



5 Secret Rules to Get (and Keep) Your House Clean



THESTAYSANEMOM

www.theStaySaneMom.com

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(Also summary and memory aid. You're welcome.)

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Do first the tasks that will make the biggest difference.
Save for later the tasks that aren't as noticeable.

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Use strategic tests to figure out what works and what doesn't.
This means you must actually write things down.

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Figure out how often each task needs to be done.
Create a calendar.

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If it takes less than two minutes, do it right now.
If it takes more than two minutes, write it on your to do list right now.

Rule 5: Utilize Your Help

Tiny humans love to feel adult and useful.
Teens hate it, but need it just as much.
Strategically leverage the help of your progeny.

RULE 1: THE 80/20 RULE

(Do first the tasks that will make the biggest difference.)

The Basics

Known in the marketing world as “the Pareto Principle” or the “law of the vital few”, the 80/20 rule states that 80% of the results usually come from 20% of the actions.

In a marketing context, this means that 80% of your customers will generally come from 20% of your marketing efforts. (The problem there is you very rarely know which actions are going to be the ones to yield the big results.)

Now, applying this to your house, **the 80/20 rule implies that 80% of your results (i.e. the “wow it looks incredible in here” response) is going to come from 20% of the work you do** (i.e. cleaning, organizing, tidying, scrubbing, etc.)

The Benefits

The huge benefit of this rule is you don’t have to get absolutely everything done in order to get seriously impressive results. Once you find out what your 20% is, you have the key to making your house look mostly-clean almost all the time.

The Hard Part

As I bet you’ve guessed, **the hard part of this rule is figuring out which tasks constitute the 80% and which the 20%**. Most of this will be pretty intuitive. It doesn’t take an scientist to tell me that, in my household of two giant, shedding dogs and a rabbit the size of a housecat, vacuuming will make a much larger difference than would sanitizing the bathroom countertops.

In the next rule, we’ll cover just how to determine which two or three tasks belong in your 20%, but for now I’ll show you exactly how this breaks down in my household.

These three “20% tasks” make my house look mostly clean, even if I do nothing else:

Breaking It Down

1. Vacuuming all floors
2. Windexing the downstairs windows
3. Pledge-ing the downstairs sofas

Now, I’m not saying (by ANY means) that these are the only things I need to do to keep my house clean, but if I only have time to do three things, these are the ones that make the biggest impact.

The “Making it Your Own” worksheet at the end will guide you through the exact steps to find your 20% tasks, but first, you need to learn the other four rules.

RULE 2: USE A/B TESTING

(Use strategic tests to figure out what works and what doesn't.)

The Basics

Delving once again into the terminology of the marketing world, **A/B testing is a fancy term for testing two different options (option A and option B, if you hadn't guessed) to see which one gets better results.** It's usually used to test two different advertising campaigns, logos, or some other strategy. After a test period, you examine the results from option A and compare them to those of option B.

Now, coming back around to your toddler-toy-strewn living room, you'll find that testing is just as helpful as it is in the marketing world.

How To

Take the act of vacuuming as an example. In some houses, it might work best to vacuum main areas every day and the less-used areas only once a week. Other houses might not need daily vacuuming, but find that an all-over vacuuming every three to four days does the trick.

The thing here is you probably won't know what needs testing right away. You'll start out with a vague feeling that something is amuck, but it's not immediately obvious what.

Don't worry about that. We'll take you through the whole process in the workbook at the end. However, it's a good idea to get started with some good questions. Look at the ones below if you're ever having that "something feels wrong" thought about your house cleaning routine.

Questions to Ask Yourself

- When did I last clean this? How long did it take it to get dirty?
- What are the different ways of cleaning this item?
- Is it dirty (not clean) or messy (not organized)?
- Would this task be something I could delegate to a mini-me (one of the kids)?
- Considering our family's daily routine, would it make more impact to clean this in the morning or in the evening?
- When does this thing get the dirtiest? Does it make more sense to clean it right after or to wait until right before it needs to be used?
- What about my house drives me the craziest?
- Is there a better way of approaching this problem? What are the possibilities?
- Which of these two tasks makes a bigger difference in the big picture (see Rule 1)?

RULE 3: KNOW HOW OFTEN

(Figure out how often each task needs to be done.)

The Basics

Let's face it, nothing in a house is truly a "one time" task. Everything repeats.

No matter how well or thoroughly we clean, 99% of the work we do each day is going to have to be done all over again sometime in the next week.

Dogs shed constantly. People wear clothes (thank goodness). Kids track mud in on their soccer cleats. We cook things. And if you live in a house with toddlers, you know that spaghetti will get on the ceiling again within a few days. These are just facts of life.

When my husband and I moved into our first "real" house, the hardest part for me was figuring how often each task needed to be done.

Yes, technically, I could have cleaned the whole thing from top to bottom each morning, but I did have a life, a job, and a then-fourth-grader to take care of, so that wasn't ever the way it was going to go down.

How do you figure this out, you ask? You just read about testing (see Rule 2). You do it the only way anyone figures anything out: by doing it wrong about eighteen different ways before you finally get to that perfect "ahhhh" moment when you finally hit the nail on the proverbial head.

However hard it is to figure out, knowing how often each task needs to be done is the biggest step towards a perpetually-clean house.

Example: My Own Herd of Dustbunnies

Just to give you a sample of exactly how this plays out, I'll give you a list of my household tasks, each with the frequency I've painstakingly tested and discovered (see Rule 2) is about the "right" amount of time before it needs doing again.

- *Vacuuming Downstairs (Daily)*
- *Wiping the Kitchen Counters (Daily)*
- *Darks Load of Laundry (Daily)*
- *Cleaning Dog Drool off Walls (2 Days)*
- *Change Bunny Litterbox (2 Days)*
- *Whites Load of Laundry (3-4 Days)*
- *Vacuuming Upstairs (3-4 Days)*
- *Dust Downstairs (Weekly)*
- *Changing Beds/Sheets (Weekly)*
- *Bathing Dogs (Weekly)*
- *Dust Upstairs (2 Weeks)*
- *WD40-ing Sliding Door (2 Weeks)*
- *Deep Cleaning Kitchen (Monthly)*
- *WetVac/Shine Floors (Quarterly)*

Every house is different, so in 5 House Secrets the "Making It Your Own" workbook at the end, I'll walk you through exactly how to figure this out for your unique situation.

RULE 4: THE 2 MINUTE RULE

(If it takes less than two minutes, do it now. If not, write it on the list now.)

The Basics

The premise of this one is exceedingly simple:

When you see something that needs cleaning, fixing, or organizing in your house, ask yourself if it would take more or less than two minutes to do it.

- **If it takes less than two minutes, do it right then and there.**
- **If it takes less than two minutes, write it down on your to do list.**

Get a bill in the mail? It takes 60 seconds to write a check, throw a stamp on it, and chuck it by the door to go in the mailbox. Do it now.

Get several bills in the mail? That would require a trip up to your desk, some quality time with Quicken (or whatever financial app you use), and way more than two minutes. Write “pay bills” on your to do list and put it in the appropriate pile on your desk (an act which takes less than two minutes, so you do it now to get them off your counter) and move on.

The Downside

Eventually, you do have to do the tasks you put aside on your to do list. You can't keep your house clean if you never do anything that takes longer than two minutes to do.

The Benefits

Benefit 1: An Easy Choice

The first benefit of this rule is that it eliminates the hemming and hawing we all go through when we see that pile of dirty laundry on the floor. With the Two Minute Rule, the second we see something, we can apply this quick test and know exactly what to do. It saves time, but also thought. (And we moms know that's just as rare of a commodity.)

Benefit 2: Taking Immediate Action Reprograms Your Bad Habits

Giving yourself a “to do list” option for tasks that would take longer than two minutes means that you now respond immediately to 100% of your messy items, the second you see them. Not bad, right? Whether that action is writing the task down or actually getting it done, this will effectively eliminate your bad habit of seeing a task and thinking “meh, I'll do it later”.

Benefit 3: The Clutter Is ALWAYS Gone

So from now on, every time you see something that needs cleaning or organizing, you either clean it right away or put it in the appropriate pile with a “to do” item with it's name on it. This means that, either way, the mess is dealt with immediately!

RULE 5: UTILIZE YOUR HELP

(Strategically utilize the unpaid labor of your progeny.)

The Basics

Each of us moms have either birthed, adopted, or married into a small army of people we can ask (or order or nag) to help us with housework.

While I don't recommend you take a page out of Cinderella's Evil Stepmother's playbook and make them scrub floors or sew you a ballgown, strategically utilizing the help of your kids can have a great deal of benefits not only for you, but for them as well.

How Kids Benefit from Chores

Learning Responsibility and How the "Real World" Works

If you've ever lived in the adult world, you know the hard, cold truth that people aren't going to do your job for you. If you're lucky, they *might* do their own job correctly.

Once they leave your house, your kids are going to be expected to do their jobs (starting with college homework and later their actual jobs) on their own motivation and without being reminded. If you don't teach them these skills now, it's setting them up for a pretty rude awakening later on.

Childhood Chores are Correlated with Future Success

If you have ever spent time doing the Googlies on kids and chores (which I most certainly have), you've probably stumbled on Julie Lythcott-Haims' TED talk about raising successful kids. She talks about a research finding I've also seen elsewhere: success as an adult is predicted by doing chores as a kid.

This means that you forcing Junior to empty the dishwasher now actually makes him more likely to have a good job and healthier relationships later on. (He'll thank you then.)

There are Chore-Specific Benefits

Believe it or not, there are actual benefits from doing specific chores. The act of making your bed in the morning has been empirically tied to productivity and accomplishment during the day. Washing dishes has been shown to lower anxiety and nervousness. We all know that vacuuming is secret cardio. If you get crafty enough, you can match up your kids with chores that will most benefit them.

Considerations

- What are possible, age-appropriate tasks for each child?
- What tasks need doing when the child is at home (and done with homework)?
- What chores would your kids (gasp) actually enjoy (or not detest) doing?
- Can you find chores attached to their lives (i.e. feed the dog they begged to get)?

MAKING IT YOUR OWN

Use this worksheet to apply the 5 secret rules to your house.

Step 1

This one is the easiest. **Make a list of all the tasks you can think of that ever need doing in your house.** Anything you have to clean, wipe, fold, wash, mop, vacuum, windex, or otherwise sanitize...put it on the list. Each task gets its own line. If you need more room, feel free to print multiple copies of these pages. My crazy house definitely needs a lot more than 30 line items to stay clean.

Step 2

This one is a little rough because you actually have to do the things that you just listed. You don't have to do them all on one day (unless you really hate yourself or the queen is coming over), but **each time you complete one make sure you write down the date you clean it.**

Step 3

Now that you've done the hard part, you just pay attention to your house. **Every time you notice that one of the things you cleaned needs cleaning again, write down the date.** This part might take a month or even two in order for everything on your list to need redoing, but stick to it.

Step 4

This step should take about five minutes. **Go through each line and figure out how often that task "wants" to be completed.** For instance, if you first vacuumed a certain area on a Monday and noticed the dust bunnies began poking their heads out again on Thursday, you might choose to vacuum every 2-3 days to catch things before they get out of hand.

Don't stress this too much. Just use your best guess and you can fine-tune your choices as you go along.

Step 5

This one is decently simple. **Take a look over your list and do a mental check to see if any of your items can be delegated to a child (preferably one of yours).** Go back to Rule 5 for more ideas if you need to, but try to take into consideration things like ability level, age level, and likelihood it'll actually get done. (It doesn't help you stay sane if the nagging you'd have to do is more stressful than doing the task yourself.)

Step 6

Now that you have the whole spectrum of tasks, go over each item on your list and **pick the three things that make the biggest difference** in how clean your house feels (see Rule 1). These are your "20% tasks". You can color in the stars next to them, because coloring is fun.

Step 7

Now that you've done all the hard work **you finally get to create your plan.**

The "Your Ever-Clean House Plan" page will walk you through it step by step. There's also a sample page with the way my master plan is scheduled out, for your reference.

This plan is intentionally included twice because, like it or not, after you try it for a month or two, you're going to want to make changes.

MAKING IT YOUR OWN: THE MASTER LIST

Use this worksheet to apply the 5 secret rules to your house.

Step 1

Make a list of all the cleaning and organization tasks you can think of, no however big or small.

Step 2

Date First Cleaned

Step 3

Needs Re-Cleaning On

Step 4

Decided Frequency

Step 5

Delegatable to Child

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Step 6

YOUR BATTLE PLAN (SAMPLE)

Use this worksheet to apply the 5 secret rules to your house.

My 20% Tasks

Write the 3 tasks you starred as being the most important to your house feeling clean. Whether you like it or not, these are now "mandatory". If nothing else on your list gets done, you should still do these 3 things.

Vacuum Downstairs

Wipe Walls for Dog Drool

Clean Downstairs Windows

My Daily Routine

List any tasks you marked with a "Daily" frequency on your master list. If any of them are your 20% tasks, write it first and put a star next to it. Make a habit of making sure these happen first no matter what.

☆ Vacuum Downstairs
☆ Wipe Walls for Dog Drool
Wipe Kitchen Counters
Darks Load of Laundry (AM)

Feed Bunny
Fill Diffusers
Brush Dogs
Empty Dishwasher (if Needed)

Get Groceries
Fold Laundry (PM)
Walk Dogs

My Weekly Routine

Anything with a frequency of every 7 days or less gets scheduled here. Try to spread things out so no one day contains too much work to feasibly get done. Again, make sure 20% tasks go first and get a star.

M

T

W

R

F

S

U

☆ Windows

Dust Downstairs

Whites Laundry Load

Bunny Cage

Vacuum Upstairs

☆ Windows

Dust Upstairs

Change Bed Linens

Bunny Cage

Dust Downstairs

☆ Windows

Vacuum Garage

Whites Laundry Load

Bunny Cage

Wash Dogs

Deep Clean Kitchen

My Monthly Routine

Anything with a frequency of more than 7 days or less gets scheduled here. Most of your 20% tasks will probably be either daily or weekly, but if any live here don't forget to list them first and put a star.

Deep Clean Family Room
Mop and Shine Floors
Bleach Showers
Goodwill Cull from Closets
Clean Dogs' Teeth

Costco Run
Target Run
Create Monthly Budget Summary
Pay Mortgage / Update Spreadsheet
Clean/Magic Eraser Baseboards

YOUR BATTLE PLAN (THE FIRST TRY)

Use this worksheet to apply the 5 secret rules to your house.

My 20% Tasks

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Need more?

WANT TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

What if these 5 rules helped,
but you still need a little
more to get your house looking
exactly the way you want it?

Take the step-by-step course on
how to take your house from “total mess”
to “total wow”.

Pre-register today to reserve your spot!

[THESTAYSANEMOM.COM/GETCLEAN](https://www.theStaySaneMom.com/GETCLEAN)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Liz is a thirty-something mom with a preteen stepdaughter (and budding Instagram addict), a sparkle-clad toddlernado (who will surely grow up to be a linebacker or a crash test dummy), two large dogs (with a *Pinky and the Brain* type relationship), a rabbit the size of a large house cat, and a well-behaved herd of dust bunnies.

She's married to a lifelong New Yorker who is so wonderful he agreed to try the white picket fence thing in sunny Cali, where they now live with the aforementioned pack.

When she gets to be a person of her own (read: nights and nap-time) she's a PhD candidate, blogger, writer, fitness nut, freelance digital consultant, proud nerd, avid reader, and sleep enthusiast (although it's been a few years on that last one, but from what she remembers it was quite nice).

ABOUT THE MISSION

The Stay Sane Mom was born out of Liz's journey into wife-dom and motherhood.

She noticed that wife-ing, momming, and keeping a clean house were all possible by themselves, but when done all at the same time started to make her feel like she was (to be honest) slowly losing her mind. Worse than losing her mind, she also felt like her identity as a person other than "Mom" was slipping away as well.

So what happens when a nerd encounters a problem? Research. Lots of research. Also empirical tests, case studies, and anything else that could help her be "Liz" and "Mom" at the same time.

When she started coming to actual, useful conclusions, she decided to start building The Stay Sane Mom to share her revelations with other moms who wanted to be a person as well as being "Mom".

THESTAYSANEMOM



How To Series

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