

PERFECTIONISM IS SO OVERRATED

I'm the kind of person who's dying to dust the house with a leaf blower. I compile lists of things you can clean in the dishwasher—beside dishes. I'm a disciple of Erma Bombeck, the wry columnist who penned the words, "Housework, if you do it right, will kill you."

Do I want to be a slave to my house, working my fingers raw to create a shimmering show palace? No. Just give me an orderly, presentable, and sanitary environment. But don't make me work too hard for it—I have a career, you know, dinner to get on the table, and Little League games to attend. To heck with perfectionism. I'm gonna cheat.

What exactly do I mean by "cheating at cleaning"? If there's a faster way to clean, I'm going to adopt it. If corners can be cut, I'm going to cut them. If technology offers more cleaning power, automated cleaning, and easy-care materials, I'm there. And I'm going to set my own standards for cleanliness—goals that may be somewhat south of Martha Stewart's.

These actually are exciting times for people who hate to clean. Nanotech materials—that is, materials designed for specific purposes, molecule by molecule—have begun to reach the market. While few such products are in wide circulation yet, the science has given us miracle microfiber cleaning cloths, window glass that cleans itself, and light bulbs that destroy odor-causing particles. Self-cleaning garments aren't far behind. Personally, I'm hoping for dinner plates that scrape themselves off and jump into the dishwasher.

This talk of products leads me to a couple of crucial points about the writing of this book. First, many people who want to cheat at cleaning also hope to do so for minimal cost. Rest assured that for every innovative product I mention, there are 20 ways to cut corners that don't involve

extra expense at all. Second, it's impossible to give specific advice without the occasional mention of brand names. I want you to know that I accepted no freebies from manufacturers when I researched this book; I bought all of my own products for testing and I don't sell these products either.

Speaking of research, you'll notice that this book is written in a unique way. As I hunted for the cheatingest shortcuts possible, I spoke with scores of experts who were generous with advice. I name them in the text because I want to acknowledge them and because I want you to appreciate the authority of the information and the freshness of this research.

I also hope you find this book as fun to read as it was for me to write. The core of this book is specific advice on how to cheat at cleaning. However, along the way you'll also hear about the junk-removal company that had to dispose of 13 enormous Buddha statues. The guy who washed his socks in the dishwasher (honest, I don't do that). The couple who use their robotic vacuum cleaner to serve beer to guests. The researcher who bought dirty underwear from his students—all in the name of science.

My final point is an invitation to you. Not every person I quote has an impressive string of letters after his or her name. I'll be writing about home management for a long while, and I welcome tips and feedback from savvy readers such as yourself. Please feel free to write to me in care of this publisher, or stop in at www.jeffbrenenberg.com and provide your input over the Internet. I may not put your name in lights, but I'll be happy to brand you as a first-class cheater.

—Jeff Bredenberg