



Tips for Hoarders on Hiring and Working with Professional Organizers

Laurene Livesey Park*

Are you, or is someone you know, a hoarder?

Are you considering hiring a Professional Organizer (PO) to help you deal with the clutter caused by hoarding behaviour? Working with hoarders requires specialized skills and the PO you choose must have knowledge of these skills and the ability to help you manage the impact that your organizing work will have on you, your home and family.

According to authors of *Buried in Treasures; Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding*¹, compulsive hoarding is thought to be present when these three criteria are met:

1. Someone accumulates and then has great difficulty discarding objects that most people would consider useless.
2. The resulting clutter is so severe that it limits the use of living spaces for the purpose for which they were intended.
3. The clutter, acquiring, or difficulty discarding causes significant impairment or distress.

Often, compulsive hoarders don't look for assistance from a Professional Organizer until they are forced by external pressure from family, friends, or landlords to make changes in their living environment. In order to realize lasting results, the client themselves must be ready to make dramatic changes, and an experienced Professional Organizer will look for cues that indicate this readiness for change. They may also ask that the hoarder be receiving psychological support to help them deal with the emotional impact that clearing out the clutter caused by their hoarding will cause.

What should you look for in a Professional Organizer?

Education! There are classes on working with hoarders available through the [National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization](#), and [Professional Organizers in Canada](#) – ask any PO you are considering hiring for details about their education in hoarding.

¹ pg. 13, 14, Tolin, Frost, Steketee, *Buried in Treasures; Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007.

A PO who understands learning styles and processing modalities will be able to use tools and techniques that match your own preferred style. For example, if you are someone who prefers to learn through the written word, the PO could leave you instructions and homework in a note or email, rather than just verbally.

Look for a PO with experience working with a team – you will probably need a number of people to help manage your space, and it takes experience to coordinate the people and services necessary. You may need to find a PO who is able to bring in complementary resources, such as additional helpers and a company to remove things from your property.

Consider the PO's personality – in hoarding situations, a certain amount of toughness is necessary, but this should be balanced with empathy and an understanding of your rhythm and need for breaks.

How much time do you have to commit to the project, and how soon do you want it finished?

An experienced PO will help you set a schedule that works for both of you – enough hours at a time to make progress, but not so many that you are overwhelmed and feel the need to retreat. Be aware that it is almost impossible to estimate how long it will take to do a full clear-out of a space cluttered by hoarding – it takes time to determine what is underneath your piles, and what kind of care may need to be taken.

A Professional Organizer can be a valuable part of a collaborative team helping to clear out the clutter that accumulates due to hoarding. For long term changes it is essential that the hoarder also receives psychological support from a mental health professional who understands hoarding issues and behaviours.

Visit the [POC Find an Organizer Directory](#) to find an organizer in your area.

*Laurene Livesey Park, a past President of Professional Organizers in Canada has been working as a Professional Organizer for over 10 years. She is a Certified Professional Organizer in Chronic Disorganization[®], teaches Professional Organizers, works hands-on with residential clients and writes and speaks about organizing.