How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind

Dealing with Your House’s Dirty Little Secrets

Dana K. White
Creator of A Slob Comes Clean
Praise for How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind

“How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind is the most entertaining home management book I have ever read. I told my husband, ‘I can’t believe I didn’t fall asleep once while reading a book about cleaning!’ Instead of overwhelming the reader with an extensive list of things to do, Dana humorously eliminates your guilt while providing simple, actionable steps that will make a profound impact on your home. Since I implemented Dana’s strategies, my house is cleaner, more organized, and most importantly, more peaceful.”

—Alea Milham
Author, Prep-Ahead Meals from Scratch

“Although life was so overwhelming that the thought of reading this book exhausted me, I read it anyway, and something clicked. Cleaning once wasn’t working for me. By doing the same small tasks every day, I’m finding that my house is getting cleaner and I’m hating the thought of housework less. While my house still has a long way to go, I’m thrilled with the progress I’ve seen and hopeful about the future!”

—Lisa Thompson
Blogger, FunHappyHome.com

“A hilarious, practical, yet brutally honest look at the way we manage and keep our homes... Dana’s way of deconstructing our fantasies about cleaning and organizing, followed by practical advice and wisdom, is why this book is a must-own for all those struggling to keep up with their homes. You’ll be revisiting her words and tips over and over again.”

—Erin Chase
Author, The $5 Dinner Mom Cookbook series, and mom to four messy boys

“Let’s face it: reading about cleaning and organizing is more fun than actually cleaning and organizing. I was fully prepared to read, enjoy, and promptly disregard Dana’s book, but when I began reading, something weird happened. On page 10 I shut the book and cleaned my kitchen... I later read more and made my way to page 80. I put the book down again and began tackling laundry... Could a book actually spur a person to action? Could an author actually urge me to be a better homemaker and give me practical ways to make that happen? Yes and yes! I’m actually crying thinking about how Dana is such a blessing to me and to my family.”

—Amanda from Independence, MO
Homeschooling mom of seven
“It’s like Dana was writing this just for me! I can’t tell you how many times I have searched for the right method that was going to solve all of my housekeeping woes, or been sure I would keep my house clean forever after a particularly deep cleaning of the house... As someone whose room was once mistaken by police as having been ransacked (it wasn’t), I need someone who understands what really makes me tick. In this book, as always, Dana is funny, helpful, and sometimes brutally honest. Thanks for keeping it real!”

—ANGIE KAUFFMAN
BLOGGER, REALLIFEATHOME.COM

“This is not like any other organizing book out there. Dana does an amazing job of helping a disorganized, junk-collecting procrastinator, like me, see that I really can get my clutter under control. She doesn’t do it as a know-it-all organization guru but as someone who has been where I am and is in the trenches with me. If you’re ready to retrain your brain and start the deslobification process (as Dana would put it), then this book is for you!”

—SARAH ROBINSON
BLOGGER, SIDETRACKEDSARAH.COM

“I love the approachable, compassionate, and fun way that Dana writes about universal struggles—like housework that is never done! I gleaned good tips (love the Container Rule and Do Easy Stuff First!) but I also gained a better understanding of those in my family I may have labeled as slobs along with how to approach them. (Hint: do not give them more stuff!)”

—JAMI BOYS
BLOGGER, ANOREGONCOTTAGE.COM

“There’s so much in the book that’s insightful, humorous, and time-tested. I especially like the term procrasticlutter. My house is full of it! This book has really helped us look objectively at each room, drawer, and shelf in our home. As I write this, the dishes are put away and my kitchen is clean. What a wonderful feeling and a great way to start my day.”

—JANET DUNLAP
PROFESSIONAL HOUSE CLEANER, SOON-TO-BE EMPTY NESTER, AND MOM OF SIX

“I have read every bestselling book out there to help me get my house under control. I can identify the stuff in my home vs. the items that bring me joy. I’ve worked through how-to checklists and posted purging questions to help me make decisions wherever I’ve decluttered. And even though I found valuable tidbits in all of them, none gave me hope for a real change in my household—not until I read
“How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind. The Container Concept hit me like a ton of bricks.”

—Stephanie from Kent, WA
Stay-at-home mom of three

“Finally, an organizing book for those of us who need it! And it’s written in a simple and hilarious way that our non-linear-thinking brains can understand and implement. . . . Dana leads you step-by-step with the heart of a woman who has been there and struggled with the same issues you are currently struggling with. Really, this is a must-read for anyone who wants to learn the secrets that all those organized types seem to know.”

—Kimberlee Stokes
Blogger, ThePeacefulMom.com

“Oh, Dana, have you been a fly on my wall? How refreshing to read this book and see myself in it, page after page. . . . How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind is full of funny, practical wisdom. If you need a remedy for your household woes, this is an easy pill to swallow, because it is laced with humor, real-life experiences, and true solutions. Dana’s principles will motivate you and change your way of looking at your home. For once, you may just feel like you can get a grip on your home!”

—Amanda from Minneapolis, MN
Professional singer, wife, and mother of five (including two sets of twins)

“When I was asked to read a book about cleaning and decluttering, I was a bit hesitant. I felt like a failure already. Did I really need to read yet another book full of tips and tricks that would leave me feeling worse? From the first page, I was put at ease. It’s okay just to do the dishes? Really? I didn’t have the usual feeling that I needed to just fire bomb my house and start over. Instead, this book gave me hope! . . . The appendix alone is worth buying the book. I want to print it and glue it to my wall as a life map.”

—Angela from Chapel Hill, NC
Voice and acting coach and full-time mama

“I laughed my way to a truly clean(er) house! How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind doesn’t just tout another organizational method that sparks inspiration and then fizzles. Dana White uncovers the reasons most organizational ploys fail and delivers real, practical, attainable hope! Adjusting my thinking to reality about managing my home has already set in motion sustainable change.
This is the first organization book that I have ever read that was written by someone who isn’t naturally organized. And I loved it. No judgement, no superiority. Just a whole lot of real, practical help with a good dose of humor and hope.”

—Shelby from Monroe, WA
Business owner and mom of five

“This is the most helpful and entertaining book on housekeeping I’ve ever read! I loved getting cleaning advice from one slob to another. Dana’s tips on decluttering were just what I needed to figure out how to declutter my own space. Living in a small apartment, I have found myself almost buried in stuff. I’ve already started simplifying my life using her strategies.”

—Patricia from Reno, NV
High school math teacher and part-time graduate student

“Praise the Lord, and pass the dishrag! Finally there’s a book that speaks to a slob like me with commonsense approaches that make me think, ‘Hey, maybe I can do this.’ And all presented with a healthy dose of humor and humility. This book lays out the hard truths of a clean house but in a way that doesn’t make me feel silly for not having embraced them before.”

—Edith from Clinton, MS
CDO of a national bank, mom of one, suffers from severe anxiety

“Even though this book was written for people who struggle managing their home, I found it applicable to people who struggle to get things done in general. If you are looking for no-nonsense, practical advice for overcoming you, you’ll want to read this book. The house will never clean itself, but Dana’s straightforward style will help you manage your home in a way you never thought possible. Forget fifteen-point checklists and chore charts—Dana cuts quickly to the core issues behind being a slob and helps you conquer them once and for all.”

—Toni Anderson
Blogger, TheHappyHousewife.com

“Cleaning is the worst. But Dana White? She’s the best! Especially when it comes to getting me to empty my dishwasher. This book is motivating and engaging but also easy to relate to, as Dana shares her own struggles openly. But my favorite part? The humor. Dana is laugh-out-loud funny, which makes me take what she says seriously. I might still hate cleaning, but I love this book and the way it’s transforming my home.”

—Mary Carver
Coauthor, Choose Joy
How to Manage Your Home

Without

Losing Your Mind
How to Manage Your Home Without Losing Your Mind

Dealing with Your House’s Dirty Little Secrets

Dana K. White
To my husband, Bob. Thanks for embracing my special brand of crazy. Life with you is so much fun.
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Who Needs This Book?

Dear Person Who Picked Up This Book (and is flipping through the first few pages, deciding if you should buy it),

Let me help you decide. Not everyone needs this book. Rule yourself out as my target audience if you buy home management books because you get a kick out of cleaning and organizing gives you a thrill. If your home is ready for unexpected guests more often than not, you probably don’t need this book.

If you truly can’t understand how someone could sleep while dirty dishes are in her sink, close it up right now and move on to something else.

Okay. Now that it’s just us, I’ll talk to those who do need this book.

If you sleep like a baby, unaware your kitchen counters are piled high with dirty dishes, but want to cry when you walk into a disastrous kitchen the next morning, keep reading.

If you’ve ever wished you could donate dirty clothes because you’re so behind on laundry, you need this book.

If you’re continually overwhelmed in your home, and you’ve failed to change your housekeeping ways so many times you just don’t know if you have the energy to try again, this book is for you.

This is the book I never dreamed I’d write. If you’d told me six years ago I would one day write a book about cleaning and organizing, I would have laughed in your face.

Loudly.

And for a really long time.
Who Needs This Book?

After I caught my breath, I would have launched into a lengthy (and rather preachy) explanation of why I’d never do this. Using vague words like “struggle” and “personal challenges,” I’d be clear that due to my own passion for authenticity, I would never write about this particular subject.

Because this particular subject made me feel like a failure. A complete failure.

Why would anyone write a book about the thing she struggles with most?

As a theatre teacher turned stay-at-home mom, I craved a creative outlet. I discovered blogging. When I realized moms were writing and other moms were reading what they were writing, I knew I had to have a blog. Actually, I was obsessed with the idea of starting a blog.

Obsession is my style.

But for a year and a half, I didn’t. My house was a disaster. A continual disaster that magically reappeared no matter how hard I worked.

I’m not saying someone can’t have a blog while her house is a wreck, but I couldn’t. I knew myself and my history of messiness enough to know I couldn’t let one more thing distract me from my house.

And I didn’t want to be a fraud. I feared if I wrote rosy and wonderful things about motherhood and my passion for family, I’d be labeled a fraud if someone found out what my house looked like. I knew there was a disconnect, and I despised it.

Even with my new “I want to start a blog!” motivation for getting my house under control, I kept failing. In a moment of inspired desperation, I started a blog called A Slob Comes Clean. It was my completely anonymous practice blog, my way to justify blogging. I planned to use it as a place to learn about this fun thing I wanted to do, while keeping my focus on my house so I could finally get it under control.

I figured this experiment would take me three or four months. Tops.

I’m now pushing a decade of what I’ve termed “Slob Blogging.” Sharing the ins and outs of my deepest, darkest, most embarrassing secret with the world has been a long and often painful process, but I’m thankful. Focusing on my home and analyzing my whys and why-nots has worked. I understand now.
Who Needs This Book?

I know what it takes to manage my home without losing my mind.

If you’re still reading and you haven’t made up your mind yet about whether this book is for you, I’ll spell it out:

If you want to learn from the best, I’m not the best. If you want to clean your house from top to bottom and never have to clean it again, I’m not your woman. If you’re looking for tips that will help you tweak your already almost-perfect organizing strategies, move right along.

But if you want to finally understand what it takes to bring (and keep) your own home out of Disaster Status, this is the book for you. If you’ve cried real tears of pain and isolation because you just don’t get it, you’ve found your people.

I get it.

Here’s the dirty little secret about most organizing advice: It’s written by organized people. Their brains don’t work like mine.

I know what it takes to change. I know because I’ve done it. Every strategy I’m going to share with you has been tested and proven in my own Slob Lab. No hypotheses, just real life. These ways work, even when life happens. There’s no perfection here, no fairy tales. Just clear explanation of what you need to do to get your real-life home under control.

Oh. And I’m funny.
Part 1

Reality Check
My First Step: Giving Up on the Fantasy

**Fantasy:** I struggle to keep my home under control. I’m chronically disorganized or organizationally challenged.

**Reality:** I’m a slob.

In almost every fairy tale, someone cleans. Most of the princesses do housework during the story, but that’s before they are (or know they are) princesses. They make cleaning look fun. They sing and dance, and the dust never sends them into sneezing fits or makes their eyes swell shut. But once the prince arrives, cleaning’s over. Life is all about fancy dinners and sitting on thrones and smiling at peasants out of carriage windows and such.

Basically, they clean before they arrive at their destinies. Once they’re there, cleaning is irrelevant. Nobody talks about cleaning or worries about cleaning or even notices cleaning is happening. But everything stays clean.

Even though I would have told you I knew life wasn’t a fairy tale, when it came to cleaning, I embraced this delusion. I was confident that one day cleaning would be easy. My house would stay clean without me even realizing I was cleaning it.
So what awakened me from this delusionary dream?
My messy house.
My grown-up, married-woman, I’m-the-mama house.
I’d been messy since birth. I had a messy room as a child, a messy desk in elementary school, a messy locker in high school, and a messy dorm room in college.
I had apartments with roommates and by myself. All of them were messy. In case you aren’t convinced, I’m talking about more than folded laundry not being put away in a timely manner. Let me paint the (messy) picture.
My living spaces were shockingly messy. People who assured me they wouldn’t be shocked were so shocked they couldn’t hide it. And all my college friends were actors.
I’m talking about the kind of messy where you forget the color of the carpet. The kind of messy where you finally give up and eat off paper plates and drink from disposable cups.
And still the sink is full of dirty dishes 99.9 percent of the time.
This kind of messy makes you pretend you enjoy talking outside in freezing weather when someone stops by unexpectedly.
This kind of messy lets “I tripped over a pile” be an acceptable explanation for a broken toe.
But as I waded through the mess, I felt confident the day would come when I would no longer be messy. I didn’t worry that that day hadn’t yet arrived. It would happen when it mattered. Once I achieved my life goal of being a stay-at-home mom, everything would be easy. My house would be clean.
Reality hit once I was at that point, living in my grown-up house with nothing to do but be a wife and a mom, and my house wasn’t clean.
I was baffled.
I tried. I cleaned like a madwoman until I dropped in exhaustion, but as soon as I congratulated myself on my permanently changed ways, I looked up to see the mess was back.
I could get my home under control for a week, sometimes two, occasionally three weeks at a time. Life would happen, and the house went back to being a disaster.
My First Step: Giving Up on the Fantasy

I created the blog A Slob Comes Clean eight years after I arrived at the place in life where cleaning was supposed to be easy. I started on what I now call my deslobification journey in that moment of desperation in 2009. I did not want to use the s-word. I’d often told myself and others that no matter how bad it was, I was not a slob.

But that was the word that came to me. The word that worked.

A Slob Comes Clean is a catchy title and rather self-explanatory. I was ready to be honest with myself, and I was ready to get my house under control.

Still, it’s an insult. The dictionary definition is clear. You don’t call someone a slob if you want to be her friend.

And that’s why it worked. Once I called myself a slob, I couldn’t sugarcoat my “issues” anymore. I stopped making excuses.

There’s another reason I’m glad I used that awful word. It helped me find my people. As women started reading my blog, they weren’t horrified. Instead, they thanked me. These women were relieved to find someone who thought and struggled the way they did, and they were glad to know they weren’t alone.

As I learned more about these women who shared my struggles, I saw they were amazing, creative, intelligent people. They were artists and poets and teachers and musicians.

I liked them.

Over time, by connecting with women who told me the thoughts I expressed were their thoughts, too, I identified a relationship between the slob part of my brain (the part I despised) and the creative part of my brain (the part I loved). Knowing the direct relationship between these two sides helped me accept that being a slob is part of who I am. It’s how my brain works. This realization did not mean I should give up, but it did give me permission to stop feeling like a failure when traditional organizing advice (written by people whose brains are very different from mine) didn’t work for me. I just needed to find ways that worked for me, with my unique brain and in my unique home.
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