



TRANSCRIPT

Episode 20: Small Space Organization

TASHA LORENTZ *from* GET ORGANIZED HQ

WELCOME

Welcome to the Get Organized HQ podcast. I'm your host, Tasha Lorentz. Every week we share practical strategies for less stress and more peace as we dive into all topics, life and home organization. I'm so glad you're here for this week's episode.

Well, today on the Get Organized HQ podcast, we are going to be talking about thriving and organizing a small space. And I am actually going to give you a tip in this episode about a way that you can let things go, declutter things, but still continue to use those things in the future. And that can be a game changer in a small space. So definitely hang around for that.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A SMALL SPACE

All right, so let's talk about small spaces. And the first thing that I want to say is that what constitutes a small space is really different for every person. Right?

So this is something I have even noticed in my personal life. So I grew up in Indiana and we have relatively large houses in Indiana. I didn't know that when I was growing up, I thought everyone had very normal sized houses, but it's really not uncommon for people to have two story houses.

Or if it's a ranch style home, maybe there's a basement. Even if it's an unfinished basement,

there's still a lot of cool stuff you can do. You can put, you know, some sort of game room or something down there.

And a lot of families I knew, every kid had their own bedroom. And I mean, there might be an office, there might be a guest room. And that was just my experience. Right.

DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY

Well, my husband is from San Diego, California, and so his experience was a little bit different. And it actually is really funny to hear him talk about how just his impression, because of his life experience growing up, he thought everyone who had a two story house was flat out rich.

Like you have to be so wealthy to have a two story house because that was his life experience. In the town in which he grew up. People had much smaller houses.

You had a lot more joint spaces where there wasn't a separate office, it was like a corner of the living room was dedicated to a desk space and then the rest of it was a gathering area and you didn't have a guest room.

Like he would go sleep on the couch or sleep somewhere else. I don't even know, you know, if they had guests over. And his bed needed to be given up for someone else to sleep in a bed.

And so we just had very different life experiences. And so that is something that has even opened my eyes to the fact that, okay, we live in Indiana in a house that's a little over 1400 square feet.

A SPACE THAT CONSTRAINS YOU

And some of you listening are thinking, wow, like that's a pretty small house. Like that's your starter home, right? You're, you're gonna get a bigger home someday that has like more room and like, if you have children or dogs or if you want to have guests and stuff, like, that's pretty small.

And some of you listening are like, what in the world? That's like twice as big as the apartment or the home that I'm living in.

And I share all of that to say that a small space is simply a space that is constraining you and your lifestyle. So you might live in a home that is twice as big as mine, you live in a 3,000 square foot home and still take and apply these principles.

DEPENDS ON YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Because whatever your life circumstances are, maybe you're running a business out of your home. And so yeah, you've got 3,000 square feet, but half of that is dedicated to business production. You know, maybe you make T shirts.

And so you have a whole stock of T shirts and you have the vinyl or the ink that you use to put on the T shirts and the machines that you use. Like that is a very legitimate situation, right? And that can take up a lot of space.

And also you might be listening to this and

thinking, wow, if I had 1400 square feet, I would never have space problems again. And I know there are so many people who live in far smaller spaces than I do, but I think these tips apply no matter the size of your small space.

We're just saying when your space is constraining you, when there isn't the room to store everything or even every type of space that you would like to have.

THE LAYOUT OF YOUR HOME

Because sometimes it's not that there's not room for the stuff in our home, sometimes it's that there aren't enough rooms in our home. And so maybe you have a very spacious home, you have tons of square footage, but it's a three bedroom home and you have three or four children and you also work from home.

And so dealing with those space constraints, like, wow, it's great, we have this massive living room. But like, that's kind of tricky whenever we're trying to create a quiet work from home space. But we're also trying to use it as a play space for kids. And we're also trying to use it as a gathering area.

All of that, to say, this is something people across the world in all different circumstances run into. And it is not a contest to have the smallest space. And just because you get online and there's someone somewhere who says, oh, I have a smaller space than you do, it doesn't illegitimize your struggles with your space.

You have the constraints you have in your space. It is presenting the struggles that it is presenting. And that isn't something that's negated just because someone else is living in a smaller space.

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So I wanted to get that out of the way right at the beginning. Just to say that what defines a small space is going to be different for everyone. But these principles apply in all of those circumstances.

USE THAT CONSTRAINT AS A MOTIVATOR

All right, so let's start with the obvious. If you're feeling constrained by your space, try to use that constraint as a motivator to get rid of some of those maybe items.

Okay, so my guess is, if you're listening to this, you've already done some basic decluttering, right? Like, you've gotten rid of the trash. You've gotten rid of the things that just absolutely don't fit, or they're completely out of style, or nobody has used them in the last 15 years. We definitely don't need those.

OBVIOUS DECISIONS

However, if you're like me, whenever you're decluttering, I notice that there's the obvious get rid of it things. There's the things that I'm like, I didn't even know I had this. Toss it.

There are the, obviously, I'm going to keep it things. You know, like, I am looking at my desk right now. My dog's food bowl is sitting on my desk right now. Not going to declutter that. Like, we use that every day, right? To feed my dog.

My phone is sitting on my desk. Not going to get rid of that. My computer, my microphone for recording this podcast. Like, all of those things, they're pretty obvious keep items. Like, they don't even enter into the equation when I'm thinking about what to declutter.

NOT SO OBVIOUS DECISIONS

But then so many times I have this middle of the road group of items where I'm like, oh, man. Like, it isn't an obvious yes or no. I could convince myself to get rid of it.

Like, probably it would be fine if I went ahead and got rid of it and decluttered it, but I'm not feeling as confident about getting rid of it. It's not an obvious yes.

And sometimes having space constraints can really help you when you're making these decisions. You can kind of ask yourself those questions, right?

DO YOU PREFER THE ITEM OR THE SPACE?

You can say, okay, would I rather have this spare crock pot, or would I rather have more breathing room inside this cabinet so that all of my appliances aren't crammed together.

And there isn't a right answer. That is one of the hardest things. Right. But there isn't a right answer. If you say, you know, I think I would rather deal with kind of finagling everything in this cabinet so that it all fits just right and I can get the door closed. Because I'd rather have that spare crock pot.

Because sometimes I really do use two crock pots. Sometimes I want to make a main dish and a side dish in a crock pot. And it would be really hard to not have two crock pots in that situation. That is totally fine.

But sometimes that can also give you clarity and say, you know what? I really can't remember the last time I've used the second crock pot. Like, it's kind of just sat there. And

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yes, I could see a situation in which it would be useful, but we're really not using it. And I would really rather have that space available to me.

THINKING IT THROUGH

So allow the constraints of your space to help you in making those decisions. It doesn't mean that you have to get rid of every single maybe item that you've come across. Okay, I want to make that clear as well.

We are not forcing decluttering decisions. We aren't trying to make people declutter too quickly or declutter things that they're going to regret, but just allow it to help you think through what you can get rid of.

GETTING RID OF THE SMALL THINGS

And the other thing I would say about decluttering and trashing things and just clearing things out of our home is make sure that you're getting rid of the small things, too.

So I'm talking about a bunch of travel toothpaste containers that you've collected from dentist appointments over the year. If you have five people in your family who are going to dental cleanings twice a year, you're probably bringing in 10 new things of travel toothpaste every single year.

And, like, if you haven't gone through your travel toothpaste stash in the last five years, you very well may have over 40 things of travel toothpaste. It's not taking up that much room. It really isn't.

But if you have 40 things of travel toothpaste, and then if there is a really big bin of various little pens and crayons and different writing utensils that you've collected, and over here,

there's a collection of different cords and cables and chargers, and we don't really know what they all go to.

If you put in the time and effort to get rid of the things that you're not using, even in those smaller spaces, it is going to help open up more breathing room in your space. So don't overlook those small things.

START FIRST WITH BIGGER IMPACT AREAS

I wouldn't say start there. If you haven't done any decluttering or if you have closets and rooms that are still overflowing that you haven't touched, start with those bigger impact areas.

But as you kind of start to get through the work of decluttering and you're thinking, okay, like, I've done all of the major decluttering, I'm not sure what to do next. Start looking at some of those smaller things and see where you can free up even just one extra little organizing bin underneath the sink.

If it was overflowing with different little travel toiletries and you're not using them or you're not seeing yourself use them nearly as quickly as you're accumulating them, and you could maybe donate them to a shelter or something like that and free up one more organizing bin under your bathroom sink.

Think about what you could put down there and how now it's just a little bit less cramped in that space. There's a little more space to spare. So definitely use your small space as a motivator to let things go.

USE HARDER TO GET TO STORAGE SPACES

However, don't worry, that's not the only thing that I'm going to say. I'm not just going to say, well, your space is too small, so let's get rid of all of this stuff. If that was the answer and it was always that easy, then, well, this podcast would be over and there probably wouldn't be so many questions about small space organizing.

However, the honest truth is that sometimes, even when you've done a really good job of decluttering, there is still just a lot of stuff that the space needs to hold. And so the first thing that I'd recommend that you do is make use of those harder to get to storage spaces and put things there that you're not accessing very often.

HIGH CLOSET SHELVES

So in my own home, there's a couple places I can think of. There is a very, very high closet shelf. Like, I pretty much can't see it. I don't know why they installed it so high.

Like, you have your, like, normal closet shelf height, right? That's like a little bit above eye level, and you can see everything there. That's not this closet shelf. This is like maybe a foot from the ceiling or so. And it's really hard to see what's up there.

But I could put little storage bins up there. Maybe that's where I store some sentimental items that I'm not taking down and looking at all the time. But I know where they are. They're up there out of the way.

There's another closet in my house that has really large shelves. I mean, they're probably a foot and a half to two feet deep and two, two

and a half feet, maybe three feet wide.

And the top shelf of these massive, like square shelves, I can't get back there very easily. Like I need to stand on a chair in order to see the top shelf and reach all the way to the back.

STORING RARELY USED ITEMS

And so what I did is I took some of the book series that we have that we want to keep. They're books for me. They're books I grew up reading that I just want to keep the series. But I'm not rereading them every year or anything like that. I just want to hold on to them.

And I set them on that shelf against the back wall, all the way back against that shelf. Because the truth is I am probably going to access those books maybe five times in my life.

And as a side note, that is kind of a clue to myself that if I am really hurting for storage space down the road, if more things come into my house and there are more things I'm prioritizing, keeping.

DO YOU NEED TO KEEP THEM?

If I'm only pulling these out five times in a year, could I borrow them from the library or could I borrow them from a friend? Like, is there another way that I could get these items?

But for the time being decided to keep them. But I put them in an incredibly out of the way area. They had been stored underneath my bed and that's relatively easy to get to area. And I'm going to give you some tips on how to store things under the bed here in a minute.

But I put them really out of the way so that I freed up the easier to get to space. I know

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where they are and that makes it a little bit easier to store things in my home and it maximizes the storage space.

Because if I'm just putting nothing back in that spot that's hard to get to because it's hard to get to, then that is some of the precious space in my house that's not being utilized.

CLOSED STORAGE SOLUTIONS

The next thing that I would recommend for small spaces is to use closed storage solutions. So, I mean things that have a lid or it is a plastic drawer and you can't see through it to see what's inside.

What I have noticed is that when you do open storage solutions, so for example, I have open shelves in my kitchen. You have to be really careful with what you put in those open spaces because it is doubling as decor.

Any sort of open storage is also decor in your home. Everyone's going to see every single thing that is on it. But when you have closed storage, you can just kind of pile things in.

It doesn't have to look nearly as pretty as it would have to look if it was on display for everyone. And you can just kind of tuck it away.

PLASTIC STACKABLE DRAWERS

And so these are things like those plastic totes with lids on them or plastic stackable drawers. I use plastic stackable drawers in my base cabinets in my kitchen.

So I highly doubt this is how these are intended to be used. I'm going to put that out there. But if you were to go to Walmart or Target and just get one of those like tower stackable drawer

units, you know, it has three or four drawers in it.

SOME CAN BE TAKEN APART

For me, it was just a little too large, a little too tall to fit in my lower cabinet. But I found that they pop apart really easily. Now, it probably depends on the exact brand that you get. Some of them may be one piece. Don't break your plastic drawers trying to apply this tip.

But the brand that I got, it just totally popped off the very top drawer. I popped it off the top plastic piece. I popped that off as well, and it set right back down on top of the next drawer. So I just removed an entire drawer and then it fit into my base lower cabinet.

USING VERTICAL SPACE

And I love having closed storage solutions that I can use more vertical space because things can kind of pile on top of each other just a little bit. In something like that, it doesn't mean that it has to be crammed full and totally haphazard.

But when it is closed, you can kind of pile things a little bit more and they're going to stay contained in your drawer or in your container. And so in a small space especially, I would really recommend using storage solutions that are closed instead of relying primarily on open storage where you have to give things a little bit more breathing room.

Otherwise it's really just going to look like everything is stacked on top of each other, because it probably is. But in a closed system, nobody knows or can tell.

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TOTES WITH LIDS

Now, one place that I love to use the plastic totes with lids is underneath my bed. So I'm sure that if you've listened to or looked up anything about small space storage solutions, you've heard use the vertical space. Use the space under your bed, use the space on the back of your door.

And all of those are true. Like, there's a reason it comes up in every single small space advice, video or podcast that has ever been created. Because it is good advice. But I want to take that a step farther.

And instead of just saying make sure you use the space under your bed, use totes underneath your bed. So I'm pretty sure that my bed is a 14 inch platform, so I can fit a pretty tall tote underneath my bed. And the thing that I love is I slide those totes in and out whenever I need to get something.

EASIER TO GET THINGS IN AND OUT

Because if you're just setting things under the bed or kind of shoving things under the bed, if you're like me, then you put one thing under and then you think, oh, well, now I have this suitcase. So like, maybe you put a duffel bag, then you put the suitcase in.

And then you're like, oh, I have these like seasonal clothes that we don't really need. Let me kind of scoot the suitcase back again and put these seasonal clothes here. And then, oh, we have these shoes we want to put. So let's scoot all of that back.

And you see, like, you just keep pushing the next thing back and back and back. But with totes, you can grab one whole tote. And

so I have my seasonal clothing in one tote underneath the bed, and I have spare sheets in another tote underneath the bed.

And I had a tote of books behind the spare sheets tote. So if I wanted to get to my books, I pull out the spare sheets tote. Then I pull out the books tote.

And it just makes it easier to grab a grouping of things at once instead of having to do the thing where you're like laying on your stomach, half army crawled underneath the bed, digging through the things that kind of got pushed back there. So I really recommend using storage totes if you're going to be storing things under the bed.

REMOVING CLOSET DOORS

Now this next one is something that my family would probably laugh at me for sharing with you because I am somewhat known in my family for doing this. But I love to remove closet doors.

Now hear me out. If you are in a small space and you especially if you have one of those closets that has like the slide sliding doors that cross over each other, do you know what I'm talking about?

Where there's, they're on this track and one kind of slides almost to the end of the other and you can only see one half of the closet at a time. Take off the closet doors.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH THE SPACE?

Now, I will caveat that with it depends on what you want to do with the closet space. So if you are in need of more storage space in your

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house, that is a time when I might recommend keeping them on. Because like we talked about closed storage, if nobody can see it, it doesn't matter exactly how it looks and therefore you can get more stuff into that space.

But if you are struggling with just not having enough living room in your space, a lot of what we've talked about is where to put stuff.

But sometimes it's like, I don't have room for a bed and a desk in this space and I really need a workspace because I work from home or my kid needs to do homework, or I want a craft table for my grandkids.

GIVES MORE USABLE SPACE

Whatever your need is, take off those closet doors. Store them in the garage or somewhere like that so you have them. If you change your mind and you want to put them back on, they're still there. And then use that closet as usable space in that room.

So I am recording this in my office right now. If I look to my left, there's a closet there. There are no doors and there is a chair in there right now and a lamp in there. I could easily slide my entire desk into that closet. I could put all sorts of things there. I could put bookshelves in there.

It just expands the room. It really opens it up. And so if you're looking for more livable, usable space, then I recommend take off the closet doors and see what you can do with that.

DO OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Now, another thing that I would encourage you to do if you are feeling constrained by your space, maybe you've already even applied some

of these principles and it's getting a little bit better, but it still just feels tight inside your house. Think about outdoor activities that you can do.

Now, I know that's not going to fix the problem inside your house. And on rainy days and snowy days and cold days, you're not always going to be able to or feel like getting outside. But I do think one benefit of a smaller house is just that extra little push to get out and explore.

If it's a Saturday and there's nothing really on that day and you're all feeling a little bit cramped inside your space and like you're stepping on each other, maybe that would be a great day for going to the park or going on a little nature hike or something like that.

NOT A LONG TERM FIX

Like I said, I don't want to belittle the problem of small spaces because it is a legitimate challenge. And just getting outside and going on a little camping trip or having a picnic, it's not going to long term fix the problem.

But I do think it is almost one of the benefits of having a smaller space is the encouragement to get outside. Because you know what, you're kind of tired of staring at the same few walls over and over again.

And so take advantage of that particular benefit of a smaller space and encourage yourself and other people in the family or those who live in your house to get outside and enjoy nature.

BORROWING ITEMS

Now, I promised at the beginning of this episode that I was going to give you a tip on

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how you can declutter something, get rid of it, but still be able to use it in the future. So consider borrowing things that you only use on rare occasions.

Okay, so I had a bread maker a couple of years ago that was pretty exciting. The most exciting thing about that bread maker is that my sweet, sweet mother in law flew that thing across the country from California because she really wanted me to have it.

She packed it in her suitcase and everything. And it cracks me up to think of this diligent little bread maker making its journey across the country to me.

And I really enjoyed it. We made a lot of bread, all of that. But eventually I started making bread in other ways.

ITEMS YOU USE OCCASIONALLY

And maybe you have an appliance like that, maybe it's something that you only pull it out in the fall and you, maybe you make a pumpkin bread and every fall you make two or three loaves of this pumpkin bread.

And the bread maker is really the best thing for it. It's not going to do as well in an oven, but this bread maker is taking up, I mean, that thing's not small. It's impressive that it got in a suitcase, but it did, it did travel to me in a suitcase, but it's taking up all this space in your cabinet and you're only using it two or three times a year.

So now is when I'd encourage you to think about, hey, do I know anyone else who has a bread maker? Do any of my family members who live nearby have one? Do my neighbors that I'm friends with have one or other friends?

Friends from the community, from your church group, from your volunteer group, just people that you know.

If you know someone who has a bread maker and they'd be like, yes, you can totally borrow my bread baker for a weekend and make a batch of that pumpkin bread in the fall, then could you donate yours, give it to someone else, and then borrow from a friend. If it's something that you're only going to be doing on rare occasion.

MORE ROOM FOR OTHER NEEDED THINGS

I know that it is more hassle. And I also know maybe you have a really unique appliance. It's something that other people just do not have, and there isn't the option to borrow it. So this isn't going to work in every single circumstance.

But there probably are some appliances that if you asked around, you have friends who would be more than happy to let you borrow it once or twice a year whenever the need arises.

And so borrowing from friends is a great way to free up space in your house, still get to use the item that you want to use and do what you want to do, but have more room for other things that you need in your small space.

UNUSUAL STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Now, this is something I started doing just kind of naturally because there were some things that were difficult to store in my kitchen.

So my kitchen does not have very much upper cabinet space. And honestly, upper cabinets are ideal for kitchen storage. I don't have a pantry

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outside of upper cabinets, and so it can be a little tricky to figure out where to put things. And I started storing some things that I didn't use as often outside of my kitchen.

OUT OF THE HOUSE

So some bulk food items that could be shelf stable and kept in a pantry cabinet in the garage, I moved them out to the garage. I keep some of my home decor all the way out in our outdoor shed.

GUEST BATHROOM

I keep some of our dogs' less frequently used items, or I have a collection of spare toys, like if they're just going crazy or they've destroyed a few too many toys and I notice we're running low. Like, I have spare dog toys that we just pull out and add to the collection. I keep those in our guest bathroom because that is where the space is.

And so look outside your space and see if there is more storage space somewhere else in the shed, in the garage, in the bathroom closet, where I could take some of the things we're not using as frequently, move them to that space.

I know where they are. I know exactly where to go to get them. It's really not that far out of the way for me to go to the bathroom closet or to go into the garage and grab whatever it is I need.

And the home decor, I'm grabbing it a couple times a year whenever I'm changing out the seasonal decor. Really, I keep the fall and Christmas stuff out there, so it's not that often that I'm going out in the yard to grab all of that. And it allows me to have the space in my house for things that I'm accessing more frequently.

PRIORITIZE OTHERS' THINGS

Now, one caution that I do want to issue, and this is something that I can be guilty of myself, and that is not prioritizing other people's stuff and desires when it comes to trying to free up space in the home.

So it's really easy for me to look at my spouse's stuff and think, look at all this sentimental stuff. You know, he has every single yearbook from elementary school through high school. And so it's a pretty big stack of yearbooks.

And okay, this sounds absolutely terrible, but like, my husband's yearbooks, I mean, it's kind of cool, you know, maybe to go look at his, like, elementary school picture, but like having a whole collection?

I don't know who these kids are, you know, like, I am not going to pull out his yearbook and just start flipping through it and be like, yes, what did everyone do in sixth grade?

BE PATIENT WITH THEM

But that is special to him. And so it's really important whenever we are decluttering and even suggesting things to declutter, I know a lot of us, we're probably not going around decluttering on behalf of other people, but having the mindset of being patient with what is important to other people in our space.

When space is cramped, it's really easy to want other people to declutter their stuff. But if we can start with our own stuff and just realize other people have different priorities than ours, that's going to go a long way just in building those good relationships with the people in our home, which at the end of the day is honestly the most important thing.

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DUAL PURPOSE FURNITURE

And then there is one last thing that I want to touch on. If you are working in a small space and that is furniture and appliances, and I am not going to tell you to go out and buy a bunch of dual purpose furniture.

It's out there, it's a great option. And if that's something that's in your budget and that you would find helpful in your space, it could totally be worth it to you. But I know that not everyone is going to completely reconfigure their space and buy all new furniture just so that they can thrive more in their small spaces.

But if you are in a space constrained space, if it's feeling a little tight and a little snug and you find yourself needing to make a furniture purchase of some sort, maybe you need to replace the refrigerator or something's happened to the couch, it's really old, or something's broken on it. And it's time to replace the couch.

THINGS MAY BE BIGGER THAN THEY LOOK

Keep in mind the constraints of your space. It's so easy to go into the store, especially into the Costco warehouse. I'm telling you right now, everything in Costco's warehouse is bigger than it looks like. When you get it home, it will be bigger in your space than it looked in that giant warehouse where there was just room on every side for it.

And so be really mindful of what you're buying. If you have to replace the refrigerator, can you get a counter depth refrigerator so it just takes up a little bit less space? Because all of the furniture and appliances and things in your home, it is going to be the hardest to reduce

their footprint, right?

I can reduce the footprint in my home of how many books I'm keeping. If I want less books, I can just get rid of a few books. But if I want the refrigerator to take up less space, that's a little bit harder.

LEAN TOWARDS SMALLER PIECES

And so my suggestion is, if and when the time comes down the road to replace any sort of furniture, just keep your space in mind and lean towards getting those smaller pieces so that you have more breathing room in your space.

We have a really small hall bathroom and we redid the bathroom and pretty much just freshened it up. We put down a new floor, we put in a different vanity and we went from a 60 inch vanity so it's like a very long and narrow.

It was like vanity, toilet and shower on the other side and we went from a 60 inch vanity to a 48 inch vanity and it just makes there be more breathing room in the space, even just by taking off that 12 inches.

And it's not even like the 6 inches on the one side by the wall is giving us any functional space. It just opened it up. And so that's something to keep in mind anytime that you go to buy furniture to to put into a small space.

So hopefully at least one or two of these tips was helpful to you can give you some ideas for how you can organize things in your small space, for how you can make use of all of the spaces that you have in your home.

Maybe think outside the box a little bit for how you can use different spaces and hopefully that can help you and your family to thrive and be

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grateful in whatever space that you are in.

Thanks so much for joining me for this week's episode of the Get Organized HQ podcast. And I will see you next week when I interview a new special guest.