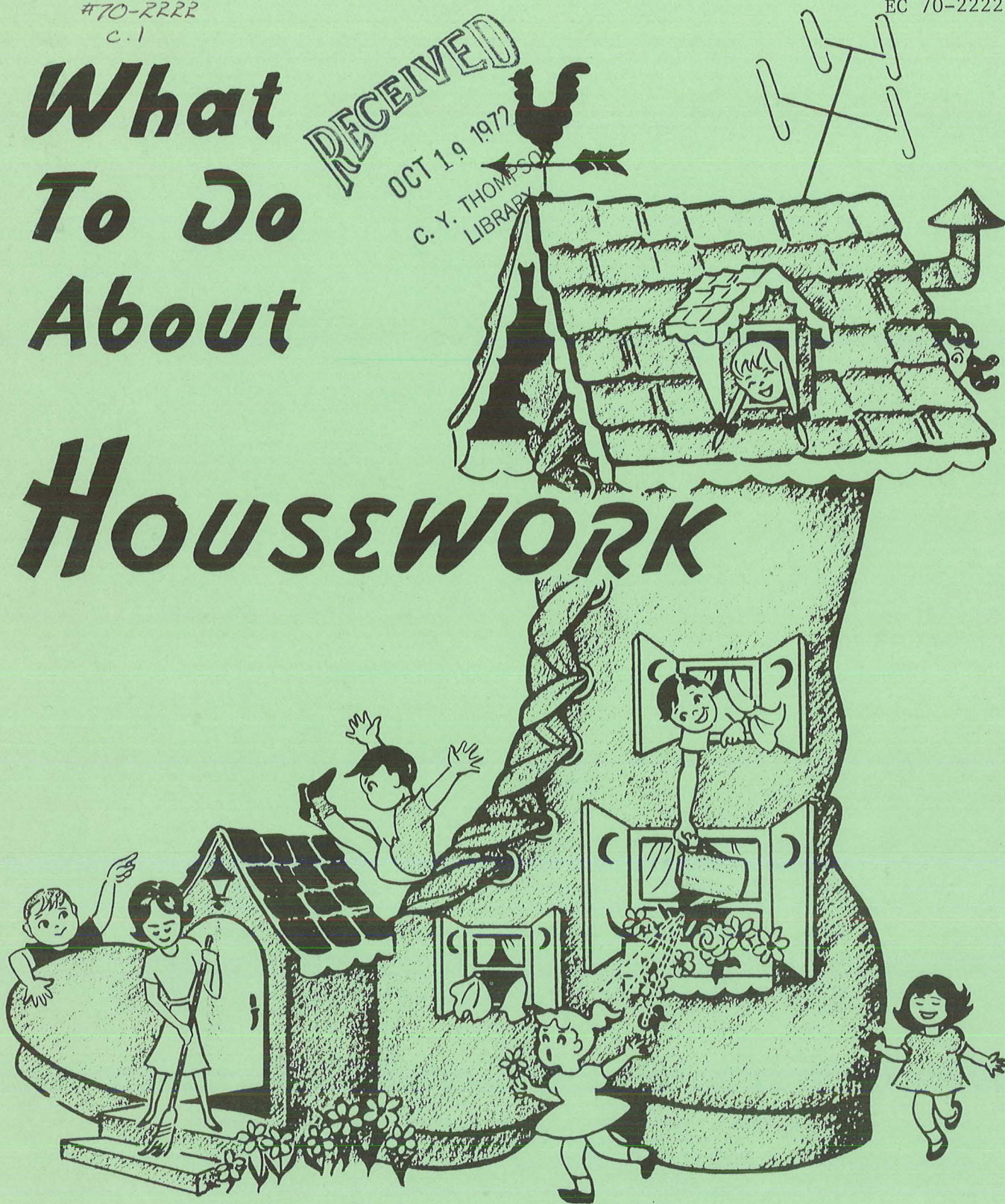
EC 70-2222

What To Do About Housework

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EXTENSION SERVICE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA—LINCOLN COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING WITH THE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE COLLEGE OF HOME ECONOMICS
E. F. FROLIK, DEAN J. L. ADAMS, DIRECTOR

WHAT TO DO ABOUT HOUSEWORK

By Faith Prior
Specialist in Home Management

PORTRAIT OF A HOMEMAKER

Before you settle down to read this publication, take a few minutes, pencil in hand, to think about why you are interested in the problem of saving time and energy in your housework. To sketch the outline, fill in the blanks below:

I am a (full, part) _____ homemaker. My job keeps me outside the house about _____ hours a day.

There are _____ adults and _____ children in the family; the oldest is _____ years old, and the youngest is _____. Our family has a special problem of _____.

Our home has _____ rooms. I wish there were (more, less) _____. I receive (much, some, little, no) _____ help from members of the family. I have (some, no) _____ outside help.

The job which hangs over me most heavily every week is _____
_____. I think having _____
would be a great help to me in my housekeeping. The homemaking job I get the greatest satisfaction from is _____.
My family seems most appreciative of _____;
they seem least appreciative of _____.

If I had more time for myself I would _____
_____.

From time to time we'll refer back to this quick analysis of your housekeeping problems, and see whether we can find some clues here to the mystery of creating those elusive commodities that we all seek, more TIME and ENERGY.

This publication is reprinted through the courtesy of the Vermont Extension Service, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont. If you wish more information about this subject, please contact Miss Valerie C. Kehm, Home Management Specialist, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service.

PART I

MANAGEMENT IS THE KEY



The most important thing you can know about life--and this applies to your job as homemaker too--is that there is no magic formula.

The closest we can come to a magic formula is in selecting the important from the unimportant. And this, in its simplest form, is Management.

We all manage, some of us well, some of us badly, for management is just the process of using what we have to get what we want. Few of us have all we wish we had of any asset, whether it is time, energy, or money, but it is the effectiveness with which we handle what we do have that creates our satisfactions.

But management means thinking, and thinking is hard work. Most of us do not find it easy to be good managers, and we sometimes build up a mental resistance to the very word "management." Why?

● For one thing, it's not easy to admit that we lack the ability to manage. We sometimes hear people say without embarrassment, "I can't sew a stitch," or "I've never learned to drive." It's more difficult to admit that we are unable to manage our time or our money or our tasks.

● Moreover, management is a very personal thing, involving us as individuals, our goals and our ways of doing things. We fear invasion of our privacy as an individual, and as a family we are reluctant to lay ourselves open to criticism of our ways of doing things.

● Then too, management patterns are always changing. When we have learned how to make biscuits, and we follow the same recipe and directions every time, we have predictable results. This is not true with management decisions. Families change, and what may have worked well on Monday may not work at all on Thursday; what was a good solution to the problem ten years ago may not fit the family needs at all today. Management sometimes makes us uncomfortably aware of the shifting sands of time, and it is easier to go on doing things the way we have always done them.

Yet without an understanding of the principles of management, the subject of "time and energy saving" can easily turn into a series of household hints. Such tricks are interesting and even useful on occasion, but they are not the real basis for the kind of improvement in our practices that we are looking for.

Businesses have "situation statements." Situation statements tell a business manager what he already has, what he can get, and what he can hope to accomplish. Buildings, machinery, materials, capital, even personnel with their time and talents are included in a situation statement.

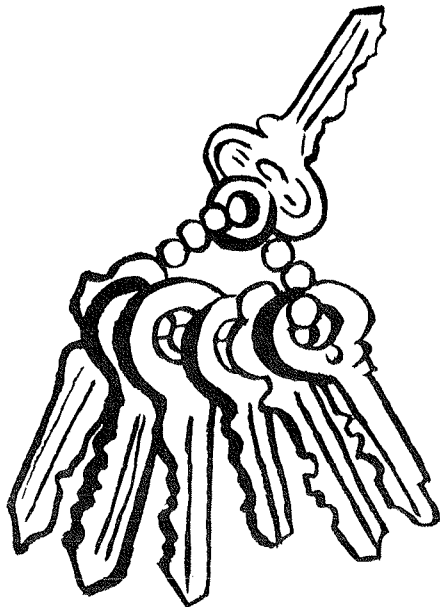
It's not easy to look at our families in such a business-like way. It's hard to see our home and our children objectively; we stand much too close to them for that. And yet, in the section of this publication which you filled out on the first page, you were actually making a brief situation statement. It tells how your family is different from every other family, not only on your street but in the whole world. This is why there can be no magic formula.... no plan for all these households. What each of us is looking for is a custom-tailored way of living that meets our requirements, even though they may be different from the needs of everyone else we know.

PART II

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO WORK WITH?

Let's take a look at our situation statement.

We all have the same assets -- time, energy, and money -- but we have them in varying quantities. We also have our own knowledge and skills, which we can add to through our efforts. And we have what should perhaps have gone at the very beginning of the list -- our attitudes.



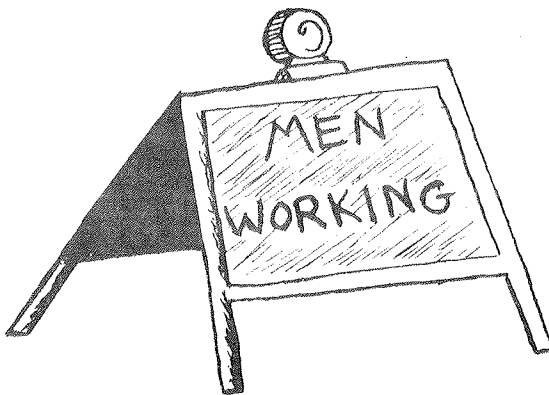
Attitudes are like a wall. They can hem us in with feelings like "I've always done it this way," "It doesn't really matter whether this gets done or not," and "Nobody appreciates how hard I work." But that same wall, once we get on top of it, can give us a fine free view of our lives, a view which makes it possible for us to think "Maybe there's a better way," and "What really matters is what is important to us, not to our neighbors or our ancestors."

Most of us are resistant to change, and sometimes this is good. If for thirty years you have typed your letters using three fingers on one hand and two on the other, a system you picked up by yourself without benefit of any known method of typing, the chances are it would be a mistake to change. Probably you would never develop the speed and assurance that practice has given you, even though the method is unorthodox.

But if you have always opened cans with a can opener that leaves a jagged edge, just because that's the only kind of can opener there was when you first ventured into the kitchen -- then don't refuse to try out the elegant new electric one that your family gives you for Christmas.

Ideas and ways of doing are neither good because they are new-- no good because they are old. They are good when they fit our needs.

We have all seen someone using up more energy resisting a job to be done than the job itself would have required. Sometimes facing up to work and getting it under way is the hardest part of the whole task. So here is one suggestion for adding to your efficiency--
GET ON WITH THE JOB.

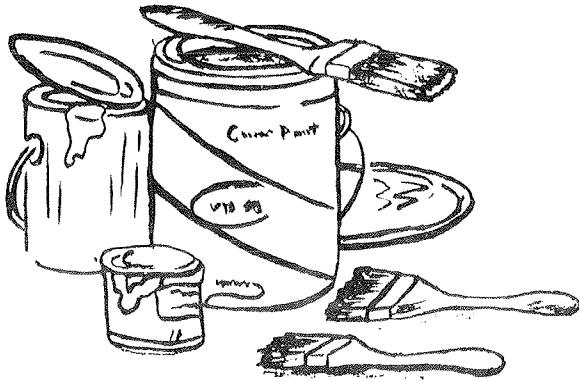


So many women today have part-time or full-time work outside the home that a whole new outlook on "homework" has come about. The good managers seem to get all the essentials done, to keep their families clean, well-fed, and happy, and at the same time to carry on their outside activities. They do not do this by simply adding one full-time job to another, for human energy and health have their limits. They succeed by adopting, in the beginning, an attitude which says "I am undertaking a new way of life and therefore I must look at my housework and family responsibilities in a new way. I must be open-minded to change."

Even for the homemaker who is not employed outside the home, a schedule of her day's activities would look very different from that of a generation or two back. The traditional ways of furnishing a house are generally not in keeping with the facts of modern life. How many hours are spent in being the family chauffeur, in volunteer work, in adult education? How much time is spent on, for example, computing income tax,--a subject almost unknown to the homemaker of thirty years ago? All these encroachments on her "homemaking" time mean that the homemaker needs to develop an attitude which makes her willing to investigate new products, new methods, new standards.

The truth is that the modern woman, far from living in the elegance that the advertising industry would have us believe, cuts corners and makes compromises in order to get her work done. Too often she does so as though it were a secret vice.

Ability and skill

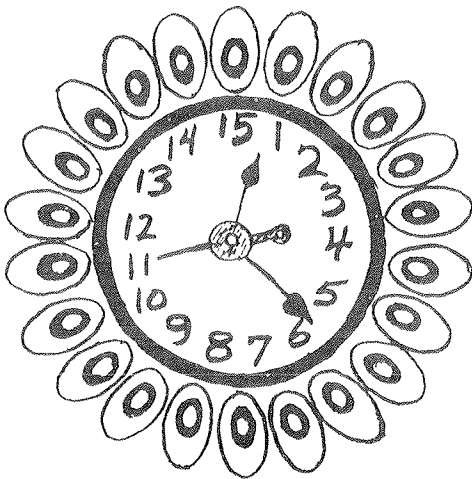


These homemaking assets are like money in the bank. The greater skill we can develop, the more time we save at a job and the less resistance we have to begin it.

Some of the skills which we develop may be creative--they may enable us to decorate a room, to paint and paper, to make draperies and slip covers. Such skills not only save us money (at the expense of our time and energy), but bring a positive reward in the pleasure of creativity.

Another kind of skill is sometimes referred to as "work simplification"--the development and use of easier and quicker ways for performing routine tasks. When we station a movable utility table beside the refrigerator so that we can save many trips, many openings and closings, we are carrying out work simplification. The same is true when we learn to make a bed in just one trip around it, without constant retracing of our steps.

Time and Energy



Somehow, certain people seem to have more hours in their day than others. It's a time-worn phrase that advises you to give a job to the busiest person you know--he'll find a way to get it done.

Technically, it may be correct to point out that everyone has the same number of hours issued to them every midnight. But the homemaker is seldom able to clutch these hours all to herself.

It's much more likely that she puts her hours into a big basket in the middle of the kitchen, and every family member who passes through is quite likely to help himself to one of her hours.

"Could you drive me to Little League? I'm late...."

"I did want to wear the yellow blouse, but it's not ironed..."

Or maybe even something as elementary as "My stomach hurts!"

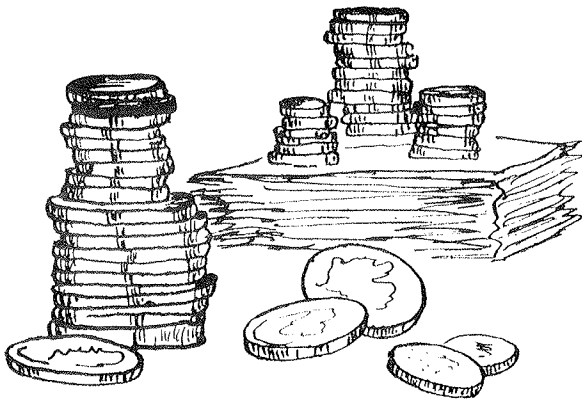
All of these, and many more, represent family members dipping into the homemaker's daily supply of time and energy.

But sometimes there can be an inflow, as well.

Time may be hoarded, or shared, or bought.

Five-year old empties the waste baskets? He's just dropped a few minutes in your basket. Teen-ager scrubs up the bathroom? Your basket may be richer by half an hour. Or maybe you buy a whole package of hours, to add to the family supply, when you hire someone to clean for you occasionally.

Whatever the situation at your house, there is a constant drain on time and energy. The more sources you can find to contribute to the supply, the better your management is likely to be.



Money

We are all likely to feel that money is a scarce commodity. Yet, in terms of saving time and energy, we sometimes need to ask ourselves "Can money be exchanged for something I think is more valuable?"

In the case of the homemaker employed outside the home, this exchange is direct and obvious. She pays a baby sitter money to buy her own working hours away from home. Or she pays the laundry, or a person to clean, or iron; she is actually buying the hours which she would otherwise spend at those tasks.

Money can be exchanged for equipment to help us do our work more quickly and with less expenditure of energy. We tend to think of large appliances in this category -- the clothes dryer, the dishwasher, the floor waxer. But in considering our own plan to save time and energy, we might give some thought to small items which would simplify a job or avoid delays and petty annoyances. What about a second double-boiler? A duplicate set of measuring spoons? A knife sharpener? A rack for storing cookie sheets and muffin tins?

Often the biggest stumbling block is just seeing what we really need. The solution may be very simple and inexpensive.

PART III



WHY DO WE WANT TO SAVE TIME?

Why have you read this far, anyway? Is it because we live in a world where there is so much emphasis on speed that it seems almost unpatriotic not to be interested in saving time?

Or do you have a plan for the minutes and hours that you may be able to salvage from your busy life, if you could just find out how to do it?

Look back at the first page again.

The last line to be filled in says: If I had more time for myself I would....what?

Read more? Spend more time on a garden? Sew? Do volunteer work at the hospital? Or maybe just get more rest, so that I can enjoy my family....or so that I'm a pleasanter person, and they can enjoy me?

Planning ways to save time and energy is a little like teaching a child to save part of his allowance -- it's always easier if he has a reason for saving.

Some jobs may be a pleasure in themselves

Don't overlook the fact that some work is so satisfying in itself, at that moment, that the work should be enjoyed in a leisurely way, as its own reward. Ironing a little girl's dress to perfection, maybe, or sitting in the sun shelling peas, or putting some beautiful extra swirls in the chocolate icing. In a world too full of hurry, hurry, hurry--we all need to do some things just because we LIKE to do them, to do them in our own way and at our own speed.

For most of us, however, such jobs are work-luxuries. We must meet most of the demands of homemaking as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Standards are mental pictures of what is essential

The ways of performing such tasks, and the quality of the finished product which we demand from ourselves, are dictated by the standards that we and other members of our family hold. To a degree our standards are based on public opinion (or our belief about what public opinion is.) We, and the way we live, are products of our time and culture.

The mechanism through which standards are built into our thinking is habit formation. Once a mental pathway has been established, it is not easy to change. But the need to free time and labor in the household is a powerful stimulus for making a change. This need may be based on new responsibilities such as added family members, larger house and grounds, work outside the home. Or conditions may change; we may have less household help, failing strength, or a physical handicap.

PART IV

HERE'S HOW

Where does your energy go?



The least physically demanding activity one can have, while awake, is lying still. If this activity is taken as a basis for comparison, we find that it requires

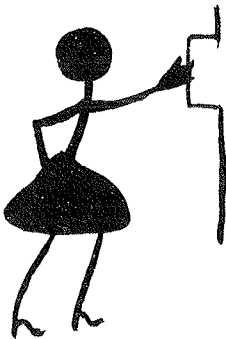
30% more energy to sit at rest
86% more energy to wash dishes
118% more energy to sweep
290% more energy to walk at about 3 miles an hour
372% more energy to walk downstairs
1336% more energy to walk upstairs.

Researchers, however, find that expenditure of physical energy isn't the whole story in eliminating fatigue. Habit affects the amount of energy used. Principles which apply to long work periods may not be the same for short work periods. It may be that, contrary to previous notions, we find it less tiring to stand for washing dishes, ironing, rolling out dough, and similar jobs than to sit for them, especially if this is contrary to our established patterns.

We can, however, use our knowledge of energy expenditure to develop rhythm in work to be done, to use momentum whenever possible, to use both hands at a job, to use feet or other parts of the body to relieve the hands and back, and to plan trips up and down stairs so that they count for as many purposes as possible.

Varying amounts of energy are also expended in bending and reaching. In considering where you should store often-used-equipment and supplies, keep in mind that --

1. Reaching to 46" requires least effort over standing still.
2. Reaching to 56" requires twice as much energy as reaching to 46".
3. Reaching to 72" requires four times as much energy as reaching to 46".
4. Bending to 22" requires five times as much energy as reaching to 46".
5. Stepping up 7" requires ten times as much energy as reaching to 46".
6. Bending to 3" requires eleven times as much energy as reaching to 46".



Keeping house in spite of a family

There's no doubt that today's families are messier than those of their mothers or grandmothers, and some of the reasons are really out of our control.

For one thing, it's a messier world, with less time to keep things in order. The boast "You can eat off my floor" is less often the goal of housekeeping.

Individual family members have more belongings--clothes, sports equipment, records, magazines, stuffed animals, junk. No previous generation has had the affluence to buy so many things, and clutter is the result.

Individual family members often operate on such tight schedules that when they claim "I'm too busy" or "I'm too tired," they may be very literally telling the truth.

There are a few suggestions which may help.

1. Periodically, take time to go through, with youngsters, the possessions which last year meant so much but which they may be quite willing to weed out drastically if encouraged.
2. Pack away, for the time being, collections which they may want to keep but are not willing to care for right now.
3. Consider swapping a heavy job like scrubbing the kitchen floor for some task which children consider tedious, like putting clean clothes away neatly.
4. Try to provide sufficient, convenient and private storage space.
5. Encourage young people to limit their activities to those which are really meaningful, thus easing the pressures of time and energy.

The fact is that while few of us can or would live in really messy surroundings, the measure of the woman these days is not for her housekeeping -- and most of us are thankful for that.

THE WHOLE JOB OF HOMEMAKING

Let's apply some of the principles we have been discussing, and see how they can be used to ease the demands of housekeeping.

Mary and Russell Wright, experts in the fields of design for both the home and industry, have worked out what they refer to as a "work-simplification catechism." Briefly, these are the questions they raise:

I. QUESTION THE JOB

Why do it? Does it contribute to your family's health, comfort, happiness? Measured against the expenditure of time and energy, does the task show a profit?

Who should do it? The housewife? Another member of the family? Hired help? Should it be done at home or by professional services?

When should it be done? (Out of this aspect of planning a schedule may be born.)

How should it be done? How meticulously? And by what possible improved techniques?

II. QUESTION THE SET-UP

This involves selection of the best tool or material with which to work, and prepositioning--that is, storage of tools and materials at the place and position most convenient to their use.

III. QUESTION THE TOOLS

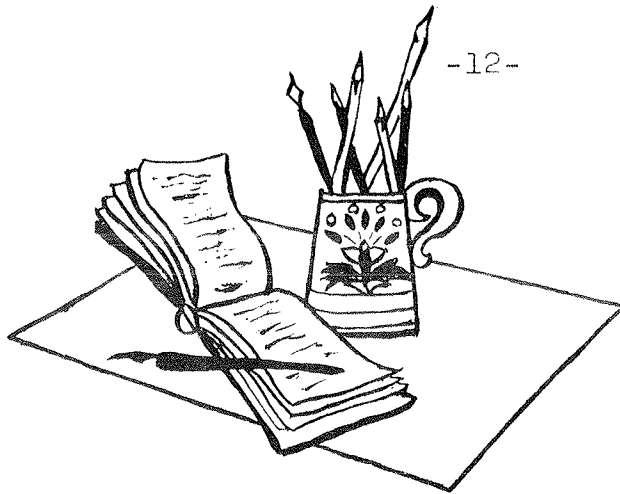
Choose tools carefully to get the most out of them, and to suit your own ways. Watch out for appliances which require more labor before and after use than they save. The stores are full of wonderful tools and materials, but buy critically and experimentally.

IV. QUESTION THE WORKING CONDITIONS

Industry long ago took note of fatigue factors that affect a worker's efficiency--light, ventilation, temperature, order instead of clutter--and went on to consider the value of pleasant colors, elimination of glare and noise, the effect of music. These are often neglected conditions of work in the home, along with consciousness of efficient dress, freedom from anxiety and insecurity, and the satisfaction of knowing that the housewife's job demands skill and competence.

You live in your home, and you must weigh the value of the things that go into it. You alone can estimate labor in proportion to happiness and comfort. Eliminate trimmings that give little return for your care, and concentrate on those things which have real value for you.

Home is not a small industry, the homemaker not a production engineer. Management should be more concerned with securing the maximum satisfaction and happiness in living for family members than with strictly utilitarian use of time.



Let's take a tour of the house and see where we might trim away some of the excess housekeeping. Like any visit, this one begins

IN THE YARD

- Be sure that there's a clean area to pass through before reaching an entrance. Paving a muddy or gravelly spot with brick, flat stones, cement or asphalt eliminates a good deal of tracking.
- Is there a wiping mat at every entrance?
- Accessible storage for outdoor toys?

HALLS AND COAT CLOSETS

- Paint closets white inside; a latex-base paint covers well.
- Provide light at the bottom as well as the top.
- Plan storage to be within the reach of children. Label hooks or hangers as they do at nursery school.
- Bins or shelves for rubbers and boots are especially useful if they are built with screen bottoms through which dirt and water fall into a tray.
- Or make a rack with pegs of varying heights on which boots can be stored upside down to dry.
- A long shallow partitioned drawer keeps gloves and mittens in order. Or hang them on miniature clothes lines inside the closet door.
- Closet too shallow to walk into, difficult to use because of a narrow doorway? Consider tearing out the door and extending the opening to the entire closet space (if it's not a bearing wall.) Sliding doors, double doors, folding doors, draperies, vertical or horizontal bamboo curtains are all possibilities in the wider opening.

- If you have a back hall, consider putting a big sheet of peg board on one wall, hanging sports equipment there for easy access and replacement.
- Have a central rack or board for hanging keys and label the keys with sturdy tags.

AT THE TELEPHONE

- Hang a really big calendar for recording future commitments. Get your whole family into the habit of using it.
- Keep a list of frequently-called numbers taped to the telephone table or inside the drawer.
- Tie a mechanical pencil or ball-point pen to the phone and tape down the pad, perhaps to the front of the phone book.

MISCELLANEOUS CLUTTER

- Have a general storage area, such as basement shelves, for the miscellany you may want shortly but not right away. Vertical window shades close them off nicely.
- Have a central place for unclaimed clutter -- a chest, or deep drawer, or cupboard. When claimant appears, let them dig it out. Clean the cache only when you are feeling very strong.

THE LIVING ROOM

- Use draw draperies in place of hard-to-clean Venetian blinds.
- Draperies show dust least when they are patterned rather than plain, light rather than dark, smooth rather than deeply textured.
- Put glass on window sills or table tops where you keep plants.
- Use dust cloth in each hand.
- Use your vacuum brush for dusting, and replace or clean the bag often for efficiency.
- Light finishes show less dust than dark woods.
- When you're re-arranging the living room or any furniture, push or pull heavy objects instead of lifting. When you do lift, stand close to the object, feet about twelve inches apart; then bend your knees and keep your back straight. Lift gradually by straightening the legs, using leg and shoulder muscles instead of back.

- Decide honestly which your family would rather have -- a pale pink rug or a pet puppy.
- Have casters, rollers, or domes under heavy pieces of furniture for ease in cleaning.
- Be sure lighting is suitable for activities.
- Before cleaning the fireplace, wet down the ashes so they won't fly.
- Records, books, magazines -- all have a better chance of being put away if there's convenient storage provided.
- Five minutes puts most living rooms in order (not necessarily clean) last thing at night.

AT THE DESK

- If you don't already have a business center in your home, arrange one.
- Organize family business and personal papers so that they can be located without frustration and wasted time.
- Keep desk supplies available at the business center.
- Wrapping supplies -- stout paper, twine, tape, labels -- deserve a home somewhere together.
- Print the family Social Security numbers with a flow pen inside a desk drawer.

KITCHEN-DINING AREA

(Here's where you can really streamline)

- Market once a week, if possible, on a day and at an hour when stores aren't too crowded.
- Use a shopping list. Arrange it by stores and by areas within stores.
- Have a shelf, rolling table, or some other place for putting groceries convenient to the places where they will be stored.
- Store current supplies of canned goods as close to use as possible; reserves might be on shelves alongside cellar stairs, or on narrow shelves with raised edges built inside closet or pantry door.
- A large sturdy lazy-susan built into a corner base cabinet holds a multitude of cans and packages, displays them at a touch.

- Don't store in the refrigerator things that don't need to be kept there.
- Get in the habit of cleaning and trimming fresh produce before putting it away.
- Keep a week's supply of potatoes handy to the sink.
- Have duplicates of small equipment, used often but at different places.
- Prevent clean-ups by --
Keeping a small flat absorbent mat (like a braided rug) in front of the sink.

Use a sheet of aluminum foil in the bottom of the oven to catch spills, making sure that it doesn't cover the holes which provide for circulation of heat. (Be sure the foil does not touch the heating unit.)

Sew sturdy tape loops to the middle selvage of small terry towels, hang on a hook under the edge of the sink for frequent hand wipings. Metal sink? Get a hook anchored to a magnet at your hardware store.

Have a big waste basket.

Keep moisture-proof bags in the garbage pail.

Rest cooking spoons on dish or piece of foil.

Clean vegetables on an open bag or newspaper, then roll it up with the trimmings and throw away.

- To save stooping to the garbage can many times a day, enamel a coffee can inside and out, fit it with a lid from the five and ten, keep handy on the kitchen shelf.
- Cut several layers of shelf and drawer papers at one time; just remove the top one when you clean.
- Use kitchen shears for snipping parsley, chive, lots of things. Tie them down so they will stay.
- Use tongs for lifting hot foods, pulling pans to front of oven.
- Teflon-coated baking and frying pans don't need greasing, won't let food stick. Use cupcake papers to save cleaning regular muffin pans.
- Keep plenty of good containers with covers, for putting away left-overs. Don't store little dabs in big bowls. And use them up promptly.

- Terry cloth dish towels don't have to be ironed and make better cleaning cloths when they are worn out.
- Be sure all the kitchen equipment is in good repair; loose handles, badly fitting covers, chipped or dented pans are time and temper wasters.
- Keep often-used utensils and appliances in easy-to-reach places. For example--coffee supplies near the stove, double boiler near the sink. "Where do I use it first?" is the key.
- Taken a look at the clutter that collects in kitchen drawers lately? One solution is to remove everything in a drawer to a box, return to drawer or hang-space as actually used. Get rid of the rest, or at least store in less valuable space.
- Soak cooking dishes while you're eating. Hot water for greasy or sugary foods, cold water for flour, eggs, or milk. And add a dash of detergent to either for real soaking power.
- When time is at a premium, homemakers who plan meals ahead have a real advantage. They can go ahead quickly to prepare a meal without spending time inspecting supplies, deciding what to prepare, going or sending to the store for last-minute items.
- Plan your meals and market order at the same time.
- Defrost the refrigerator just before the large shopping.
- Some time savers in the meal-planning department are: one-dish meals, canned foods, company meals from an emergency shelf, frozen foods, oven meals. All used with discretion to avoid blandness and monotony.
- Let guest meals be simple and good. Save elaborate menus for when you just feel like pampering your family.
- Can you reach knives without taking a step?
- Have slot storage for cookie sheets, muffin pans, platters, and so on near the range. Vertical dividers on a deep shelf do the trick.
- Covers on toaster, mixer, etc., are more often harder to clean than the appliance itself.
- Remember that foods may have the same food value but save time in preparation; for example, scrambled eggs instead of a souffle or omelet, drop biscuits (or square biscuits) instead of painstakingly cut rounds.
- Set the table for breakfast the night before.

- Find the most comfortable work height and position for each job, whether it's paring potatoes or caring for the baby.
- Paper towels kept in the vegetable crisper extend the time between sudsings.
- Check your cleaning supplies. Be discriminating and have only the one brand of each product that you like best.
- Carry small cleaning supplies from room to room in a basket. Don't unpack between cleanings.
- Keep a set of small tools (hammer, screw driver, pliers) in the kitchen. Lock them up if necessary.

THE BATHROOM

- Keep a bottle of liquid detergent, or a pretty jar of a mild granular detergent near the tub. Teach the family to add a capful to the tub, to prevent a ring.
- A quick daily swish does wonders at preventing a big cleaning job.
- Get a big enough hamper. Better still, could you make a laundry chute? (Sometimes a closet or cupboard floor lines up just right.)
- Put name labels, if necessary, over each towel rack.
- Try having a different color towel and washcloth for each family member; makes it easier to identify the culprit.
- Paper cup dispenser, paper towel rack save time and energy, cost money to keep refilled. Which is most important at this moment in your life?
- A window shade installed so that it rolls up from the bottom provides privacy.

BEDROOMS

- Casters or rollers on the bed make cleaning easier.
- Who says you have to turn a mattress every week?
- Now that vacuum cleaners do such a good job, you may want to eliminate the mattress cover.
- A single electric blanket can replace blankets and comforters, speed up bed making.
- All school-age children of the family ought to be making their own beds. Before school.

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