

# Oscar Living in a Felix World



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ILLUSTRATION  
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Dentists by definition are generally considered focused, precise people with an excitement level about that of CPAs. The box inside of which they think, is full of millimeters, microns, and other tiny little quarks that have to be handled painstakingly with rubber gloves. Their work has been compared to that of repairing a fine watch while somebody spits on their hands, painting the Sistine Chapel wearing boxing gloves or solving Rubik's Cube blindfolded in a fetal position in less than 45 seconds.

Dentists spend their working hours in immaculate surroundings with the exception of the one that requires the rubber gloves. How is it then that they maintain their savoir faire in this stressful workplace? The answer: Female staff.

There are male dentists and there are women dentists. I have no idea how women dentists live their lives after leaving the sanctuary of the office, but I suspect the neatness syndrome carries over at home. That's their nature. Once a male dentist leaves the office, he metamorphoses into

his Mr. Hyde persona before he reaches the parking lot. Unless he has been raised in a family of sisters, aunts, and a mother bereft of a father to introduce him to the perks of his testosterone heritage, he is now an honorary citizen of Slobbovia.

How do I know this? My wife explains it to me on a fairly regular basis using inside information her mother passed on to her. All women are privy to these facts originally observed by Eve when she mentioned to Adam that one simply did not leave apple cores on the Chippendale or neglect to use a coaster under the vino flagon.

The list of no-nos has grown exponentially since then until I am hard put to explain away the condition of my desk to my severest friend and best critic. My theory that I still believe has merit, is that since the Grimm Brothers (1785-1863) wrote of the benevolent elves that snuck in during the night to make shoes for the kindly shoemaker, elves have gone bad. There are roving bands of malevolent

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Travelocity-type rogue gnomes who come in after I am sound asleep and raise havoc with my desk. I have not seen them, but how else to explain the messiness of my sanctum sanctorum? My wife, past whom very little gets, claims she knows the real reason and elves are just another manifestation of an untidy mind.

How exciting, then, to find vindication in the form of *The Perfect Mess*, a book written by Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman, subtitled *The Hidden Benefits of Disorder*.

“A book written about the virtues of messiness by two *guys*?” my bride scoffs. “Case closed.”

In their defense and in defense of messes in general, I quote reviewer Debra Hamel who says, “They argue the cost of

maintaining order can be higher than the benefits accrued from it.” There! I rest my own case.

*The Perfect Mess* cites a police chief in Bradford, Penn., who was fired for not having a neat desk and then goes on to state, “Fortunately for the world, Albert Einstein did not work for the city of Bradford. Einstein’s desk at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J., was maintained by all personal and photographic accounts, [to be] in a stupendous disarray.”

To those of us who aren’t absolutely anal compulsive on order, the two authors claim there has been no research to support the benefits of neatness. Furthermore, as a highly effective prioritizing and accessing system, you can’t beat a messy

desk up to a point. The urgent, important stuff written on cryptic Post-it notes tends to stay close to the surface because of the adhesive backing. The safely ignorable material gets buried until spousal prodding suggests a semi-annual cleanup is in order. My sophisticated filing system then gets crammed in drawers never to be seen again. A minor flaw if you believe in the “clean slate” theory.

Kate Lorenz, article and advice editor for CareerBuilder.com, brightly suggests, “If you don’t inject a little disorder in your life, you most likely will miss out on the serendipity of an unplanned success.”

I see no point in having my office staff read this material, but I feel better already. ■■■■