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It's about that raise ...

If all it takes is moving my garbage can into the proper corner, Why not?

Rebecca Eckler
National Post



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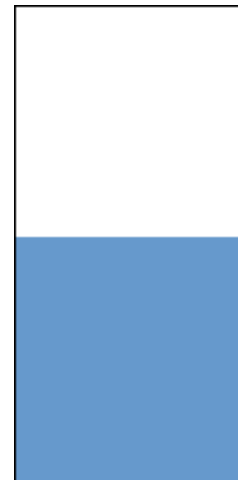
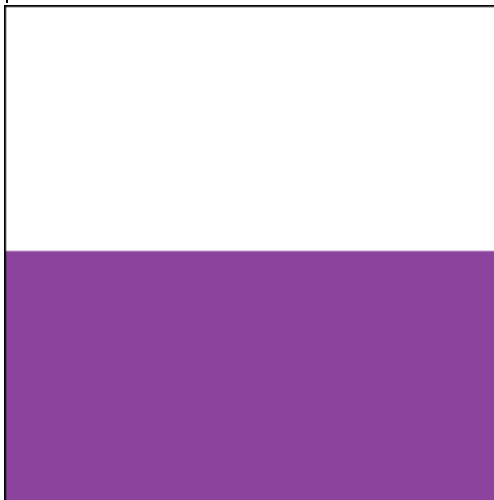
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Monday, July 15, 2002

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This is the first of a series in which Rebecca Eckler reports on a course she took to boost her prosperity through feng shui. The series will run daily in this section until Thursday.



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I know I am a Taurus and I know the personality traits of a Taurus. If I remember, I read my horoscope in the newspaper. The only horoscope I have ever followed was the one that told me I should go back to bed because my day was going to be awful.

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The reason I went back to bed was not because I believed my day was going to be a disaster but because I didn't feel like working.

I have done yoga but have never reached that meditative state everyone keeps yammering on about. I once visited a doctor who practises Chinese medicine. I paid \$100 for some weeds. They are still in the same brown paper lunch bag in my kitchen cupboard.

About once a year I'll get my palm read. Within a day, I'll have forgotten what the psychic told me was going to happen.

All of which is to say I don't actually buy into any of this stuff, just so you know. But when a feng shui consultant named Vicky White asked me if I wanted to take part in her tele-classes on "How to feng shui my office to boost my prosperity" I thought why not? I like prosperity. If moving a garbage can into the proper corner of my office could get me that raise or if all it took was lighting a candle or something to get prime assignments to cover, why the heck not?

After all, businesses like Shell, Borders bookstore, Citibank, Trump Towers, the MGM Grand hotel in Las Vegas, Coca Cola, Virgin Airlines and the Bank of England have all used feng shui, and as far as I know, they are quite successful companies. At least they are successful enough for me to have heard of them.

"You have the power to create what you want and have your environment support you. Business flourishes, relationships are enhanced, and stress levels decrease," I read on White's Web site before I agreed to participate in the class. I admit I laughed at this. Sure, whatever.

But in her Web site picture, Vicky looked pretty normal. And since the classes were to be held over the telephone, I figured I could smoke, have a glass of wine, and not have to get out of my pyjamas while learning how to become the world's best journalist. I'd probaby just have to hang a crystal over my head or something. There are worse ways to spend an hour. I signed up.

The five one-hour phone classes are to be held over a two-and-a-half-week period.

Ten people, from all over the world, are going to be taking part in the class. Each has paid US\$129. We have all been given a special



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number to call Vicky for the conference call.

Right now, the only thing I know about feng shui is that it was big a few years ago and I guess it still is.

It's 8 p.m. Eastern Time when I call for the first class.

I'm a minute late. All the other students are already on the line, raring to go.

First, Vicky, a New Zealander who has lived in Vancouver for four years and who has 20 years of feng shui experience, introduces herself. "Welcome to the class. I'm really excited to have you here. I've seen the profound effect of feng shui on my life and the lives of my clients. It's the most amazing, powerful thing."

The rest of us then introduce ourselves and say what we want to get out of the class. I'm a bit worried when I hear what the others have to say.

Karen, calling from North Carolina, is a business consultant and really wants her life to "flow, so it can all happen."

Judy, from southern California, also a consultant, wants "more clients and more prosperity."

Rolph, calling from Switzerland (where it's 3 a.m.), works in the tourism business. (I realize immediately that I would like to get to know this Rolph better, as he lives on a lake in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Must remember to get his e-mail address at the end of the classes.)

Janna is calling from New Jersey. She's a management consultant who has just moved her business into her home. She'd like to "promote productivity."

Beverly, who lives in Victoria and is a part-time Web editor, needs help with "organization and focus."

Most of us, including me, work out of home offices. I just want to be the most successful person in my industry, and make a lot of money, if that's not too much to ask. And I say so.

We learn there are three key principles in feng shui (pronounced fung-shway), which is the art of arranging your environment to enhance your life. The practice of feng shui is apparently 4,000 years old.

The first principle of feng shui is that "everything is alive," made up of molecules that are constantly moving, and that includes our furniture. Second, "everything is connected." If you have chaos in one area of your office, it will affect the rest of your life. Finally, "everything is constantly changing."

We've been on the phone for about half an hour now. I really have to go to the washroom.

"The number one thing that will have the greatest effect," says Vicky, catching my attention, "is to CLEAR YOUR CLUTTER. Clutter stagnates energy. Think of clutter as emotional constipation. Clutter makes dead energy. You have to be vigilant about getting rid of your clutter."

This is immediately something that concerns me. Think of the messiest, most disorganized person you know. I am 10 times worse than that. My friends call me the secret slob. I can leave the house looking great. But underneath my boots are mismatched socks. My boyfriend, who has a housekeeper once a week, has already warned me that when we move in together, she will be coming twice a week.

So cleaning clutter will make me more prosperous, and more successful?

I tell Vicky that, just yesterday, I did a major cleaning in my work space, and immediately afterwards I got into a wicked fight with my boyfriend, so how can cleaning possibly be good?

"Yes, but did you clear the air about something that needed clearing up with him?"

"Uh, yeah. Yeah. OK. You're right."

And it's true. We did make up and things were better.

Next, Vicky asks us to write down what success means to us.

Karen says success means "the freedom to make choices." Others say more of the same. I'm embarrassed to say the words I've written down for what I think success is: "Money, admiration, lots of vacation time." But I say it. I am way past lying to teachers.

We are given our homework assignment: Clean the clutter off our desks and in our office. This, supposedly, will help "create an environment for success."

Next class, we are learning about the "bagua," which helps determine how certain areas of our office space affect corresponding areas of our lives. I have never been so motivated to clean my work space, though I still am not a believer. Yet.

(For more information on tele-feng shui classes, go to www.LifeDesignStrategies.com)

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E-mails count as 'clutter'?

Other students, apparently, took the homework seriously

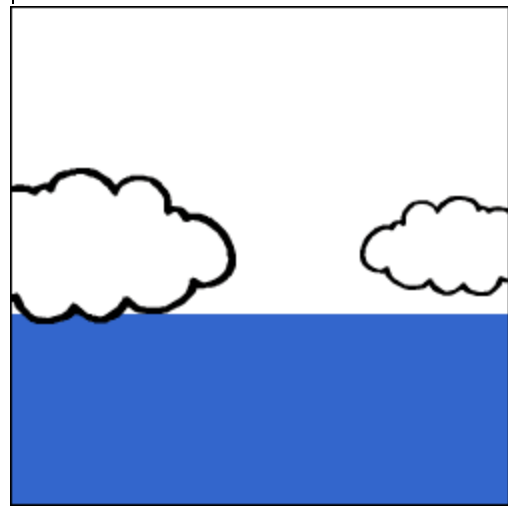
Rebecca Eckler
National Post

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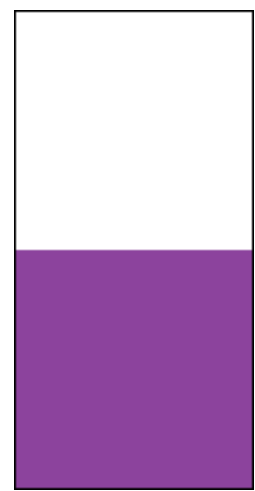
It's been five days since my first telephone class with Vicky White, who runs "How to feng shui your office to boost your prosperity" courses out of her home in Vancouver.

After that class, I was eager to clean out my office and my desk, which was our homework assignment. Vicky promised we would feel much better and would see a change in our work life. Sometimes feng shui is immediate, she told us, but sometimes it takes a few weeks to create something new in your life.

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Now we're in class two. I have done absolutely nothing. In fact, my desk has never been messier. I have 12 reporter's notebooks, two cans of Diet Coke, three magazines, a hairbrush, Tylenol cold pills, a bottle of vitamin C, a wedding invitation, a Daytimer from 1998 and, don't ask, some cake mix on my desk, along with my laptop, which is all I really need for work.

Now Vicky, with 10 of us students on the line in one big conference call, wants to know how we all did with our homework assignment. Please don't pick me, I pray, please don't pick me. It's inevitable though. I know she will eventually call out "Rebecca," and I'll have to think of something to say fast.

Karen goes first. Of course she does, because Karen is a good student and actually cleaned her clutter.

"A month ago," says Karen, "I had 1,032 messages in my e-mail in box. Now I have 17. I got rid of most of them all in the past three days. I feel wonderful. I feel like I've turned in a mammoth term paper."

(I have 2,046 e-mails in my in box. I didn't even think about that "clutter.")

Judy says she has a "positive" and a "negative" to share with us. "The positive is I cleaned off my desk. I feel much better. But the negative is that there's now a lot of stuff on my floor," she laughs.

Another student says she cleaned her desk, and that same day she got a new client. Maybe this feng shui thing does work.

Vicky calls my name, as I'm the only student who hasn't said anything. I could easily lie and say I did clean my clutter, but I don't.

"Well, I'm really very sorry. But I did nothing," I admit, and then pull my best trick from not-doing-my-homework student days. I change the subject.

"I told my friend I was doing this feng shui course and he said that if I play music in my office when I leave, that will bring good energy," I tell the class.

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"I've never heard of that," Vicky says. OK, my plan didn't work.

Judy suggests I give myself a reward if I clean up, because that works for her. It's kind of her to offer this advice, but I don't want to tell her that I've never, ever had a problem with not rewarding myself, even when I do nothing. I'm all about immediate gratification.

"I guarantee you if you clean your clutter you will feel the difference and be inspired. Whatever it is you are trying to achieve will be stirred up," says Vicky. I promise to clean my clutter before the next class.

Thankfully, we move on to today's lesson, the bagua. The bagua is used to determine how the areas of your workspace affect corresponding areas in your life.

In feng shui, our offices are divided into nine equal portions. When you are standing at the door to your office, looking in, the far left-hand corner of your space is the Wealth and Prosperity corner, the middle of the far wall is the Fame and Reputation area, the far right-hand corner is the Love and Relationship corner. To the right of the wall the office door is on is the Travel area, the middle area on this wall is the Career area, and the left area is Knowledge and Self-Cultivation. In the middle of the room, to the left, is the Health and Family area, and the right area is the Creativity and Children area. The centre is nothing but the centre. (You can use this bagua map for any room you want to feng shui.)

"Knowing how to orient the bagua map correctly will help you look at different aspects of your life," says Vicky. "For instance, if you would like to create a new relationship or improve an existing one, focus on the Love and Relationship area of the office and you can improve and enhance that area with feng shui."

If there is clutter in that area, for example, that could be responsible for a breakup or bad fight. If clutter is in the Career area, that could be a reason for not getting a promotion or raise.

I like to travel, and notice that a little shelf in my Travel area is completely cluttered. I wonder, if I clean it up, will I get to travel more?

To find out, I suppose I'll have to clean it.

We each talk a bit about our offices. My desk, it turns out, is faced the wrong way for feng shui. We should always be facing the door to our offices when sitting at our desks. "You never see a CEO of a big corporation with his back to the door," says Vicky.

But, I tell her, I like looking out my window. Still, I'm going to listen to her. She knows feng shui. I don't.

My desk is located in my Fame and Reputation corner, so it couldn't hurt to see how I will be perceived in the community after I switch my desk around.

We learn that it's always wise when you're sitting at your desk to have your back facing a solid wall. We learn that our desks "hold the history" of the person who had it before us. My desk is a hand-me-down from a friend, Tess, who has always been quite successful at everything she does. She's just one of those lucky people. Maybe it's because of this desk, which I never fully appreciated until this class, that I'm quite happy with my job. Maybe it has everything to do with the desk.

"One of my clients," says Vicky, "used a desk that her father had used. But her father's business went downhill. So she realized she should get rid of it, and immediately her business improved."

(As a side note, our beds also hold the history of anyone who has ever been in it. This is why if you're getting married, says Vicky, you should always get a new bed. Imagine if we did this after every bad relationship. Does she not know beds are really expensive?)

Some of us can't move our desks to face the door because they are too heavy to move. So we learn that if you can't move your desk into a position where you're facing the doorway, you should get a mirror, like a sideview or rearview car mirror, so you can always see your door from behind. This supposedly helps.

Time is up. Our homework is to clean out our desk drawers and continue getting rid of our clutter. Next class, we learn how to enhance our bagua areas, so we can all become the successful, enviable people we want to be.



THIS SUMMER'S BIGGEST EVENT IS ALMOST HERE.



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I think I have too much wood

It makes you stubborn, but isn't that my charm?

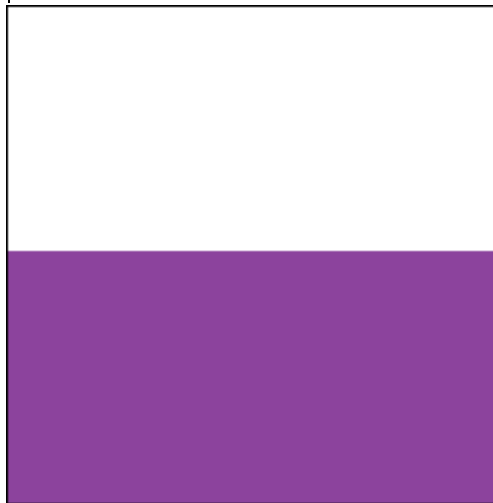
Rebecca Eckler
National Post

This is the third in a series in which Rebecca Eckler reports on a course she took to boost her prosperity through feng shui. The series ends tomorrow.

It's the third class of "How to feng shui my office to boost my prosperity": I've been a good student. I've cleaned three garbage bags of clutter from my workspace, which, in feng shui, is the first and most important step in becoming incredibly successful in your career.

I've also turned my desk around, so I'm now facing my office door. I learned last class you should always be able to see your office door, even if this means you have to put up a rearview mirror in front of your desk. Today, we're learning to "enhance" the nine different

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areas (this is called the bagua) of our office: wealth and prosperity, fame and reputation, love and relationships, health and family, creativity and children, the centre, knowledge and self-cultivation, career, and travel.

(If you missed yesterday's article about where the nine areas are, check www.nationalpost.com to catch up.)



Nine other students are in this teleclass (Rolph gets up at 3 a.m. Switzerland time to participate).

Vicky White, the teacher, starts each class by asking us in a conference call how we are getting along.

Casey pipes up first. "Two things happened to me," she says. "I had a lady track me down to be a client, and another girl is going to help me with my direct sales."

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I forget what Casey does for a living, but her excitement is contagious. "I think things are finally starting to happen for me because I cleaned the clutter off my floor," she says.


"That's what happens," says Vicky. "You change something in your office, and things will start happening."

Apparently, you can't hide from feng shui. Every inch of your office is affected by something. If you have clutter in your wealth and prosperity area, it will block your cash flow. If there is clutter in your love and relationship area, you will find it difficult to get into new relationships (including business ones) or resolve issues in work situations.

If there's clutter in your career area, you could have trouble discovering your purpose, and your ability to advance or change careers will be affected.

If you have clutter in your health and family area, it will have damaging health consequences. This is all pretty basic, but I'm learning things can get complicated.

In feng shui, everything is made up of varying combinations of five elements: wood (promotes growth and healing), fire (expansion and transformation), earth (grounding and support,) metal (mental



WEATHER

energy) and water (renewal).

If you have too much of one element in a certain bagua area, you have to balance that out.

According to Vicky, we will often know instinctively when the "energy" in our offices is out of balance. I have no idea when the energy in my office is unbalanced. I know once a month I am quite unbalanced, but that's something entirely different. I wonder if there's a feng shui course for PMS. Basically, I just know if my office is clean or messy, and that's it.

"For example," says Vicky, "one of my clients had a picture of a coal miner in her career area. But a picture of a coal miner represents struggle and maybe bad health. So she moved it and that made things better."

I have a huge wooden desk, hardwood floors, wooden chairs, wooden bookshelves and a piano, made of wood, in my office. I'm thinking I have too much wood, which, according to feng shui, can make one feel overwhelmed, rigid and stubborn. (But isn't that my charm?)

Water is represented by reflective surfaces. I have doors in my office made out of mirrors. (We've also been told that if you have mirrors in your office, make sure that if you look in them, you can't see any clutter. This is a big no-no.)

Too much "water" can make you emotional, depressed and overwhelmed. (But isn't that just me?)

I think I'm mostly missing the fire element, which, according to feng shui, means I will be lethargic, impatient and feeling distant from others. (Wasn't I born that way?)

The fire element is represented by the colour red. I do have red folding chairs, so I make a mental note to take them out and put them in the fame and reputation area of my office. Red supposedly will give me more energy, passion, motivation and excitement.

"You don't want to put water in your fame and reputation area," says Vicky. "Water puts out fire."

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(Just so you know, you should never put anything like a water fountain or pictures of an ocean in your bedroom. That puts the fire out. And who wants that, especially in the bedroom?)

I have never looked so closely at my office furniture before.

We also learn there are "hazardous materials" for areas of our offices. For example, never have unhealthy plants in your health and family area. Never have broken items, reminders of bad times or trash cans in your prosperity and wealth area.

But there are also ways to enhance your areas. You should hang certificates, diplomas and awards in your fame and reputation area. Keep healthy plants and family photographs in your health and family area. In your prosperity and wealth area, put wind chimes.

Images of water or mirrors are great in the career area.

Plants are good, because they symbolize growth and new life, an easy way to enhance the energy in your office.

Our homework assignment today is to clean our windows (because in feng shui if you have dirty windows you're not seeing the world clearly) and to clear our bookshelves, so we only have books that mean something to us.

I'm not sure if it's because I changed my desk around, which is in my career area, but I am being sent to Calgary for a work assignment. Which means it's also a free trip to visit my boyfriend.

Maybe it's all because I cleaned the clutter in the travel area of my office. Maybe there is something to be said for this feng shui thing.

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I feel like I just got an A+ on my report card

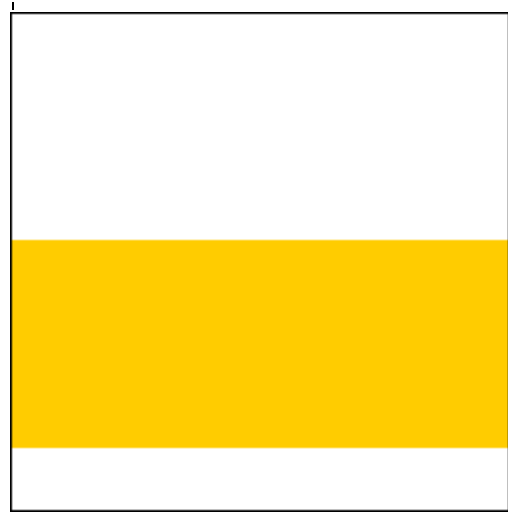
Rebecca Eckler
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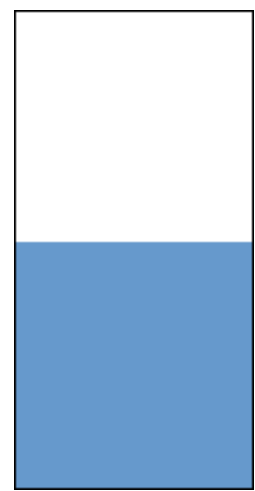
It's my last class in office feng shui. Truth be told, I missed the previous class. I like to think this is because I've applied some of what I've learned in these classes, which have been conducted over the phone and taught by Vicky White, a woman with 20 years' experience in feng shui. I cleaned the clutter in the "Travel" area of my office, and I put a red chair in my "Fame and Reputation" corner, to enhance my motivation and passion, and I switched my desk around, so, like CEOs, I now face the office door.

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All of which could just possibly be the reason I got a work assignment in Calgary (a free trip to visit my boyfriend), which is also the reason I had to miss a class.

I was a non-believer in feng shui at the start of this course, but I'm changing my mind. This course has affected everyone in the class.

"I walked into my office today, which I share with my partner, and I found a sticky note on my computer which said, 'Your desk is too darn clean. You're making me jealous'," says Karen, one of the students.

Tamara, another student, has had a feng shui accident. I'm guessing this is what it is called. In any case, it's quite unfortunate.

"Basically, I have cleaned all my clutter," she tells the class, "and the room feels really good. I have practically no clutter left. But yesterday my computer crashed. I'm wondering what that means. This has never happened before."

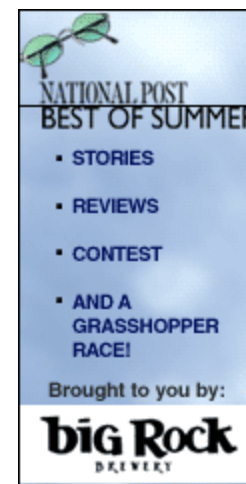
If my computer crashed, I'd cry, especially if the feng shui, which is supposed to help us be successful, was responsible.

Vicky asks if Tamara thinks her computer is "trying to tell her something." The class talks about what this could mean. There was a big storm the night before, says Tamara, which could have been responsible.

"You might not want to read too much into a crashed computer," says Beverly, another student. "It could just be a crashed computer."

Vicky says we can get messages out of most things, but there is randomness in our lives. "Computers do crash," she says. "Maybe you should clean the clutter in your e-mail?" she suggests. We move on.

I tell the class about my travels, and how, after cleaning the clutter in the Travel area of my office, I found out I probably will be doing quite a bit of travelling this summer. For example, right now, I'm planning a wonderful summer vacation in the south of France. Everyone is very impressed, and I feel like I just got an A plus on my report card.



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S&P 500	▼	-23.71	857.85
Nasdaq	▼	-22.08	1334.87
C\$ (in US\$)	▼	-0.0015	0.6477

updated 13:42 ET

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WAKE UP INSPIRED.



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Karen tells Vicky she heard from a friend that it's bad to have wicker or bamboo furniture because bamboo is dead (like my oak desk isn't?), and asks if bamboo could bring on negative energy.

"Sometimes people come up with the strangest things in feng shui. But that's not true. It doesn't make sense at all," says Vicky.

Tamara thinks this feng shui office course has changed her whole life for the better.

"Usually when I tell my 17-year-old son to do something, he just scoffs at me. But I just felt so powerful after cleaning my office, and when I asked him to do something earlier, he did it -- with no complaints."

This is probably because if you change the energy in one room in your house, says Vicky, you will change the energy in the entire house.

Judy hung a small bell in her Wealth corner and in a week, she got two new clients.

Rolph, the student who calls in for class from Switzerland, I can't help but think, also must have cleaned up the clutter in his Travel area. He's not in class today because he had to go on a work-related trip to Germany.

"Maybe it doesn't make sense," says Vicky. "Maybe you can't explain feng shui. But there is a lot of stuff in life that works that can't be explained."

I can't help but ask, what happens if I become messy again? What if the clutter piles up tomorrow, which it inevitably will. Will my life turn bad again?

"If you don't keep up the feng shui, your life won't turn bad. What you have achieved now will continue, until maybe your environment gets clogged up with clutter, at which time things will slow down. But if you want to support your continued growth and prosperity, feng sui is extremely powerful in doing that. At the very least, I would recommend paying attention to the clutter. In your case for example, if you want the energy to flow smoothly in the Travel aspect of your life, I would keep it clutter-free. Otherwise you might

find that part of your life getting bogged down and you might not get what you are wanting," Vicky says.

Feng shui is not a toy, we are told. It can be dangerous and powerful.

"If you're in a terrible relationship and use feng shui to help in that area of your office, what will happen is you will either have a huge blowup with your partner and decide to deal with it or you'll decide you don't want to be in that relationship. Feng shui won't fix the relationship, but it takes you to the place where you need to be to go forward," says Vicky. "Let's say you want to work on the Wealth corner of your office because you want a raise or to rise up the ranks, or want to be recognized by a superior. Let's say you hang a crystal there to enhance that area of your life. It might mean you get fired from your job, but that will force you to change. It supports you moving forward. Yes, sometimes, doing feng shui can lead to a shock in your system. But you will realize it was a good thing, even if it seemed uncomfortable at the time."

I'm glad I took the class. But I have always liked my job, and because of this, I'm not going to go crazy over cleaning clutter and hanging crystals from the ceiling in every corner of my office. I mean, why tempt fate?

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