Burn Your House Down!

And 99 other ways to create an organized life

Organize, Simplify and Multiply Your Joy!

by Professional Organizer,
Kim Wolinski, MSW
“Dr. DeClutter” CSI
Clutter Scene Investigator

www.DrDeClutter.com

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PO Box 6149
Longmont, CO  80501   USA
kim@drdeclutter.com
303.485.5280
www.drdeclutter.com

Editors: Cari Taplan, Lori Mitchell [www.impactediting.com](http://www.impactediting.com)
eBook design and typography: Kim Wolinski
eBook cover design: Kim Wolinski

Contact Kim's office to book her for speaker events, book signings and more.
kim@drdeclutter.com   303.485.5280

Dr. DeClutter’s Newsletter:
Get on Kim’s e-mail list to be alerted of book signings, upcoming events and future publications.
Dedicated to…

My mom, who can hold ‘em, fold ‘em, contain and organize ‘em really well, giving me the “O” Gene for life! Love you, mom!

And to my dad who passed away before this book was finished. Love you, dad.

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude to so many participants who have attended my organizing classes, workshops and seminars over the years. To all who have told their truth about their frustrations, guilt, shame, embarrassment and anger with piles and heaps and stacks and mounds of stuckness—inside and out. And, to my hundreds of organizing clients who have invited me into their homes, offices, heads and emotional dark places to help them to bring order to chaos, and joy back into their lives. I am honored.
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**Introduction**

Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I have been in a relationship for about 9 years; we’ve lived together for about 6 years. Periodically, I bring up the subject of her getting rid of clutter. When I say clutter I mean to the extreme. The garage is filled to the brim—only has a walkway, which I had to clear. There is an attic that is full, every room, every drawer and closet is packed. When you need to get something you either must clear an opening or deal with an avalanche. Tables are overflowing, cabinets maxed out, rental storage is maxed out too.

I have decided to take time off of work to deal with this, but she refuses to get rid of anything. When she goes to work I compact stuff into boxes and mark what’s in there, but after 2 weeks of doing this I am getting nowhere, it has not even made a dent. I am at the point where, when I walk into a room and look at where to begin I get so overwhelmed that I just do nothing. Is there relationship, legal or any advice you can give me? If the fire department saw the inside of this once beautiful house, it would be closed due to hazard. I am desperate at this point.

Please help me, Paul

Miami, Florida

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I came across your website a couple of weeks ago and have been considering having you come to my home to help me declutter my life.

I used to have a nice clean, clutter free home. Then I had 2 kids, post-partum depression, and I have some ongoing health issues. Mainly, I tried to fill my sadness, pain, etc. with "things" somehow thinking it would make me feel better. Now I have a huge mess on my hands and I want it all gone - yesterday. Yet, I don't know where to begin and just don't feel like I can tackle it alone.

I would like my home to be back to a simple, clutter free state. I am not a knick-knack person. I don't collect anything. I like my counters and table bare, free of anything. I like everything to have a home, and right now that is not the case.

Help, Jan

Omaha, Nebraska
Got Clutter?
TV shows feature it. Radio talk shows love it. Magazine articles are all about it too. A billion dollar industry trying to keep it and us all organized. There are blogs, e-newsletters and online forums, classes and books all trying to educate us on how to control our urge to splurge and to merge into every corner of our homes and land. Some people have made their life's work from it; you can hire us for hours on end to get it all organized again and again. What is this “it” that is so important that it's spawned its own industry over the past few decades? “It” is material clutter.

Okay, well, actually that’s not really “it.” The real truth is that we have lost the ability to manage our inner “it”—we have become incapable of saying no, enough!

A REVIEW OF COLLECTIONS OF NOTHING
In his book, Collections of Nothing, part memoir and part dissertation on the psychological impulses behind the urge to accumulate, author William Davies King spins his real-life clutter-bug and collector's engaging tale of one man’s clutter and cluttered pathology, taking us deep inside the soul of the solitary collector. A lovable eccentric, he collects with purpose and passion—rusty nails, loops of wire, old coffee tins, bottle caps, glass eyeballs, cat food, cereal boxes, skeleton keys, seafood tins, water bottle labels, envelope liners, strips of masking tape, canceled credit cards, boulders—to name a very few. He didn’t tell his therapist about his collection for three years. You might call it junk, but to King, it’s a very special sort of nothing. No one on earth has a garage quite like his, and that might be a good thing.

In his philosophy, King clearly finds joy in his "collections" and believes that the impulse to collect comes "partly from a wound we feel deep inside this richest, most materialistic of all societies." But he also considers other possibilities—"It finds order in things, virtue in preservation, knowledge in obscurity, and above all it discovers and even creates value." He is endeared to "the mute, meager, practically valueless object. ... "What I like is the potency of the impotent thing, the renewed and adorable life I find in the dead and despised object." For him, there’s "something in nothing." And he has lots of it—nothing.

Psychologists estimate that 4 million Americans do not ever throw anything away. The rest of us are right behind them, unable to stop buying, collecting, storing, stacking, piling, heaping, hoarding and adding to our stash of outer “it” that we now jokingly and painfully call clutter.

Look around your room, home or office and answer the following questions with a yes or no.
1. Is it calm and relaxing, a sanctuary and beautiful castle for me to live, dream and play in?
2. Do I love inviting friends and family to my house?
3. Is it easy to find what I’m looking for?
4. Is my paper under control and filed neatly?
If you answered no to any of these questions due to clutter, it’s time to mark your calendar for some organizing—internally and externally.

Don’t be a slave to stuff.
**EXERCISE**

Sit back and relax. Visualize your home and ask yourself, "Why do I love an organized home?" See, hear and feel what comes up in your mind. Now, still relaxed and calm, visualize how you would like to see your home and/or office organized and just right for you. What did you get rid of? What did you move? What did you bring in to make it better?

**What's Your Big Picture?**

We are storytelling, pattern seeking creatures. The inherent problem is that our “stuff holds stories.” We create patterns of disorganization and keep telling the same stories about it, making us feel bad about ourselves and our homes—which should be our castle, our sanctuary from the crazy world “out there.”

It's important to change these patterns and tell new stories to create a new life. It’s imperative to see the big picture of what we really want in order to make the incremental changes needed to get the outcome we desire. The problem is that we live in the space age with brains from the Stone Age. This being the cellular truth about humans, we quite naturally are still "collecting" rocks, boulders, sticks and shiny objects to trade in for the newest of shapes and forms for survival and security.

Answer these questions honestly and pay attention to the emotions, the feelings that arise inside your body and the thoughts that are stirred up in your mind.

1. Where is your clutter?
2. How did it get there?
3. Why is it still there?
4. Where does it belong?
5. What do you say to others about the condition of your home or office in relation to clutter?
6. Who would you be without the story, “I'm so disorganized!”?
7. Who would you be with the story, “I love being so organized all the time!”?

If you found yourself saying “I don't know” and feeling stress, anger, fear, embarrassment, shame or guilt about the condition of your stuff and things and your ability to get them and keep them orderly, you’ve just purchased the right guide to change all that! Welcome to the world of:

“How did my house get this messy;
how can I get it organized;
and how can I keep it that way forever?”
You're not alone!
Why is This Book Titled “Burn Your House Down”?  

Reason #1: People are frustrated, stressed and angry about feeling out of control of their belongings and possessions. They complain and feel ashamed, embarrassed, guilty and overwhelmed. They ignore their stuff and then stuff their stuff into back rooms and corners and ultimately they give up. I can’t tell you the number of people I’ve met worldwide who don’t hesitate to say, “I’d rather burn my house down than deal with all this clutter and stuff! I’m so stressed out about it I could scream!” I had one email from a desperate woman who said she’d rather die than deal with it.

For some, collecting, hoarding and out of control clutter is past the point of humorous “stuff”, it is literally ruining their lives. There are support groups for clutterers, at least 50 cities in 17 states have chapters of Clutterers Anonymous, a 12-step recovery program. (Search “clutterers anonymous” online.)

Too many people are frustrated with the accumulation of stuff and things, piles and heaps and the overflow and overwhelm they feel about their disorganized and cluttered lives. I’ve not known anyone who deliberately burned their house down to deal with it, but I do know several who have bought the house next door in order to live comfortably in one while leaving the clutter in the other!

STORY

A new client was excited to have me help her cull out her basement storage area. There wasn't really that much there, some wedding gifts from years before, her son had moved home in between college decisions leaving a mess, but really not a big job. We would discuss and decide on what to do with items in between her continually leaving the basement and going upstairs for no apparent reason. My organizing jobs are three hours minimum. One of my “rules” is to “stay in the room” so that we can get the job done! About an hour and a half into the job she yelled down the stairs saying, "I can't take this anymore. We will find my checkbook and I will pay you your full fee and we're done." I loaded up my van with the donations we had collected; on shooing me out the door she did laugh a bit but didn't explain why she had such an emotional crash. You never know what's going on for people and what buttons will be pushed when unearthing the past and deciding on present clutter in regards to why they can't "stay in the room."

Reason #2: Life's so very short and precious. I want to help people stop struggling. Life should be joyful and fun! The stuff and things you own should bring you joy and fun!

When people around me complain about clutter, or are attending my workshops on organizing, I challenge them to think about and answer these two defining questions: 1) if your house burned down today, would you really miss anything? And, 2) if your house was burning right now and you were given a generous 60-seconds to run in and take anything you could out of it (all living beings and your purse/wallet and ID are out already) what would you choose, and is it ready to go now?

Kim Wolinski, MSW  “Dr. DeClutter”  www.drdeclutter.com
How well can you answer these questions? An unorganized house and/or office are not ready for this challenge. There is a lot of sadness, remorse and regrets in the aftermath of fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and other such tragedies when we are ill-prepared. “I meant to get it organized and find the important papers, and…. But, I just never found the time.”

Reason #3: To remind people that they have permission to be, do, have, obtain and release whatever it takes to experience the best life possible.

My brother, Dave lives in Baltimore; several years ago he told me the story of a man who had come home from work to find his home burned to the ground and the fire department watching the last timbers fall. The local news was also there to cover the story. The man was asked by the news reporter how he felt about this awful event—the destruction of his beautiful home—and suggested that he must be devastated over his loss. The homeowner said, “Yes, at first it was a shock, but I have to say, I was the keeper of my adult children’s things that they just were not moving out; of many of my diseased parent’s antiques and family memorabilia; and of my own life-long collections of stuff. I’m a veterinarian. Since my children left home over the past few years, I’ve really wanted to be a traveling vet, but I couldn’t because of this house and all its belongings. I didn’t know how to let go of it all and make it okay to sell or give away the antiques and family heirlooms and such. Well, now I’m free to do what I want!”

Sometimes we "accidentally" let go of the good and the bad to allow in the best, what we’ve really always wanted anyway. The road from here to there however may be very dark, wild and scary.

There is a similar story about a man in Boulder, Colorado who had for many years collected artifacts and art from Haiti. His house burned down… he moved to Haiti!

One of the most used metaphors in Buddhism (especially Zen Buddhism) is that of the finger and the moon. It warns against mistaking the finger, which points to the moon, for the moon. Look beyond your finger to the moon. When you see the moon, you won’t see your finger at all.
No matter how much we have or don't have, or how much we can get more of, *our stuff and things and possessions should bring us only joy, peace, happiness and/or functional use.*

The Boulder man in the story is now in Haiti (the moon), not collecting and looking at his “finger” pointing at items from Haiti.

And, if we take this one more step, we *become the moon,* being detached from needing things to “make us” happy.

When our homes and possessions become heavy and overwhelming, we need to remember this one truth:

*We should own our possessions; our possessions should not own us.*

Define “Clutter”
To define clutter or disorganization, you can look in the dictionary—or just around the corner in your closet! I offer three definitions of clutter here to create a complete picture.

**Definition #1:** Clutter: fill with unwanted things; disorderly accumulation; confusion; litter; disorder.

**Definition #2:** Clutter: whatever you perceive as creating interference and distractions in your life, keeping you from what you most want, need or value and what you think is most important.

The following is my personal (and professional) favorite:

**Definition #3:** Clutter: a) a luxury *that you can afford* to purchase and then hold close or store but can get pushed aside and forgotten; b) an obsessive luxury (no matter the cost) *that you can’t afford* that keeps you from a life of balance. Whether you can or can’t afford it, it affects every area of your life including physical, mental, spiritual, financial and relationship freedom.

Mostly, clutter is a distraction.

**There are 3 Kinds of Clutter**
I want to share a little of my background to give you a bigger picture of how I’ve become “Dr. DeClutter” and how my ideas have developed into this book and workshops on organizing. I have a Masters Degree in Social Work and a long history of various “helping industry” jobs as an administrator, program coordinator,
therapist and educator in the fields of mental health, addictions and personal development as a stress and change expert. I travel internationally as a professional speaker and trainer. Adding "Professional Organizer" has been natural for me as my life's work has always included "bringing order from chaos" and helping others problem solve and make more effective decisions and life choices at some level.

I've been organized and organizing since I was a child (I was born with the “O” Gene) as I am naturally a very visual and spatial thinker, learner and problem solver. My mind likes to make order from chaos, like seeing a puzzle all apart and putting the pieces back together. I also learned to be organized from my mother as she's naturally good at it. After leaving a one-year position as Assistant Manager of a Bed & Breakfast in 2000 I realized that I could help others to declutter and reorganize their environment and teach these skills as well.

Soon after teaching workshops on the subject and working with clients to organize their homes and offices, I realized that there are really only three areas of life where clutter exists, or 3 Kinds of Clutter. These three clutter focus areas are described here, and then each expanded upon to deepen your understanding of how they keep you stuck, frustrated and blocked from your natural joy and flow in life, and how to change all that.

**The 3 Kinds of Clutter are: Inner, Outer and Other.**

1. **Inner:** Inner clutter lives between our ears! It took up residency even before we were born and demands to be listened to. Inner clutter includes one’s emotions, thoughts, opinions, beliefs and perceptions.

   The greatest “terrorist” of our time is not “out there” in a cave—he or she is much more familiar, the one that lives in our heads. We are in charge of this invisible, inner world—most often cluttered, confused, chaotic and out of control—which in turn controls our lives. We must take charge and become conscious of the input, output and non-stop (unorganized) flight of thoughts, ideas, beliefs, old-programming, conditioning and fears that vie for our time and energy.

2. **Outer:** Material stuff and things in our environment.

3. **Other:** People and our boundaries with them. I often ask my audiences, “If your family wasn’t your family, would they be your friends?” There is always a shifting of bodies on seats, followed by a snicker, an elbow to their neighbor, and then rolling into a loud burst of laughter while wagging heads “No!” Can you relate?

   Thank goodness we can have some members of our families who are wonderful and a joy to be around. However, not all are and some are downright mean spirited,
Burn Your House Down

depressing, exhausting to be around and possibly even dangerous. Learning to build healthy boundaries with family members and others is imperative to good mental health. But, “decluttering” some people—friends, clients, customers, and family—is a brave and necessary action to get back your balance and move more deliberately in the direction that is right for you.

The 3 Kinds of Clutter—Inner, Outer and Other—more often than not overlap. Like a mobile hanging in balance in the air, start decluttering and sorting through one, and the others will be affected.

WARNING: When organizing, sometimes it gets worse before it gets better! We will talk more about this in the section on “sorting.” (Husbands need to know about this!)

How the 3 Kinds of Clutter Affect Your Joy, Your Present and Your Future

Clutter is distracting and in some cases even dangerous or hazardous. But for sure, clutter affects your

- energy
- time
- decision making
- earning power
- everyday finances
- perception of yourself
- plans
- choices
- and how others perceive you

STORY
I have been hired by several businesses… to find checks. Yes, checks. A newspaper editor was overwhelmed and called me in to dig her out. She had a large messy pile—or heap of paper, notes, files, packets and such—about 20 inches high and rounding off to the edges of the desk like a small mountain. Her instructions: “I’m leaving for a while. There are at least four huge checks for ads in there. Please find them as you organize that mess so that I can deposit them.”

Lost checks, paperwork, bills, important documents, keys, credit cards, checkbooks, gifts cards, gift certificates and passports are on the top of the “I thought I put it right here!” list, to name a few. My newspaper editor client in the preceding story is not alone. I’ve found more than checks in my many jobs with clients. Here’s a very short list of items unearthed:

- 28 pairs of reading glasses and 15 glass cases (from one room in a house)

FACT:
Over “5 billion dollars” of gift certificates and gift cards are not used every year. They are lost, mislaid and forgotten—before and/or after gifting them.
Burn Your House Down

- 25 gift cards to Blockbuster® Video, never sent for Christmas gifts (in one house)
- 11 new ink jet printer cartridges (in one home office, most to printers that were already gone)
- 13 cameras and camcorders with no instruction books or chargers (in one house)
- 10 film cameras with film still in them, pictures taken, batteries dead (in one house)
- $1,000 of computer software, never used and out of date
- Gift cards partially used and now no good, the remaining cash depleted by service charges
- Christmas presents forgotten, not opened
- Cash, lots of cash
- Foreign money
- Passports
- Medication
- Prescription slips never filled
- Vitamins, lots of vitamins
- Candy, lots of candy
- 6 remotes (in one house)
- Children’s "sign this for the teacher and return" slips
- Jewelry, lots of jewelry
- Clothes not worn or remembered for years, many with price tags still on them
- Photographs, lots of photographs
- Important documents to be signed months ago
- Checks never cashed (tax returns, rebates, product and service sales), some too late to cash or redeem
- Hundreds of dollars of Gift Certificates, expired
- Piles of Gift Cards not used or sent as intended gifts
- A wedding ring
- TO DO LISTS
- Notes from classes and books on organizing (including from my classes!)

TIP: Donate unused gift cards and certificates to a non-profit or other group that will appreciate them use them up.

As I noted earlier, my background is in Social Work and the mental health field. I found the side-step into hands-on organizing for others and teaching these skills a smooth one. Because, whether we are decluttering our thoughts (Inner Clutter), emotions or "stuff" outside ourselves (Outer Clutter)—that is most likely connected to our Inner Clutter—we are all very much the same. With over 60,000 thoughts a day and years of information running around wild in our minds, we are easily distracted from a clear focus. Our non-
stop chaos and blur of Inner Clutter moves its way out into our relationships and the physical world—into the describable distracting form we generically call “clutter.”

**Our Need for Mental Focus and Action**

So what do we DO about all this clutter? That's what this book is all about, the *doing*. I'm excited for you that you're here and that you are ready to learn and use the simple steps and tips outlined herein to bring your life back to center in all three areas of clutter—Inner, Outer and Other.

And, if you think you can put off dealing with your messes and frustration a day, week, month or year longer, I just want to share my life's mantra with you to help you decide, get focused and start your declutter projects today.

*The question is not, "What if I die tomorrow?"*

*It is, "What if I live another 20 or 30 years the way I am?"*

You can do it! You deserve it!

**EXERCISE**

*Sit back and relax. Visualize your home completely empty, as if you just moved in and get to start all over. Take a few minutes to start decorating it, putting in the colors and textures, fabrics and furniture that you love to be surrounded by. Then, start putting in the important and fun embellishments that you honor and respect, like family photos and art, books, awards and entertainment center. Now, it's time for the extra fluffy knick-knacks and chotchkies, magazines, etc. In your closets there are your best clothes and beloved shoes. In your garage and storage are just the necessary items for hobbies, sports, car repair and maintenance, etc. Get a good sense of what it feels like to really have a functional, happy and easy home in which to enjoy your life now.*

If we don't do this kind of big picture exercise once in a while it's easy to let clutter come in and destroy our joy. If we don't shake ourselves awake and question our habits, patterns and behaviors we fall into what I call a “trance” about clutter. We don't see it anymore and become almost zombie-like around it and the inability to take effective action to get organized.

*"The less the best, The lighter the brighter."
~ Helen Hayes
(1900 – 1993)
American actress*
Like Marilyn, we all “trance” at times. We become unconscious around our stuff and things, walking by piles for weeks, months and years, collecting the same kind of items over and over and not really stopping to find out why or if we really like them at all.

**For Whom Are You Getting, Being and Staying Organized?**

Decluttering, organizing and staying organized takes time and effort, and, the more you have to organize, the more time and effort it takes. So ultimately, who's all this effort for anyway?

1. Yourself  
   Because you love your home and environment and you enjoy it organized, and you love inviting others in to share it. When you’re organized you experience much less stress, more time, more opportunities for joy and creativity and a more balanced life.

2. Your family  
   Because when you, your household and your family are all more organized, everyone is happier and less stressed.

3. Your children  
   If you have children at home or are still planning to have some, being organized is a life-skill that cannot be over-rated in modeling and then teaching to your children, through chores and age-appropriate responsibilities.

4. Your predecessors  
   “Someday” something will happen to each of us; we will die, that's life on Planet Change. The more organized you are on all levels now, the more easily your future decisions for material items, finances, etc. will be dealt with and honored.

You might notice that friends and visitors aren’t on this list! If you organize for others who come to visit now and again, you'll set yourself up for failure. Your home is YOUR HOME first. People should feel welcome and

A house becomes a home when you can write,  
“I love you” on the furniture!

Kim Wolinski, MSW “Dr. DeClutter” www.drdclutter.com
safe and enjoy visiting you, NO MATTER WHAT YOUR HOUSE LOOKS LIKE.

How This Book Will Help You

This book is set up in four parts: **PART ONE** is on Inner Clutter, describing psychological and emotional reasons why we get into clutter chaos in the first place. **PART TWO** will take you through the practical steps to get and stay organized anywhere. **PART THREE** is specifically about managing paper clutter and **PART FOUR** covers specific areas of the house not covered in the other sections.

I write pretty much like I speak, so you’ll find this information easy to follow and utilize quickly.

My greatest joy is to know that you are taking care of yourself "first" by getting organized one-pile-at-a-time so that you can love your home, and your life and open your “present” up to a brighter day!

Thank you for purchasing this book and investing your time in finding functional solutions to your everyday freedom from clutter. You deserve it!

I would love to hear from you! Feel free to email me and let me know how you’re doing!

kim@drdeclutter.com

Blissings,

(Yes, I meant to put an "i," not an "e!")

Kim

“Dr. DeClutter” CSI Colorado

Clutter Scene Investigator, and sometimes it is a crime (I even have a badge!)

**P.S. You are not your clutter and you are not your house.** When you identify with your clutter; “Look at this mess. *I am* such a mess!” you bring up unnecessary and unrealistic guilt and shame and your self-esteem gets blurred. You are an alive, lovely, wonderful, worthy, blessed human “being” and your clutter is “inanimate stuff.” Your house and stuff will come and go. You, as a vibrant human being, are here now whether you have your stuff or not, whether it’s organized or not. As long as you feel bad about your mess, and crazy about your chaos, you’ll stay stuck in your stuff. I give you permission to feel good about your life, home and belongings, no matter how they look today, or any day.
PART ONE:
Got Clutter? How Did This Happen?

Dear Kim, (Dr. DC)

I'm writing because I'm desperate. I am buried in clutter. I'm overwhelmed. I'm a reasonably intelligent person who has let all of this stuff wreck my life. I don't know if I need you to just keep me company while I do the work or if I need you to help me create a plan or if I need you to get me started or if I need you to give me permission to let stuff go or what. I haven't been to one of your seminars, but I'm not sure I can sit through a seminar because I'll be stressed the whole time thinking that what I should be doing is at home.

What I have against me:

- A basement full of stuff that is now creeping into the entire house. It's just too hard to do alone.
- This stuff is valuable, and "I-should-sell-it Syndrome."
- "I'll-do-something-about-this-tomorrow Syndrome." I'm overwhelmed by the enormity.

My long-suffering husband and kids will be so thankful to have these messes organized. How should we proceed? At first, I thought that the "burn the house down" option on your website was $20, and I nearly took you up on that offer. I realize now that it is a videotape.

~ Lori
Longmont, Colorado

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Dear Dr. DeClutter,

HELP ME! I can't take it any more! I have had your business card for over 8 years. I have been to your workshops on organizing 3 TIMES! I have read books and I can't find them now. I have set timers, done the "one in—one out" thing, but ahhhhhhhhhhhh! Help me! I have adult children's stuff in my basement, attic and garage, my parent's passed away a couple years ago and I don't know how to let go of all that stuff with memories in them. My shed is full—though I haven't seen what's in there for over a decade! I feel so bad about myself, all this clutter and extra stuff is overwhelming. I don't know where to start and even if I do, I get so tired I quit within seconds. I'm ready to hire you and get this all behind me already. I want my life back! Oh, and by the way, it's all a big secret to everyone else because my house looks so nice when people come to visit. I'm tired of my secret!

~ Selma
Louisville, Colorado
As the Cluttered World Turns
Why We Have Clutter—INNER CLUTTER

Have you ever noticed that your TO DO list never gets TO DONE? And, worse yet, you a) can't find it when you need it, b) it's gotten so long you feel overwhelmed and not much is getting done, and c) you've written the same notes a million times and they're all over in piles and stagnant places and never completed. This book is about getting your TO DOs TO DONE for a great big TA DA!

Layers of Problems Cause Clutter
Mayo Clinic studies say that the third most stressful thing in our lives is being disorganized. And stress kills! It's been known for years that over 97 percent of all doctor's office visits are related to stress. A recent news report says that stress is the fourth largest cause of disability and by 2020 will be the second. Clutter then is not only the lack of organizing skills and some time to do the job, but clutter is also a symptom of stress. It's an unending loop complicated by other issues such as depression, overwhelm, grief, fear, childhood traumas and programming (I'll talk about all of these.) It would seem like a really good idea to take the reigns of this runaway steed and do what we can to stop the madness.

Stress is caused by many factors, but when it comes to being disorganized it's caused by a few targeted things:

1. Lack of focus (letting yourself get distracted)
2. Not scheduling the time to deal with it
3. Not understanding how to organize
4. Not deciding what to do with it
5. Lack of action

A life without focus and clarity—Inner and Outer—is a life easily distracted and drawn off course and off center. There is a German proverb that says, "The main thing is keeping the main thing the main thing." The "main thing" in our lives is to stay at our center, to stay focused on what is important and to stand still long enough each day to realize just what the "important" thing is, then do it.

This book is focused on organizing, and if you just do the doing of getting organized in your home, you're your office and your mind, you will be amazed at how much less stress you have and at how much peace ripples positively into all areas of your life.
Since you have control over being organized, and gladly don't have to take a trip to the Mayo Clinic to deal with all the stress it's causing, challenge yourself today as you read the steps and methods here to start the process one pile, one heap, one layer, one lump at a time and chunk by chunk it'll get done.

**FOCUS**

Here is the definition I use for FOCUS:

- Feelings
- Of
- Clarity
- Under
- Stress

Stress is going to happen—that's life! However, constant and ongoing chaos, indecision and disorder pull us off center and away from all that is truly important in our lives. When "stuff" happens, and our emotions and thoughts start going wild, we need to detach and keep our inner-self—our mind and thoughts focused and clear under any and all kinds of stressful situations "no matter what." Then we can more easily stay focused and connected to the important doing of the next step, and the next and the next.

In *Organizing for the Creative Person* (Lehmkuhl and Lamping) there is another good way to use FOCUS as a tool to guide our minds into right-action.

- Follow
- One
- Course
- Until
- Successful

Staying the course with one plan of action will get us where we’re headed. Zigzagging—going from one pile or project, finishing none—is a common downfall when decluttering. No zigzagging!

**Focus Happens "Here" and Now, Not "There" and Someday When**

The bottom line is, don’t let your clutter and disorganization (Inner or Outer) blur your focus, stress you out and pull you off course, adding to an already painfully frustrated day. There are clear steps out of chaos and disorder that you will learn in this book. Making organizing a priority and a commitment will keep you out of “there”-apy and help you step back into “here”-apy! Your clutter—your life in process—is right “here.” Start *here now* and make the time to declutter and get organized for good. Start *now* to get back your space, time, energy, self-esteem and joy! You deserve it!
The 1% METHOD
Many of the problems we have can be shifted quickly and solved effectively for good, with what I call The 1% Method.

STORY
Secretariat is a name horseracing fans will not soon forget. Over three decades after Secretariat’s astounding strength and champion's heart inspired an entire nation, his name is still revered by new generations, and his legacy still captures the imaginations of those who hear his story. The most interesting part of this legend is the one written years after his two famous years of racing gold. Researchers were interested in just how much faster Secretariat ran than the other horses to win so often.

The result of this research is important to our lives on a daily basis. Secretariat only ran 4% faster than the other horses. Only 4%! But… here’s the lesson for humans… he ran 4% faster consistently than the other horses!

Secretariat had that whopping 4% faster consistency. You don’t even need 4% to win your clutter problem! Just find the focused 1% that you can change each day and find yourself consistently moving towards what you really want to be, do and have in your life more quickly! Small things done consistently create major impact.

Using The 1% Method of Change
First, make the time for SELF-INQUIRY about the problems you have in any area of your life. Tell yourself the truth about your situation. It may not feel good, but this will be half the solution (not battle!)

Second, choose just “one thing” at a time that you can do differently each day—that 1% that you can declutter or reorganize to make the changes that will move material items out and around physically, stop old habits, routines and patterns, and replace “trances” and limbo with focus and clarity.

If you take complete action on 1%, a chunk of your piles and heaps and frustrations—Inner, Outer or Other—every day, you’ll chip away at your otherwise overwhelming barriers and feel renewed and refreshed more often. Even a little at a time will bring back your long buried internal feelings of order and balance, affecting your life positively.

Do the doing and continue to do it.

Small things done consistently create a major impact.

By the way, pass on the “O” Gene!

You can teach children to chip and chunk their rooms easily too. Help them to learn these important life skills. This opens up more time for you to do what you want, alone or with them, as they take over more of their own room responsibilities.
Burn Your House Down

Did you know that airplanes are off course over 85% of the time? They get to their destination by readjusting where needed all along the way. Following sage adages like “a stitch in time saves nine,” taking action on and/or doing a daily routine when needed just 1% differently will, over time—like the plane on its path—create the positive readjustments toward the big and small changes you desire, landing you right where you want to be safely and almost effortlessly.

Examples:

- Maybe you keep losing your keys. Using the 1% Method for Change, you would create a HOME for them to live and always find them there.
- If you find yourself piling paper and not filing it, your 1% will be to file the papers each day. This might only take about another a few minutes of time, but it will be done—completed—and you will feel better.
- Perhaps it’s a phone call that needs to be made, make your 1% a practice of checking off phone calls made each day.

Change your routines and habits just 1% and see how and where you end up at the end of the day, week, month, year and life. It will be far from where you would be if you don’t do it.

The 1% Method can be used for everything, including weight loss, exercise, better communication, self-care, health, financial management, relationships, and so on.

One of my mantras is, “You’re not here for a long time; you’re here for a good time!” And, we can't have a good time if we're stuck and overwhelmed.

Stress and anxiety over disorganization is capable of distorting perception. When your perception is distorted, many kinds of things happen, and don't happen, that do not support your best life.

Whenever you feel yourself struggling with “what is,”—your clutter or other life problems—take time to ask yourself some deeper questions, and come up with doable answers.
Burn Your House Down

Self-Inquiry for “Inner Decluttering”

1. What 1% change can I do to make incremental ongoing positive ripples in my life?
2. What will I have to change or let go of in order to enjoy my life more?
3. What one thing, that if organized better, would give me more free time?
4. What one thing, if released from my home, would give me the space that I really want?
5. What one thing, that if I stopped letting it scare me or stress me out, would positively change my focus and attention to life?
6. What story would I like to stop repeating and reliving related to clutter and being unorganized?
7. What new story would I like to live and tell?
8. How does my house, full of stuff and things, keep me from being free to enjoy my life?
9. How would I feel if my house burned down? Or, if I “lost it all” due to some act of nature or otherwise?
10. What would I do if I lost it all? (Except your important documents file, wallet, ID and all living things.)
11. How would I live differently?
12. What would I say?

Why We Have Clutter

We have clutter because

- We buy too much
- Don't know how to store it functionally
- Don't know how to use systems well to corral it
- Don't know how to organize it
- Don't take the time to organize
- Don't have the space to store it
- Don't have the energy to store it
- Have too much space and feel the need to fill it up
- Need help but won't ask for it or hire it
- "It's genetic!"—I grew up in a family who weren't great organizers and learned it well
- It's not important to us
- There aren't strong enough consequences if we don't declutter
- We're not making a decision to get organized
- We're not taking action
- We're rebelling and unwilling to change it
- We get used to it and "trance" out—walking over and by piles and old heaps daily

But, really, the truth is we have clutter (at least in America), because we can!
I’ve traveled overseas speaking to groups and organizations and have “collected” wonderful friends in other countries. From conversations with them and first-hand experience, here is what I know for sure: “clutter” as we know it is pretty much an American issue, a byproduct of prosperity, space, “biggie-sizing”, the idea that “more is better” and inexpensive products. After all, there’s that bumper sticker that claims, “He who dies with the most toys wins!” I say, “She who uses up, shares and enjoys all of her toys and stuff before she dies wins!”

Our amassed Outer Clutter is also a byproduct of our “Inner Clutter” in respect to unconscious and cultural programmed buying. Too many have bought into the “shop till you drop” or the "gotta have it now!” mentality and not being aligned with more important things to do—and more important things to do with our time, energy and money.

We were constructed after WWII, in these United States of America, to create, produce and consume. We did and today it’s killing us! Research says that Americans spend three to four times more hours shopping than other countries. Our 3,000 ads a day tell us we need to change to be happy, that in fact we’re doing it all wrong! Billions of advertising and marketing dollars go towards one imperative message: “Buy our _____ and you’ll be happier, richer, thinner, faster, bigger, prettier, more handsome, women will love you, men will love you, and on and on.” We must have it. And of course, the “it du jour” changes!

How many plastic toys does a child really need from the fast food restaurant? How many clothes and shoes are in closets that still have tags on or are in heaps in the back of the closet and never worn? Even some of the poorest in our free and incredibly wonderful country have their stockpiles of stuff, because they can. Think "third world country." If you don’t have money, closets, walls or a roof and live on a dirt floor, clutter isn’t going to be a problem! Hmmmmm!

Among my many other interests I’m also a songwriter and singer. These lines and a tune came to me as I listened to a couple complaining about their clutter while in the grocery line:

How would your life be different if you lived in Bangladesh?
Would you be so worried about your clutter and your mess?
Oh, how would your life be different if you lived in Bangladesh?

How would your life be different if you lived in old Nepal?
Would you be so worried if you didn’t have it all?
Oh, how would your life be different if you lived in old Nepal?
The Alaskan Inuit Tribes have over 100 words for the concept of “snow”. I met a woman from Brazil recently who asked me what “clutter” meant. She said that in their culture, "Maybe the richest people have clutter, but I don't know what that is." They don't even have one word for clutter.

**Move Out of Your Trance to Make New Choices**

No one is exempt from some level of trancing. Have you ever bought clothing, food or other items, gotten home and didn’t remember actually buying them? Have you eaten a meal and don't remember eating? When you start to declutter a pile, do you "trance out" quickly and walk away to find yourself in another room doing something else? These are all kinds of trances that we experience day in and day out.

Generally, a trance is an altered state of consciousness, a mental state which is clearly disassociated from normal consciousness. Someone in a trance may still be experiencing very intense brain waves and intellectual activity, but the individual is also clearly not entirely awake and conscious of what they are doing.

Furthermore, in regards to decluttering, letting go and changing "what is"—Inner, Outer and Other Clutter due to indecision and inaction—makes us equally put off dealing with what is right in front of us. We stay indecisive, procrastinate, stress and in some level of discomfort and chaos, sometimes for decades thinking, "I'll do it later."

Trances are created by years of doing the same thing over and over creating routines, patterns and habitual thoughts, beliefs and behaviors. They can also be created by grief, loss and illness. Sometimes we need a nudge, small or large, to shake us out of it.

To shake people out of their trance, I often take my workshop audiences through a guided imagery. We start out in a third world country with almost nothing: a broken down hut with no door and partial walls, no electricity, no shoes, some loose wrapped clothing like a sari. We each have two bowls, a spoon and a bucket with which to walk a mile to and from the river to get water. We have scarce food and no money or jobs and never feel completely safe or secure. We must hunt, gather, pick, grind, start a fire and bake or cook our food every day. I have the audience remain in this place for just a moment, breathing it in. Then, I take the fantasy minds of my audience to another third world country where we have more clothes, but decayed housing, a little more food, a community water pump, no electricity, no money, some animals, no jobs. We travel from there to an Amish community where there is still no electricity, but we have nice clothes, shoes, homes, furniture, etc.

We have clutter because we can! It's the human condition. It is especially so with abundance, no matter how "small" it is. We "collect" things around us for many reasons—to feel connected, important, full, wealthy and "nested" to name a few.

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**STORY**

I was talking to my high school friend Gloria, who lives in Minnesota. She jokingly shared that she declutters by "carbon dating." "I have to go through the layers. Each event creates a new layer of clutter in a bag or a box and then a laundry basket on top of that pile. The new layer goes on top; the old ones begin to migrate into the extra bedroom."
water, food and all that worked to build, grow and create with our own hands; we have no money (no need for it) but have community, family, jobs and responsibilities to the community, comfy, safe and secure.

After this we travel to a modern spa retreat where we don’t carry money and don’t have jobs there of course, but we have money and jobs and are well taken care of in simplicity, security and an enjoyable environment. We may then stop off at several other levels of freedom, security, health, wellness, abundance and well-being, but eventually I bring the audience back to visualize their present day homes and daily lives.

It’s easy to forget that there are many other ways to live in the world. Unless a person has traveled around their town, state, region, country or the world and has experienced the contrasting differences in what they can compare to what others have, it’s easy to stay wrapped up in our own loop of perception and “reality.”

After this guided imagery, it never fails that people let out a very deep sigh and are a little quiet for a while. Then, I'll hear a handful of them say, "I want to live in a third world country!" Of course they wouldn’t really, but the contrast they experience in this exercise helps them get out of their daily trance and routines long enough to emotionally go where they haven’t gone before, or long enough, to see how lovely it really is to simplify; to let go of having all this stuff around us, having to think about it and maintain it.

I've received plenty of feedback about how much this one exercise has helped participants clear out clutter, let go of “someday when” items and simplify their environment. This makes them feel freer, lighter and allows in more joy on a daily basis.

Throughout this book I want you to consider this guided imagery exercise. Imagine how it feels to have nothing. Do you like it? Does it feel good to have open space and less to take care of and keep track of? Then, imagine accumulating items slowly to see what is really important to bring into your home, your space, environment and life. What can you live without and do just fine?

**STORY**

Kris had hired me several times to help her declutter her basement, kitchen, laundry area, den and other rooms. On one of the last appointments we were in the basement for a couple hours then went upstairs to carry up donations, etc. We each grabbed a beverage and were talking as we headed for the stairwell. She stopped at the top of the stairs and we kept talking. I was very aware that something was up because we didn't get any further. A couple minutes into our conversation I said, "Are you not going downstairs?" She said, "Nope. I'm just not ready yet."

**Self-Inquiry Question About Living an Organized Life**

If my environment was organized, what would I do with all my time?
Maybe the answer is: “If I got organized I’d have more time to give to more important and fun activities and causes with others, family and friends. I’d have more time and space for life! I’d have more fun stories to tell, and less about my clutter! Yea!”

**Shake Out of Your Trance**

Progress and the ability to go anywhere in a nanosecond online has hit most people like a tsunami wave. We have too many choices and too much input, information, and money without focused strategies to use them well.

“Anything-you-can-buy-for-a-dollar” stores and big-box “Marts” have their place, but when shopping becomes an unconscious *trance-induced-hypnotic-zombie-like* activity, these easy-to-get-whatever-you-want-shops can become a too-quick-and-easy unconscious buying spree to plastic-bag-your-way into clutter hell! (And then there’s our plastic-bag-world-clutter problem.) Please use reusable totes!

To make all shopping a pre-planned conscious activity is painful for some people, unheard of for others. To plan and budget—to limit buying to *needs* and essentials, and a very few *wants* and luxuries—feels like withdrawal from a drug. Addictions and compulsions take many forms. For many, buying and shopping is a "drug," giving birth to our greeting card, tongue-in-cheek, movie-titled term "shopaholic."

The reality is that it’s not what we buy or bring into our environment to take up space and energy, it’s *how much* and how it makes us *feel*. Buying too much is the same for someone shopping on Rodeo Drive as it is on Cheap Street. This is “Inner Clutter” gaining mental strength in one’s life and doing its job. The insatiable need to consume, to fill our selves, conversations, and space up with material possessions instead of relaxing into what we have, and enjoying life more simply and functionally—still enjoyable and beautiful—has become patterned and habitual. It is a hypnotic trance.

**STORY**

One of my workshop participants told me that she had once lived in Japan where her apartment was extremely simple and empty, but comfortable. White walls. One chair. One table. One plant. One futon. One. One. One. Period. She said she really missed it. I asked her if she has recreated it here. She said no, that it’s too easy to let more and more things into the house and she has lost that simplicity and peace she had while in Japan. I suggested she find one room or even one corner of a room and designate it as that same space; a place to go and be simple, quiet and peaceful. We can all do that.
How to Stop Bringing Unnecessary Stuff into Your Life-Space

Here is a list of questions to ask yourself—to help wake you up and keep you awake—before you buy anything whether online or off, from a garage or tag sale or thrift shop, at a We've-Got-It-All-Under-One-Roof-Mart or Saks Fifth Avenue. Ask these questions whenever you notice yourself reaching for items or “clicking SEND” that are not on your Necessity List of eating, drinking and daily requirements. To simplify and distress our focus must be on Needs not Wants:

1. Can I afford it? Really? (Paying cash, no plastic!)
2. Am I going to use it?
3. Am I going to use it now, or in the near future?
4. Where is it going to go? Where will it “live”?
5. What would happen if I don’t buy it now?
6. Why do I think this is important to own?
7. Why do I think I need it?
8. Would I be fine if I don’t have this?
9. Are there better ways to use my money than to buy this?
10. If I save this money, what could be a better way to use it later?

STORY

One of my workshop participants became desperate to learn how to get rid of stacks of magazines, papers, incomplete projects, and more. I asked her what her life would be like if she organized her house. She sat very quietly for a moment, then jerked a bit in her seat, like someone had shaken her awake from a nap, she said, “I’d feel scared! I’d feel like my security was gone.”

Wow! That was great! Did you hear her "shift”? Did you hear her wake up? Did you hear her get conscious about this unconscious “trance” issue? Everyone stared at her while she stayed in her thoughts and in the focused inner vision of her new realization and personal story. She then said, with a huge smile and nudge to her husband’s arm, "We are going to get those drapes rehung and clean out the house. I am so excited to have my home back!"

Clutter and buying more stuff begs the question, “Why do so many people complain that they don’t have enough money, but are still buying things?” If you look in almost anyone’s home you will see all they’ve spent on items they don’t need, will never use, don’t care about, don’t know how to use, have lost or mislaid, can’t find to use or have already broken. It’s clearly not about “outer” stuff, it’s Inner Clutter.

The Human (Unconscious Consumer) Condition

70% of our economy is driven by consumer spending. If we don’t buy stuff and “consume” who are we?

Over spending, over buying, over collecting and over consuming is about

“If we’re looking for outer conditions to bring us contentment, we’re looking in vain.”

~ Ayya Khema,
“Be An Island”
being unconscious and ultimately it's about greed and fear (fear that I won't get mine). It's the human condition. We are a nation, and world, in a consuming trance, even at the risk of harming ourselves in the process. Well known clinical psychologist, therapist, author and Buddhist meditation instructor Jack Kornfield said, "We don't need more oil, energy, stuff, time, money, power, etc. We need less greed."

**STORY**

Oprah had a show on how Chinese women are not only having breast implants and face reconstruction—to look more desirable, like American and European (their eyes made round)—but men and women are having their shin bones broken and rods implanted to make them taller, like the models they see on billboards, magazines and television, from across the pond. Is this "better" better?

Thanks to billions of dollars spent on TV commercials, advertising, slick marketing, and a world of "progress" and prosperity (cash or credit, mostly credit) we have been entranced, programmed, manipulated (think cigarettes) and addicted (sugar and low nutritional food) over the years to want more, "need" more, buy, get, claim and conquer in the name of feeling good "now." Why? We have to keep up with the "Joneses," stay in trend and in fashion with the big name celebrities du jour (in or out of jail). We are taught to "look the part" for a job or title and to have more, bigger and better, the "best" in the name of progress and success. We've biggie-sized ourselves, our bodies and our homes into heart failure, diabetes, bankruptcy, high-level stress and low-level relationships, with ourselves, family and our inner, spiritual selves.

**STORY**

We're all very aware that over the past decade or so the US has outsourced most of its tech-support to India and other nations where pay is lower and the people need jobs. So, are these "third world" people becoming the same as wealthy nations in regards to consumerism? Yes. It's the human condition.

Not long after these tech-support employees started having more income, and disposable income, they "disposed" of it as quickly as they got it on cell phones and other tech-toys and "stuff" just as in any other country.

In parts of Africa, where poverty is overwhelming, a wildlife game reserve was replenished with the funds to bring it up to par and get visitors and tourists bringing money into the villages and towns. One woman, who could hardly feed her family before this change in local income is now a bank administrator. She's so busy and on the phone so much that she now has little time to be with her children, has hired a housekeeper and nanny, buys "stuff" and has actually never been to the wildlife game reserve just miles away, because she doesn't have time.

I'm not telling you anything new, just turn on the TV. There are a myriad of reasons why we do the things we do. Living unconsciously, we don't know that we don't know something, especially when we've been steeped in our cultural programming and dare I say propaganda "Gotta

"You can never get enough of what you don't need to make you happy."

~ Eric Hoffer
have it!" (trances) for so long, until something shows up to shake us awake… or, until we create circumstances to shake ourselves awake.

**STORY**

My friend Carol and I were in a high-end department store in a mall once, just looking at clothes and going from store-to-store to see what was going on in the world on our way to the movies. As we passed the section of women’s evening dresses there was one on the end cap that stood Carol still. As she grabbed the dress to see how it draped, and then looked at the price tag, she said, “Man, I’d buy that dress if had the money.” As I do with anyone, even myself, I ask the litmus test question for conscious decision making. I immediately asked her, “If you had a million dollars right now, would you buy it?” She looked at me and then the dress and said, “No.”

Getting caught up in the “If I had the money, I’d get this” to-make-me-happy mode is easy to do. In such a fascinating way this thought process actually keeps us discontent, unhappy and in the game of “not enough” or “they can have it and I can’t” and other old loops of stories and reasons for, a) not having the life we want, and/or b) not thinking through what we really want in the first place, i.e. deciding consciously.

Many people deal with stress by looking to their outer world for relief. Some use alcohol and/or drugs, some use food, some use sex, and some use shopping, collecting, accumulating and hoarding “more.” There’s even a term for it—it’s called “retail therapy!” As Dr. Phil might spout, “How’s that workin’ for ya?!”

From the depression, frustration, stress, overwhelm and self-loathing that I hear and see about collecting “more and better stuff,” I’d say, it’s really not working.

There are plenty of "hoarders" in the world who do collect and stockpile items for their hobby or their active interests, and it’s no problem for them. However, people who collect, hoard and accumulate to fill a need of security or “fullness,” or feeling lost and adrift from not having a purposeful and conscious life is another story. Making our “stuff” speak for us when we don’t know who we are isn’t new. There are some who hoard, hold onto small bits and pieces or run down items and buy more to fill in the empty ("not enough" and "starving") places inside themselves from growing up in the Great Depression Era. Those from very poverty stricken childhoods or from having lost possessions early in life may hoard as well. Material items can make us feel some power when we feel powerless.

**Citizens Vs. Consumers**

The sad reality is that we are no longer “citizens” of this or any country; *We The People of These United Nations* are “Consumers.”
Burn Your House Down

Somewhere we tilted almost completely into the mentality of what you buy is who you are. What you own is who you are. Your stuff and material things equal you and your identity, including the size of your house, vehicles, bobbles, flat screen TV and the speed of the newest cell phone and tech-gadget. And, the bigger problem economically of course is that now the U.S. is outsourcing and consuming, leaving us victim to the ebb and flow of world politics.

All this consuming and collecting is not working for us. It’s time—time to shake ourselves awake, stay awake and stay conscious about how we spend our time, money, energy and space—but only if we want to have more enjoyable lives! Hmmm, where’s the drama in that?

In Deepak Chopra’s PBS program on his book, The Way of the Wizard he examines humans as the consumers that we are, stating “Consumers are hunters, predators leading to greed, war and conquest. The problem is that predators risk their own extinction.”

Collective wakeup calls keep shaking us up. Oil supply issues, its affects on our gas and food prices, followed by economic crashes resulting in the real estate and mortgage turmoil, the devastating BP oil spill (hemorrhage), and the dominoes keep falling. These economic earthquakes push all the right buttons for those on the edge of some level of trance-formational change. People are waking up, becoming more thrifty, out of necessity or raised consciousness—making more mindful and conscious choices and responsible decisions. More people are finding that they can say no to what not long ago they would have unconsciously said yes to. People are reaching out and helping others, trading, bartering and being a bit slower in their need for consumer-speed. These are all great side-effects of an economic shake-up.

Self-Inquiry for “Inner Decluttering”

Pre-planning your shopping trip is an imperative step towards changing unconscious purchases and adding to clutter. There are plenty of questions you can ask yourself before you find you’ve “done it again.”
1. Do I have a list with me before I go shopping, and do I stick to it—no matter how I feel about it?
2. Am I willing to start making a list and to not stray from it?
3. Do I have a budget and do I stay within its bounds?
4. Am I willing to create a budget and to stay within its bounds?
5. Can I choose positive ways to deal with stress, depression, low-self esteem and anxiety that do not include accumulating material items?
6. Am I willing to stop, shake myself awake and choose again for more conscious choices whenever necessary?
7. Can I get in touch with being happy without adding more material items?
8. Can I create positive and fun ways to enjoy life one day at a time without purchasing something new?

"A man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone."
~ Henry David Thoreau

The Two Necessary Steps to Control Clutter
What keeps us from getting clutter under control? Two reasons: 1) A decision has not been made, and 2) the action to move the clutter has not been taken. So, quite simply, in order to get your TO DO LIST TO DONE and clutter organized, these two steps must be taken:

#1: Decide.
Assuming a person doesn’t have any of the truly limiting Clutter Personalities (you will read about these later in this chapter), the first thing to do about clutter is to DECIDE to change it—to move and to reorganize it. So, to get organized you must DECIDE it’s time and DECIDE when and how you’re going to make the change. DECIDE if you’re keeping it or not and DECIDE where it’s going to go when organized.

Now, with all those fresh DECISIONS, it’s time to actually do it!

#2: Action.
I know that, like most people, you make decisions all day long—to clean, reorganize, and declutter. There are the small decisions, like where to put the extra linens and quilts and there are big important decisions, like putting together your important documents and end of life decisions. But, deciding and doing are two different things.

Making a decision without taking ACTION is like planning a trip and getting into the car to go but not turning on the key or putting it into DRIVE—you’re not going anywhere! Hesitation, fear and
procrastination can stop and derail the best of decisions. The gap between decision and action is where trances live. This short circuit between knowing what to do and doing it can often be linked to a variety of psychological reasons, such as childhood pain or trauma, conditioned learning, depression, grief and stress, as well as the lack of necessary skills causing a paralyzing affect. Layers of problems develop as the lack of follow through creates more procrastination, stress, overwhelm and self-loathing.

So, even in the smallest ways, take ACTION on your decision quickly and start changing old patterns.

The One Minute Declutter Plan
Here’s a nifty plan that you can use throughout your day to keep you organized. If something takes a minute to do, do it right then. Don’t think about doing it or putting it off. Examples: Water a plant, put food in the pet’s dish, put stuff back into a drawer, put a dish in the dishwasher, hang up a towel, put shoes away, address an envelope, hang a coat in the closet, etc. You’ll be amazed at how much clutter never accumulates because you are chipping away at it on an ongoing basis this way.

CLUTTER IS A THIEF
Clutter steals your space, time, energy, money and precious present moments. If you don’t use half the stuff you own (it isn’t harmlessly lying around or in storage), it’s eating into at least 50% of your space and increasing the burden of your housework, mind-bytes and income.

“Weif I spent as much time doing the things I worry about getting done as I do worrying about doing them, I wouldn’t have anything to worry about.”
~ Beryl Pfizer

We all have our reasons for clutter buildup. The following list is laced with “Inner Clutter” indecision and reasons for staying disorganized. Check ✓ the ones that you believe are true for you or if you have used them before.

The Top 33 Reasons for Not Decluttering
1. As soon as I throw it out, I’ll need it, or I might need it “someday”.
2. It’s still “good enough.”
3. It was a gift.
4. I don’t want “them” to visit and not see this thing they gave me!
5. It’s handmade.
6. It was expensive.
7. It’s brand new! Or, It’s never been worn.
8. I’m going to fix it.
9. It will fit me when I lose weight.
10. It might come back into fashion.
11. I used to love it.
12. It was a bargain.
13. I bought it with a coupon.
14. I bought it as a Garage Sale for just pennies!
15. I got it free!
16. I won it!
17. It might be valuable one day, or it’s an investment.
18. I’m saving it for…
19. I can sell it on eBay, or somewhere.
20. It’s a family heirloom.
21. It reminds me of…
22. It was given to me by someone who has passed away.
23. It’s a vacation or holiday souvenir.
24. I might want it now that I’ve found it.
25. I might want to, or I might get around to reading it someday.
26. Someone might want to borrow it someday.
27. I used to love this craft. I may take it up again someday.
28. I “should” use it. “
29. I don’t want to waste it.
30. There’s a story connected to it.
31. Who would want it? I may as well keep it.
32. I’ll wait and take it to the consignment store.
33. It’s just so cute!
34. Add your own!

Did you check any? Are you ready to rethink those decisions? (See the Appendix for the expanded version of these reasons.)

**Clutter Kills**

Okay, kind of like “guns don’t kill, people kill,” “clutter doesn’t kill but the people who are clutter-bugs can kill themselves or others” creating a fire or health hazard!

Whether you “plop and drop”, “toss and forget” or “store and move on,” in order not to be a headline in tomorrow’s paper (and have to be really

“*Good spirits will not live where there is dirt.*”
~ Mother Ann Lee (1736-1784)
Found of the Shakers—
Crafting the art of making the corn broom
embarrassed about your clutter), you must make a stand for your life and joy and clear it out now. Think of it as pruning the forest to have a healthier forest as well as less fire disaster opportunity!

Here are two sad news article examples, reminders of the importance of getting your decluttering started and to keep going until it’s done.

**BREAKING NEWS**: Fire destroys NE Portland home, sends two to hospital
Posted by Helen Jung June 23, 2008
An early-morning fire destroyed a Maywood Park home, in which clutter and combustibles helped the flames to quickly consume the home.
The fire, which was ruled accidental, began on the back patio of the home at 9914 NE Failing, said Lt. Allen Oswalt of Portland Fire and Rescue.
Portland fire crews, initially told there might be a person inside, had trouble accessing the home due to “excessive content clutter” inside. The homeowner was able to escape after some difficulty, said Oswalt.
A firefighter suffering from heat exhaustion was sent to a nearby hospital where he was evaluated, released and expected to fully recover. The homeowner, who had tried to put out the fire, was also sent to the hospital for evaluation.

**BREAKING NEWS**: Bloomfield Fire Dept. Battle House Fire
*By Reggie Hales Jun 23rd, 2008*
Bloomfield, CT – Early morning fire destroys house at 41 Harding Ave., between Blue Hills Ave and Coventry St. Cause of fire unknown at this hour. No reports of any injuries in Bloomfield. Fire crews from the Bloomfield Volunteer Fire Dept. battled a morning blaze that engulfed the home. No one was home at the time of the fire. "The call for this fire came in at 2:52 am. With several cars in the drive we thought we had people inside. But quickly learned that the residents were all away on a family trip in Jamaica, for a funeral," said Fire chief Arthur Gold.
Neighbors said they were happy the fire department did a great job of knocking the fire down and preventing the fire from spreading to other homes. And also before it could ignite any of the cars in the driveway. “It took a couple of hours to totally knock the fire down and put out hot spots. One fireman said he had a tough time getting around in the house, because of so much clutter. The Bloomfield building dept. is investigating the cause of the fire.

**The 6 Main Rational Reasons for Staying Disorganized**
As listed earlier, the reasons for being disorganized are many, but there are a few that surface to the top when I ask, “Why are you disorganized?” or, “What is keeping you from being organized?” Because these few reasons are so human and classic, they can be heard anywhere.

1. not enough time
2. not enough space
3. not enough help (need help deciding or moving things)
4. not enough skill (don’t know how)
5. need for the right systems with which to organize
6. not enough money (to buy the systems or pay for help)
And if these don’t keep people from getting organized, there are three “Inner Clutter” reasons that are heard quite often as well.

1. not willing to do it
2. not motivated to do it
3. don’t have the energy

We can take each one of these obstacles to task and choose to override it and get the job of organizing underway.

Clutter Between the Sexes

Is there a difference of why women vs. why men have clutter? Yes and no. A personal and humorous observation is that over the years I’ve realized that women and men are so very different—with most everything of course, but certainly organizing. Women and men hoard and attach to different categories of things and approach the decluttering process with great polarity. Men are from Camp Nike® – “Just do it!” Suck it up, dig in, get rid of this crap! Just pitch it! Throw it out. (By the way, women often make sure to schedule our organizing appointment when, “My husband’s not home and won’t find out, he’d kill me if he knew I was paying someone to organize my stuff!”) Men tend to be very impatient with the decluttering and sorting process while women will sort for hours to finally make decisions about what to keep and what to let go.

As an example, men tend to care little for the upkeep of family scrapbooks, memorabilia and keepsakes, anything “cuuute!” and all the knick knacks and chotchkie’s in the house. Less is better! Most couples know that if the woman, the wife, doesn’t take care of memorabilia and photos, it won’t happen.

Since men are from Camp Nike®—“Just do it!” women on the other hand are from Camp Confusion and Overwhelm, wondering how to, “Just Start it!” I hear it all the time, “If I just knew where to start I’d get organized!” Women let the “whole house” become overwhelming. It’s not about organizing the “whole house” at one time, just one chunk at a time, and it will get done. Plus, not starting can also be caused by perfectionism, an all or none mentality, stopping the process before it starts.

TIP: It’s important not to take on a messy house and disorganization, a little or a lot, as personal. You are not your clutter, but your life is multifaceted and clutter is a reflection of an involved and interesting life!

“If your house is really a mess and a stranger comes to your door, greet him with, ‘Who could have done this? We have no enemies.'”

~ Phyllis Diller, comedienne
The Most Asked Question About Getting Organized

The most asked question about getting organized is, “Where do I start?” With very few exceptions, women still take care of the home and housework, including the following list of TO DOs:

1. mail and paperwork
2. filing
3. record keeping
4. bill paying
5. important documents
6. end of life planning
7. grocery shopping and storage
8. cooking and meal planning
9. cleaning and supplies purchases and storage
10. holiday and family event planning
11. gift buying
12. letter and card writing and sending (email or paper)
13. years of children’s clothes transitioning
14. children’s sports events, equipment, transportation and scheduling
15. children’s sleepovers
16. childcare
17. birthday and other parties and events and storage
18. donation and recycling
19. and much more

And, of course, many women are doing all this while working full time jobs. They get overwhelmed and the tipping point comes with one more heap of clothes or pile of mail they just can’t handle.

In this way, Inner and Outer Clutter areas overlap to create more frustration and anxiety than is necessary in our lives. It’s clear that if we spent as much time working on our declutter project as we did thinking and worrying about it, we’d have it done already! But where to start?

The 5 Key Steps To Get Started Decluttering

1) Decide
2) Plan
3) Schedule time blocks
4) Put on blinders (organize with your head, not your heart)
5) Take action (or Start!)
Burn Your House Down

We usually begin with sheer willpower. It’s also helpful to ask for help. Whether it’s from a neighbor, relative, partner, friend or by hiring a Professional Organizer. Make sure you get someone who is non-judgmental. You don’t need more anguish. Bottom line…get started. Get it done—not perfect, just done. Get your life back!

Ways to Get Motivated to Get Organized

People come to my classes, they listen and take notes on "how to get organized," get excited as well as overwhelmed thinking about it all and by the end of each class at least one participant will ask, "Okay, but, how do I get motivated?"

I say, "You don’t!" Think of decluttering and organizing like exercise. Very few people love to exercise. You don’t get motivated to exercise, you just do it!" With that question answered we all laugh and sigh, and then I refer them back to the basics one more time.

Deadlines

That said, a really good trick to get "motivated" to declutter and organize is by having a real deadline. I say “real” because giving one to ourselves is easy to let slide, (and I know this from personal experience!). But when your deadline is real, from someone else and it’s imperative, there will be real consequences if we don’t meet it. We tend to get tasks done when we have a real deadline even if it’s at the last minute. It’s similar to hearing people say, "I wish my doctor would tell me I had to lose weight or I’d die, then I’d do it!" It’s the human condition.

Declutter Buddy System

Create a buddy system and give one another real deadlines that at least give you “soft” accountability. The nudge here is the guilt and fear of having to say you didn’t do it, yet! Hey, sometimes healthy guilt and fear are your keys to freedom! Overall, it should be fun and strengthen your relationship with your friend too.
STORY
"Project Days" from Lana Crowley, Colorado

My friend, Michelle, moved from Texas 4 years ago. She talked about how much she missed her "project days" with her sister. I was curious what these "project days" were and learned that she and her sister would spend the day helping each other with a project that would be easier when shared with someone.

I told Michelle that I would be happy to have a "project day" with her... and so it began. The "project day" is marked on the calendar at the beginning of the month, one day for each of us. We choose a project that is typically considered a burden and one that we have put off for quite a while. We have cleaned refrigerators, linen closets, basement store rooms, junk drawers, cubbies, kid closets, and playrooms. Each of the projects has brought us closer as friends as we reminisce about items that we find in the back or bottom of locations. We have smiled, laughed, cried and shared memories. We have been embarrassed about expiration dates and mouse poop we find in locations. We have been surprised to find "long lost" items that were found in the back/bottom of various locations. We have learned so much from each other, sharing thoughts, helpful tips, recipes and shortcuts.

We encourage each other to really look at each item, deciding which pile it should go in: Keep - Trash - Donate. We are each other's voice asking "Do you really love it?" "When is the last time you used it?" "Do you really think you will ever use it again?"

At the end of each "project day", we can smile at each other, knowing that we have accomplished a HUGE task. The beauty is that we thoroughly enjoyed the time together while we accomplished a task too daunting for one person alone.

Program Your Mind for "Projects"

Train your brain to go from vague to specific in order to divide and conquer

- Don't slide that pile of magazines back under the bed. It's a project.
- Don't drop that piece of paper on the pile that's falling over. It's a project.
- Don't drop your tools on the counter after using them. It's a project.
- Don't pile up your photos in a box and ignore them. It's a project.
- Don't drape your clothes over a chair. It's a project.

No matter what you're dealing with that you feel is unorganized or clutter, it's a project. And when you can program your mind to see chunks, piles, stacks, lumps, heaps, messes and containers as one-project-at-a-time, it's much easier to stay the course and get the job done. Everything is a project.

PARTY!!!

A fun "real deadline" is to plan a party, at your house. Next weekend! (After you stop hyperventilating, continue reading....) Yes, indeed, fear, guilt, shame and embarrassment can work really well here too! I hear this example from many of my clients. Just knowing that "they" are going to judge your home (meaning judge you of course) is enough to motivate you to get it all cleaned up fast. You of course may be shoveling odds and ends into one designated room to clear the main rooms where the party will be held. This room I've come to call "the Whisper Room." You will share this little "secret" throughout the party to everyone in
low, whispered tones, “Don’t open the door to (hand covering the side of mouth) the bedroom.” When I share this tidbit every woman knows what it means, with an elbow nudge, a laugh and eyes rolling!

**Chunk and Chip**

Think of every pile as a “chunk.” Your job is to focus on only one chunk at a time, no zigzagging to other piles before a chunk is done. Then, chunk in hand, “chip” away at it until it’s all gone. When you can think in these terms it feels much more doable.

**Time Blocks: The Chunk and Chip Timer System**

Schedule time blocks for each project. If you get into your child mentality, you know that whiny one, “This will take foooreeeevvverrr,” you’ll never start! Set a time block for 5 minutes, 10, 20, 30, 60, etc. Then, only do one “chunk” at a time and “chip” away at it. The best way to do this is to set a timer for 15 – 30 minutes per chunk or area. Go for it. When the timer dings you can stop or start it again. Setting a timer can do two things: 1) the ticking, or knowing that there is a timer going can make you feel “under the gun” and you move faster, and 2) it feels good to know that you have just this allotted time and that there is an end in sight—and you won’t be looking at the clock or feeling overwhelmed. This is a great technique to use for kids too.

**Program Your Mind for “Categories”**

People are always asking to me, “How can you deal with all that clutter in peoples’ homes? It’s just overwhelming isn’t it?” My answer is always the same, “I only see categories.” When I go into a home to organize wherever I look I only see categories. Socks, as a category, do not belong in the kitchen drawer, and spoons, as a category, don’t belong in the bathroom, etc. Think of the children’s books and games where they are asked to match like items on a page. I loved those games as a kid, and it serves me and everyone to keep up this category matching in our daily adult lives: like belongs with like. Do only one category for 10 minutes at a time, like books or toys.

**Jumpstart Your Declutterfest!**

Other examples of deadlines might include...

- You have to move.
- Your colleagues or co-workers want to meet at your house.
- It’s your month to host your book club.

Trance-states notwithstanding, most of us are procrastinators. We have lots of “stuff” and too many “things” and paper flying at us from every direction. We ignore it, push it aside, complain and gripe about it, put it into boxes to “get to later” (and never do) and on and on it goes. I’ve met many a couple who, every time a child graduates from high school or gets married they finally finish a room, build the garage, put in new...
carpet or whatever. The house looks great for all the guests and the party. Too bad their kids never get to enjoy it while they lived at home! However, some of these same people never actually finish those jobs either. The Tyvek® is still visible where three levels of siding never got on one side of the garage (the neighbors love that!), or the paint job was never finished on one wall, lighting still not finished as the electrical work is still not done, etc. Each of these "projects" would take less than a half-day, if only minutes, for some.

The "As If …" Way to Get Self-Motivated

So, no real party or visitors pushing you to get organized quickly? Here’s another positively functional way to declutter and organize anything in a short amount of time. It is adrenaline filled, yet pleasingly caffeine free! Organize “as if.”

That’s right, organize

- "as if" you’re getting ready for a big and wonderful party at your house.
- "as if" guests are coming over just to say hi in a couple of hours, or minutes.
- "as if" you’re moving.
- "as if" your life depended on it.
- "as if" your joy depended on it. It does!
- "as if" your financial security depended on it.
- "as if" your house is burning down. (Make choices quickly. What’s really important out of all that "stuff"?)
- "as if" you’re downsizing, your house is going to shrink 50%.
- "as if" it’s an emergency—you need important documents NOW!
- "as if" you’ve just found out that you’ll receive One Million Dollars to let go of everything that is not fun, happy, joyful, useful or functional in your house.

I’m sure you can think of a few more reasons and ways to let go of what just isn’t you any more, doesn’t matter and gets in your way. Make a fun family game of it if you have children! They need to learn this life skill too.

Being Ruthless!

Sometimes you really have to just be ruthless and start pitching. It’s hard to do, but necessary in some instances. Examples are when a parent or person has to move quickly to a nursing home and you can’t afford time off to deal with their house for weeks and months on end. When you’re moving, and don’t have a long time to think about what to keep and reminisce over items. Or, perhaps you’re moving into a much smaller home or room and can’t put anything into storage. Disasters like fires and floods will require this method as well. Being ruthless has its place.
One-In-One-Out

It’s well known in the organizing industry that one way to stop over buying and bringing in too much stuff and having nowhere for it to live is following the rule of one-in-one-out. In other words, for every one item you bring into the house, one has to go! This is a good life-skill to teach children. One-toy-in-one-toy-out! It makes them consider what is important and of value to them, and keeps down the clutter for you.

STORY

One of my clients is a city administrator. James hasn’t had an office assistant for most of the time he’s been in his job which has resulted in overflowing archives and old file systems because he doesn’t have enough time in the day to do it all. He has hired me to come in and help him redefine his space and systems a couple times over the years. At one point I suggested to him, “Think about it this way, if you were leaving your job next week and had to get your office organized for, let’s say ‘Mark’ to take over your position in the best of ways, how would you organize your office?” That “as if” has been very helpful to James. He fortunately did finally get an assistant in the past year, but I received a call from him recently. He said, ” ‘Mark’ is coming in!” I’d actually forgotten about “as if Mark” but we got a good laugh out of it. James is moving onto a new city administrator position in a new town and leaving his office and paperwork very organized.

Rewards

Some people say it’s helpful to build in a reward so that you’re motivated to get the carrot at the end of the organizing string. Personally that doesn’t work for me and many others. If I’m going to be unorganized and frustrated, it’s likely I’ll eat the ice cream, drink the latte’, take the nap, sit and watch TV, or go to the movie whether I get the decluttering job done or not! I know, then, I’ll be more stressed! But, if pre-planned rewards work for you, and they do for many, please, do it!

Rewards to keep you motivated to get the job finished might be enjoying a beverage of your choice, turning the phone ringer back on and talking to a friend, getting a manicure or pedicure, checking your social media site, etc. You have to define what the job is and match the motivating reward, your positive consequence, that will help keep your attention on the prize while doing the job.

A-B-C TO DO LIST

Sometimes we just need to divide our TO DOs up into logical levels of importance in relation to our time. Draw three columns on a sheet of paper listing from left to right columns A, B and C. Column A is “do it now important”, Column B is “important but can be done by week’s end”, and column C is “if it never gets done, it’s okay too.” Now, write in your list of to dos, dividing them up between the columns. It’s easy to have too many things in the A Column, making us feel overwhelmed. You might, in fact, have put lots of projects and tasks in A when they are actually C. So, after you’ve written your list in the columns go over it again. Everything can’t be important, and if you’ve been procrastinating on all of them already, they must not be.
Go a step further and cross off any Cs that you know you'll never get to and stop stressing yourself out about it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
<th>Column C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do it NOW! Important</td>
<td>Important but can be done by week’s end</td>
<td>If it never gets done, it’s okay too</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What “Being Organized” Means
Let's talk about what "being organized" really means. Maybe you don't have to do anything!

What is your definition of “being organized?” Take a moment to write it down before reading further.
For me, being organized means

Certainly, not everyone is born with the "O" Gene. “O”rganization is a learned skill. If you’re not a natural at it, it takes time and patience; a few key tips and methods and you’ll do great in the areas that keep mystifying you. Some people are born more visual and can see quickly how space can be used most efficiently, while others just can’t see it but have their own systems that work for them.

TIP: If you don’t know if you’re visual, here’s a test. When you buy groceries, put them away and shut the cupboard door, do you remember you have groceries? Do you have to look in the cupboards to remember? If you can’t remember, or have to see them to remember, you’ve highly visual.

No matter what natural talents and skills we come into life with, effective ways of organizing can be taught and learned. What’s really important to understand, especially if you have children, is that organizing is a life skill. That’s why it’s important to teach children very early how to keep their rooms decluttered and organized, as well as how to organize time, schedules and homework.

**STUDY**
Studies show that children who learn to be organized very early in life are better students and better learners. If they don’t lose their assignments and don’t have to live with stress, fear and shame about being disorganized, they’ll have more balance, efficiency and flow in all areas of life. As a result, they’ll probably have higher grades which will create better self-esteem. The really great part is that these skills ripple into all other areas of life making day-to-day living much more enjoyable too.
I’ve worked with several families who have had one or more children, but not all, attend a Montessori School for at least a few of their first formative years. These children tend to be more organized than the other children in the home. Montessori Schools teach organizational and time management skills to these young sponges. What their organizational skills at home showed me is that these children learned this core life skill well.

**Organization defined:**

“Being organized doesn’t mean you know where you put something; it means you know where to FIND it when you need it.”

With this definition of being organized, your space and your environment can look any way you like it... *as long as you can find what you want when you want it* (and it’s safe and nothing is growing, smelling or moving or green and fuzzy!) Simple, huh? Whew, doesn’t that feel better?!

**What Does Being Organized “Look” Like?**

Most people think being organized “looks like” a room, desk, table, counter, closet or floor clear of everything, perfect and pristine clean. However, there are plenty of very nice homes and offices where a person could *eat off the floor* it was so clean and organized, but the owner still couldn’t always *find* what they needed when they needed it, and so felt disorganized and stressed.

How many times have we heard someone say, “I remember putting it somewhere where I’d remember it, but now I can’t find it!” Being organized is in the finding.

With this definition of being organized, your space and your environment can look any way you like it... *as long as you can find what you want when you want it* (and it’s safe and nothing is growing, smelling or moving or green and fuzzy!) Simple, huh? Whew, doesn’t that feel better?!

Don’t use nice, neat piles as an excuse for not putting things away; you’ll end up with nice, neat piles everywhere.

Here’s another very good and clean definition of being organized by Julie Morgenstern, the author of *Organizing from the Inside Out*, “Organizing is about designing your space so that it reflects who you are and what’s important to you and arranging things logically and efficiently so that staying organized will be easy for you.”
The bottom line is that your home is your home. It should reflect your personality right down to the organizing products, items, containers, etc. that you choose and will use. Enjoy your home and enjoy being as creative as you like in organizing it to suit your life and your sense of structure and style.

**Whatever You Choose, Make Sure it's Functional**

You can use high-end amazing containers and systems, or used and low-end basic, it doesn’t matter. It’s your home; you should love it and love to use it.

There are many ways to get there from here; to organize, clear and create a wonderful environment and make your home streamlined and flowing. Being organized means making your life simple.

From time to time I’ve been asked if I do “Feng Shui” as part of my organizing practice to support energy flow in a space. I say, “No. I’m from a very small farming community in Nebraska. I do Functional Way!” Everything and anything can work if you set it up to work and then work it. I’ve organized in homes where we came across all the bells and whistles with colored paper taped to back walls of closets and such from energy-flow consultants they’d had previously… now, all covered up with clutter! Principles and theories or systems and ideas for change and flow cannot work long-term without the basic functional fundamentals of organization first. Then, the rest can be applied and work very well.

Julie Morgenstern’s definition covers being “functional” very well. Again, use whatever spins your top and makes you dance and enjoy your world. Remember however, that if your environment is not “functional,” attractive and workable for you, you’ll struggle with it constantly. And, that’s a lot of bad energy.

**10 Clutter Personalities: Nature or Nurture?**

Some people hoard and collect more than others. There are 10 Clutter Personalities that I’ll describe, explaining why these people do what they do and then give some ideas on how to change them where possible. About every one of us can fall into every one of those categories depending on the day or week.
1. The Hoarder, Pack Rat and Obsessive Compulsive Personality

   They think: "This might come in handy someday. Better keep it!"

   Hoarders are afraid that there might not be "one of these" in the future. They need to remind themselves that resources will always be available; there's always "more." They have to dare to dump it!

   How do they get this way? Hoarding and Pack-Ratting behavior has everything to do with security needs. A person’s sense of insecurity can go back to childhood due to lack of food or money, moving often or being raised in an unstable or chaotic family. Hoarders tend to be running away from something, and/or filling a void from childhood that will never be satiated by material stuff. Many of the elderly in our society were raised during the Depression or war times, some from concentration camps or countries where they lived through times of lack and fear. Hoarders can be any age.

STORY

Carmen grew up in a military family, moving a lot when she was a child. At the onset of each move her dad would put a laundry basket for each child in the middle of the floor and instructed, "Fill it, that’s all you can take." Carmen grew up to be a buyer and hoarder. She has beautiful stuff, but way too much of it. On one of my appointments at her house she had opened the refrigerator. I noticed immediately that it was overflowing with food for just two people. Carmen's husband pulled me aside a few minutes later and said that he throws most of the food out every couple days as they can’t eat it fast enough, but she just can’t see it. I talked to Carmen about it at which time she told the story about her military, take-only-what-you-can-get-in-a-laundry-basket childhood. As soon as she told the story her eyes lit up. She “woke up” out of her trance and “got it.” She’d never seen the relation of those two events before.
Hoarders can also be Perfectionists—afraid to get their environment organized as it won’t be “perfect” and so don’t do it at all. Wherever their traumas began, the overall theme for the Hoarder is chaos, distraction, hiding and running while trying to fill up an empty emotional space inside.

*Are you a Hoarder, Pack Rat or Obsessive Compulsive Personality?* A great way for a Hoarder or Pack Rat to think of libraries, yard sales, thrift stores and all stores as your very own off-site treasure trove of alternative household storage areas! You can get all the books, magazines, utensils, kitchen and other room décor anytime at cheap, cheap prices, without having to store and maintain any of it all yourself. And, when you think ahead, and decide you can leave it in the store, you have less at home, keeping your Hoarding to a minimum. The ultimate question to ask yourself is, “What do I want to fill my life time, space and energy with instead of stuff?”

**STORY**

After I graduated from college with my Bachelor’s in Social Work I was hired as Head Counselor of Salvation Army’s Men’s Rehabilitation Center in Omaha, Nebraska. This was a 100 bed rehab facility plus the warehouse where all the donations—given by charitable declutterer’s like you—were processed. I could have first pick of anything that came into the warehouse. I mostly just needed an electric blender. I saw one and was going to take it when the fellow who was in charge of fixing items, to make sure they worked before sold, said, “That one’s okay, but if you just wait a day or two, a better one will come in.” I was surprised that he could know something like that. He then said, “We get several every week; you just learn to wait for the better one because there’s always more.” And, he was right!

**RESEARCH**

In the last few years medical research has found that there is a part of the brain that is not functioning properly in people who are Obsessive Compulsive (OCD), Hoarders and Pack Rats. They really can’t help what they are doing. Coupled with counseling, there are now medications available that can help people with these disorders gain balance in their thinking and choices.

Two healing methods increasingly used today to release these types of disorders and emotional imbalances—sometimes caused in childhood or past traumas—that does not involve medication are Neuro Emotional Technique (NET) and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). (See Resources for more on these mind/body healing methods).

“There is no single cause. It would be easier to treat if there were one cause. You have addictive savers, similar to people who are addicted to alcohol or overeating. They do it to numb out bad feelings…. Another type of clutterer is frugal.They have a strong rationale for everything they save…. [The third type] are people who have an enormous problem making decisions and they can’t stay focused…. The fourth type suffers from OCD – Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.”


2. **The Deferrer**

They say, “I'll think about that tomorrow!”
A Deferrer’s behavior is grounded, and stuck, in procrastination. They need to apply one simple step to get out of Deferring: ACTION! The Universe loooves movement! Just getting started can get the momentum going and needed to follow-through and finish a job. People who Defer and procrastinate tend to invite lots of drama and chaos into their lives, creating more things to Defer.

The Deferrer Clutter Personality may be caused by growing up in a chaotic home, trauma or possibly ADHD, which moves the whole issue over into a problem with the brain or body, brain chemistry and biological imbalance. Illness and depression can cause people to Defer as well, just not being up to dealing with the project at hand, or they can keep the focus to follow-through once they think about getting started.

Are you a Deferrer? Jump into ACTION. Choose one doable “chunk” and start. Get support to keep you going—get a declutter-buddy for "soft" accountability until you’ve completed the task or project.

Cleaning Poem
~ Author unknown

I asked the Lord to tell me
Why my house is such a mess.  
He asked if I'd been 'computering',
And I had to answer 'yes.'

He told me to get off my fanny
And tidy up the house.  
And so I started cleaning up...
The smudges off my mouse.

I wiped and shined the topside.  
That really did the trick...  
I was just admiring my work...  
I didn't mean to 'click.'

But click, I did, and oops I found
A real absorbing site
That I got SO way into...  
I was into it all night.<<Sigh>>

Nothing's changed except my mouse  
It's very, very shiny.  
I guess my house will stay a mess...  
While I sit here on my hiney.

3. The Rebel
The Rebel says, "You're not the boss of me!" The child or adult-child reaction to feeling controlled. "I don't wanna and you can't make me!"
We pretty much live in Rebel world, where people blame others for their problems and resist making changes themselves. The Rebel is still blaming Mom and Dad.

I saw a quote once that I love and use whenever I can. It read, “Some people slip through life with their head up their past.” WHOA! Catchy, eh?!

Are you a Rebel? If so, you need to bring yourself out of the past and into your present and shining future. Life’s short! You need to be your own healthy, supportive parent now—to grow up and into the person that you truly deserve to be, in an uncluttered, happy home.

4. The Perfectionist

The Perfectionist: “I can’t do it perfectly, so I won’t start at all.” Or, “Next week, I’ll do everything … perfectly!”

The Perfectionist puts off organizing, waiting to buy or get the “perfect” shelf paper, vacuum cleaner, dust cloth, utility knife, utensil tray, pen, pencil or color-coded labels and labeler… with a coupon… at the perfect time. Perfectionists are programmed from childhood with some fear that created a black-and-white, all-or-none rigid world. Perfectionism is also fueled by the worry of “what others will think” if the job isn’t done perfectly. The sad humor is that no one else cares!

Are you a Perfectionist? Take back your control over your world. Jump in and realize that doing things “well enough” is “good enough!” No one else cares, and if they do, ask them to step in anytime and do it themselves! It also help to stop thinking that you can do “it all” in a day. You get overloaded thinking about organizing “the whole house,” when you only need to do one drawer. That is “good enough.” Give yourself permission to do only the necessary 10 or 20% per day to get things moving and keep them moving.

Use the 80/20 RULE: I’ll talk more about this later, but basically, 80% of what you have you’ll never use or see again. Start letting go of more of the 80% and enjoy the 20% you already love anyway. Go ahead and be and feel “perfect” about the 20%.

As Perfectionists sometimes “we” just need “permission” to change. I carry with me at all times “Permission” cards. I have given them out to people in my programs, clients and anyone I meet anywhere who seems like they need permission to do something. I’ve included a quick and simple “Permission card” here for you

"What you think of me is none of my business."
~ Terri Cole-Whitaker
Burn Your House Down

if you need permission! Copy, cut it out and carry it with you everywhere. When you need permission to stop and slow down, to get up and get moving or to be less than perfect, bring it out as a reminder!

You have Permission!
To be, do, have, know, grow, change, live, love, laugh, cry, grieve, dream, talk, try, risk, ask questions, fail, succeed, say “yes,” “no,” stop, go, begin, end. You have permission.

www.DrDeClutter.com

STORY
My client Jean is in her 80s. She has a beautiful cedar chest from when she was a child. The chest itself holds sentiment for her, but what is in it holds even more value to her. Inside her well polished cedar chest is a wedding dress from her grandmother, shoes from her son who died when he was only three, military articles from her deceased father and husband. She said that she knew that dealing with these belongings and memories they held would be hard to let go since she waited so long. She said that her children and grandchildren are not interested in the items and she has to move to a small room in a nursing home where she cannot store them any longer. Upon opening up the cedar chest, which she hadn't done for decades, we found the items had gotten moldy and rotted due to water damage that she didn't know had happened while it was stored in her basement. In this case, letting them go felt a little better as they were ruined anyway.

5. The Sentimentalist
They make a standard audible response to their stuff, it sounds like “Ohhhh, look at this, I remember this.”

A Sentimentalist can get overwhelmed and buried in all of their “Ahhhh’s” about everything. It’s too much for the brain to maintain and house to hold. Sometimes Sentimentalists are stuck in the past too, cooing over photos and memorabilia that has sadness and grief attached to it.

The dictionary says that a sentiment is “a tender, romantic, or nostalgic feeling or emotion.” And sentimentalism is “the excessive expression of tender feelings, nostalgia, or sadness in any form; an overindulgence in the ‘tender’ emotions, sympathy.” So, with this in mind, when a person who is sentimental comes upon old photos of family, friends or events, items from high school or baby-days, aged greeting cards from Auntie Em, souvenirs from trips almost forgotten and layers of

“Sentimentalists never met a memento they didn’t like—or keep.”
Cynthia Townley Ewe
Editor, OrganizedHome.Com
Burn Your House Down

keepsakes in bags, boxes and containers of all kinds…. time keeps moving…. but the
Sentimentalist freezes in time and space. You’ll hear, “Remember this?” And the story and
emotions follow. Handmade items are also in this category. It’s very hard for most women to let go
of handmade items from others, especially when they are laced with memories of older or passed
on family members, or those who may have died young. The sentimentalist can easily become a
Hoarder, finding it hard to let go of the past and items that no one cares about anymore or no one,
such as adult children or grandchildren, will take.

Are you a Sentimental Clutterer? If so, you need to reduce
your heaps of mementos that you can’t realistically enjoy anyway. Ideas for reining in Sentimental
Clutterers include scrapbooking the very best photos and children’s school art and papers, or
photographing surplus sentimental clutter before letting it go. Remind yourself that life is happening
NOW, not yesterday. Sort it out, choose the best, keep the memories and dump the rest!

Blog Post
Here’s a post from my blog that demonstrates another helpful way to look at dealing with the
“sentimental”-type: Guilty Treasures—Declutter “Sentiment” Before it Sets-into-Cement!

When you think of a “treasure,” what do you think of, what do you feel? What would a child think
and feel if you said there was a “treasure” somewhere in your house? Are your memorabilia and
family heirlooms a treasure to you? Do you treasure, respect, love and enjoy them?

You may have said something like, “It belonged to my great grandmother,” “My dad gave it to me
when I was a kid,” “My sister and I wore this when we were in our 20’s, she passed away last
year,” or "This is my dogs toy, he died five years ago and I miss him."

“Things” hold energy. What sentiments and memories keep you knee-deep in guilty treasures?
We think we can forget about our trinkets and photos and past if we just leave it in that box in the
attic or basement. Sorry! Because of the living-file-cabinet-archive-storage of your mind, it’s still
talking to you! You still “feel” it.

Right here, right now, I give you “permission” to let it all go, even ten percent at a time will help.
Whatever “it” is. Or, to enjoy it. But either way, don’t stow it, show it! TAKE IT OUT OF
STORAGE—use it, share it, display it, see it, feel it and enjoy it.

If you “treasure” your keepsakes then treat them like the priceless, joyful, story-filled treasures that
they are. This means, and shows, that you honor and love them. Display them where you can see
them and enjoy them, where you can share them and their stories with others, out of pleasure.
Next step... use them, and use them up, before they decay, rot, get bug damaged, melt, crack or are broken.

If you are holding onto items, keeping them out of feelings of grief, guilt or anger, then let them go. How? Here are some ideas for releasing your sentimental treasures, from your past (or someone else’s).

1. Move them on: Call family members or those somehow connected to the items and ask if they want them. Schedule a date to give them or have them picked up. Ship them if necessary.
2. Donate: Check for historic value with the museum in the city or area where the items came from; check the high school or college or other institution to see if the items are wanted for their showcases or library; seek out the shops and stores from where they originally came from that might display them for everyone’s nostalgic pleasure.
3. Give: to friends or anyone who likes the item.
4. Give: to strangers who will honor them, or to a thrift shop, charity, nursing home, etc.
5. Give: to silent auctions or charities, for example PBS stations who take donated cars and art and sell them a good cause.
6. Sell: Yes, there is sentimental "value" and then there's actual "value" that some items may hold. You can go online—Ebay.com, Craigslist.org, specific product sites, garage or yard sales. Or go to auction houses, antique stores, flea markets and consignment shops to see if you can make a profit from items.

To recap scrapbooking and display options for family heirlooms, souvenirs and children’s art
1. Take photos of the items, and then let the items go. Digital cameras are magic!
2. Make a display or scrapbook of the photos.
3. Start a family blog! All the people in your family and extended family around the country and possibly the world can add their photos and thoughts as well.

Open up your space and your “present” again to enjoy your current life, letting go of the past and things that unnecessarily take up valuable space (Inner and Outer).

**STORY**

My friend Sherry had a cat. The cat chewed on their stuff. One day they came home and found tiny doll feet and hands lying around the house. The cat had chewed up several Barbie® dolls! Now, in most homes these dolls and their parts would be trash. But, Sherry and her daughter, Tessa took photos of the dolls, and the cat, for their scrapbook. And (this is great!), they took the hands and feet, chew marks all over them, and put them in clear scrapbook window box containers and adhered them to the page with the photos. Oh, man. It is hilarious! That is a great treasure of a memory for Tessa!
6. The Unconscious Routine Shopper

They say (and everyone can hear them in a couple of miles!) “Oh, this is SOOOO CUTE! You’re coming home with me!”

How many cuuuuute things have you bought on vacation, on a business trip, on that shopping trip or even on a quick errand that you never use or have forgotten?

Some people have the need to buy something just to buy something. It's not quite obsessive, but is surely a "soft" addiction. This need to pick up something and put it on the counter to pay for drags you and your wallet around without your complete control or consent.

“Remorse” and “regret” shopping are in this category as well.

It may be caused by not having a lot as a child, or not being able make personal choices early on. It might also be caused by just the need to have something and not go home empty handed. The problems is that no matter how much money a person has or doesn't have, if they are an Unconscious Routine Shopper they have a limited decision-making ability and unstable boundaries about what is necessary. They don't take the time to be responsible to their budget and space in order to make a better decision in the moment.

Are you an Unconscious Routine Shopper? Start hearing the cash register “cha-ching!” every time you think about buying that next “cuuuuuute” item. What else more important could you be spending your money on? Be honest with yourself about why you think you “need” the item. Think of it as snacking on sugar all day and then wondering why you've gained 20 lbs! That little $5.00 item isn't “nothing.” It’s everything that fuels your drive to do it again. Be more selective. Clear your Inner Clutter so that your Outer Clutter stops piling up. Get picky. Get choosy. Enjoy less about stuff and more about life.

STORY

I have helped Suzi several times with her piles and clutter. She's a wonderful person, salt of the earth, hard working and kind. Several of the organizing sessions unearthed tote bags and shopping bags from her trips to Las Vegas. She always has a great time but finds women's wallets, coin purses and small handbags to be "sooooo cuuuuuute!" We found several forgotten and buried sacks of brand new—tags still on—wallets from several years before. She ended up giving them to a charity.

"Yes, I'm going to help the economy in this financial downturn—I'm going to go shopping!"
~ Paris Hilton

Clutter is the biggest obstacle to our natural positive flow of energy and a joyful life. Organize with your head, not your heart. Sort it out.
Choose the best, keep the memories and let go of the rest!
7. The Messy Personality

They say, “I don’t know how it gets this way, but what a mess.” And yet don’t deal with it.

A Messy Personality may also be called a “Dropper.” They just keep dropping clothes and anything else they were carrying on the floor or nearest surface, but certainly not where the items should go.

Some people, and certainly children, who are Messy and Droppers are not taught how to organize, see their parents do the same behavior without consequences, or are children raised in homes where they never learned to pick up their clothes and toys because the parent did it for them.

Are you’re a Messy or Dropper Clutter Personality? If it’s you, then you’re reading the right book, right now. Learn the basic skills of organizing and enjoy a nice, neat-er home. If you are raising a Messy or Dropper, it’s time to sit down and have a talk with them. Teach them how to organize and that there are consequences for not being neat, tidy and respectful of their things. That, if they can’t take care of what they have—they don’t get new “stuff”.

By the way, there is a group for this, Messies Anonymous! Visit http://www.messies.com/support_groups/.

8. The Gadgeteer Lover/Collector

They say, “Check it out! It’s so cool!”

The Gadgeteer clearly was first in line for the new iPad and iPhone and, and, and. They live for the newest and latest “thing”. So, anything labeled “old” is never looked at or truly enjoyed. Unless they run out of money, trying to stop them is pretty fruitless. The “consumer engine” makes sure of it.
**Are you a Gadgeteer?** Without stereotyping the sexes, men may be more Gadgeteer’s of computer and high tech stuff, maybe car, outdoor and camping gear, or tools. Women may turn this into knickknacks and chotchies, or the newest fabric or yarn, scrapbook dooodad or William Sonoma® kitchen gadget. Both men and women can equally be Gadgeteer’s of office supplies.

Unless you run out of money, you’re hard pressed to stop this “collecting.” But, depending on what your collecting, you can move out the old by selling it on Ebay or donating to schools, libraries or other nonprofits who can still use out of them. There are recycle boxes in many stores for old cell phones, ink cartridges and so on.

9. **Health, Immobility Clutterer**

   Not a “personality” per se, but a big problem in our country. They say, “I can’t deal with it.”

   **STORY**

   My younger brother, Kelly and his son Colton cleaned out my parent’s garage recently. My dad started going blind from macular degeneration fifteen years before he died of a fall from the stairs and three week coma. The garage work bench, tools and such were left as he last was able to use it. Mom could park the car in the garage easily enough, but it needed a good decluttering and clearing. 18 months after dad passed away my mom said that it was okay to clean it out. It looks so nice now. Dad’s memory is still intact, but it’s a nice place to go into and through now for my mom, and to find what’s needed.

   No matter the person’s age, clutter, piles, heaps and lost items can be caused by physical pain or health problems, depression, loss, grief and unexpected change. If it’s physically difficult to bend over and pick things up they will stay where they were last dropped. If depression or life-changes have taken a person for a loop and they “just can’t seem to get it together,” it’s easy to let organizing slide.

   Too much stress for too long can leave gaping holes in your thinking and ability to make decisions. Add medication that can affect thinking, and you have a cocktail for a clutter disaster. Trancing and procrastination are guaranteed.

   **STORY**

   At a speaking engagement recently I met a participant whose aunt was on the TV show, *Hoarders*. She said her aunt was living in squalor. I’ll let you imagine how nasty it was if you’ve seen any of these kinds of programs. The outcome of her situation was to be admitted to a nursing home as she was very overweight and ill and couldn’t take care of herself, even if her house was organized. Mental and physical illness take their toll on our minds and bodies—decluttering isn’t a priority.

   Funny, I checked the spelling on “squalor” as I don’t know that I’ve ever typed it before in my life(!) and found this a website! [http://www.squalorsurvivors.com/](http://www.squalorsurvivors.com/) Yikes!
Are you a Health, Immobility Clutterer? Do the best you can with one chunk at a time. Don’t keep waiting, ask for help. Let go of feeling embarrassed about what it looks like. Let others help you. You’ll feel so much better when your home looks nice again.

10. Ladies in Waiting

This one too is not a “clutter personality” per se, but a precursor to stacking and piling. They say, “When I get the system I need I’ll put it all away.”

They may not be Perfectionists, waiting for the “perfect” SYSTEM, but they are “waiting” for the SYSTEM they need into which to put their stuff. They’re more in the procrastinator and indecision camp.

Are you a Lady (or man) in Waiting Clutterer? Decide what SYSTEM you need. Get it. Put stuff away. Or, if for some reason you can’t get the SYSTEM you really want, and it could be a while, at least get the piles of stuff out of your daily walk-way so that your...
mind doesn’t have to keep being distracted and exhausted looking at it.

Organized Clutter
Is there such a thing as “Organized Clutter?” Absolutely!

Do you know of someone (or maybe it’s you), who have one or more stacks of paper or books and when asked to find an item in these stacks can go directly to it and pull it out? There’s actually a reason for this! It means they are a highly visual learner and possibly tactile and kinesthetic as well. Their mind works best by "seeing" and touching things. Unfortunately, their mind can’t visually remember where things are if they are neatly put away behind cupboard doors, in drawers and file cabinets. For visual learners the phrase, “Out of sight, out of mind,” is very literal. Right-brainers, artists, crafty folks, writers and others tend to be in this category. We (I’m in this club!) need to "see" everything "out" as our minds catalog it and find it quickly when needed, though from the outside observer, and even to “club members,” it may look messy.

Love Your Environment
No matter how your surroundings look, when you are comfortable and you are productive, efficient and effective clutter is not an issue for you. You would be able to say that every single item in your home or office has a purpose and makes sense to you. When you are organized and things flow, you can focus on what is important, what you really value. You keep clutter from accumulating and stay organized more easily, giving it much less attention, time and energy.

The bottom line: if it’s causing you stress, effecting your time, financial wellbeing, relationships, health or life management and you find yourself complaining or feeling guilty about your environment, then it’s time to change. If not, don’t worry about it and enjoy your life!

What if someone else says something about your stuff and things? Well, as my clients and audiences know from my presentations, I say, “Oh, well!” It’s your house and your life. If it’s honestly working for you, don’t fix it!

STORY
Years ago when I lived in Lincoln, Nebraska I worked as a chemical dependency counselor. Several times a year I had to go to the office of one of the most prestigious attorneys in the state for client consults. I'll never forget his office. Big overstuffed red leather couches, ancient and noble law office glass door and wood book cases lined the walls, his big oak desk and all the big metal desk tools, pens, blotter, etc. But, even with all the great couches, there was nowhere to sit. Every cushion and in-between was piled a couple feet high with his clients’ file folders. He clearly didn't have an issue with piles and clutter. The visual person he was, it worked just fine.
Living With Clutter-Bugs

It’s hard to deal with others who are the clutter-bugs, but it’s not worth a life-time of struggle either. Do they know how to sort and organize? Do they have one of the Clutter Personalities? Can you talk to them honestly about how it affects you? If it’s a child, jump in and teach them now. Shutting their bedroom door is also effective! If it’s your spouse, you obviously married them knowing they were not organized, right? So, they also know that! It’s important however to at least have the main areas of the home off limits to clutter so that everyone can enjoy the house and invite others to visit. Each person may have their own piles in their rooms and spaces that hopefully don’t bother the others.

3 Self-Inquiry Questions to Help You Know If You Should Keep It or Pitch It

1. Do I love it? Do I feel good when I look at it, use it, see it?
2. Have I used it recently?
3. Does somebody in the house use it? (Ask around so you don't get rid of something they really want or have been looking for.)

We don’t always know why we get overwhelmed with our stuff, even if we don’t have a lot of it, or why we don’t put things away right away or keep our environment clean. But, what we can do is notice when we are feeling stuck or frustrated with our environment and see what changes. Even the smallest change can brighten up our world again. For example, put all the shoes back in the closet, hang up the clothes from the door knob and from the back of chairs (and the exercise equipment!), take recyclables to the recycle bin or center, clean off the table and kitchen island and file those papers.

Here is another clever way to find out if it’s time to release something. If you’re not sure about whether it’s time to let go of something, put it in the trash can or a donation box and “see how it feels.” Pay attention to your guts, not your head. You’ll feel it! Not ready to let it go? That’s okay. Retrieve it and enjoy it, make sure you have somewhere to put it so that it’s not floating around or stored and lost. Or, feel great to release it? Leave it in the trash or donate it. Let it go!

The Third Kind of Clutter: “Other” Clutter

Yes, the third kind of clutter is people! Sometimes it’s people who are cluttering up our lives. Sometimes their material clutter is in our way, sometimes it’s boundary issues, and yes, sometimes it’s really, literally, them! This can be anyone from family, ex-family, adult-children, friends, neighbors, etc. Taking a stand with this issue is very hard, but necessary if you want your time, energy and sanity back.
This is not a relationship manual, so I'll keep this on point as it relates to clutter. Basically, if you’re having ongoing negative situations with another, discuss it; communicate your needs; sit down with them and figure it out; go to counseling; do something proactive. If it’s time for them to move out of your life, or you out of theirs, figure out what that means, and declutter them! I’ve decluttered a number of relationships in my life and don’t regret any. It's great to think of it in positive terms too, that if you have something taking up space, you can't put anything else in that space until what is there is removed. It's the same with material items and the energy and time we spend in relationships. If a relationship's time has run out, it's good to move on with as little drama as possible, opening up that space, time and energy for someone better for you and better for them. Everyone wins.

Is it easy to declutter people? No, it’s usually gut wrenching. But, you can do it. If any relationship stops you from living your life, enjoying your uniqueness and intrudes on your peace, time and energy, you have a responsibility to do something to change it, otherwise, it will surely not change. You deserve a great life. So do they.

We’re on this big twirling ball for such a short time, the more quickly you make decisions to live your best life the better you are for yourself and others in so many good ways. Remember, YOU HAVE PERMISSION!

**Being organized means**
- living, working, playing and relaxing
- in a space and environment
- that supports your best life, day in and day out.
- You deserve it!
PART TWO:
The 10-Steps to Declutter and Get Organized Forever

Hi Kim!

I'm doing very well. I know we haven't talked for awhile, but I want you to know that things have clicked into place in my brain or something. At the start of the summer I couldn't even walk in my 3 car garage and now I can park a car in it… maybe even two! We borrowed my daughter's boyfriend's pickup and have taken loads to the dump and charity donations and my other daughter's had a garage sale. It feels GREAT and I'm finding so many treasures I've lost. Yesterday I found a Roman Coin that we'd given the kids for Christmas with another Korean ornament that our foreign exchange student gave them in with old toys. I think of you when I say, "I've been looking for this" or "Oh, there it is!!"

Most of the stuff is just junk to me… stuff I no longer need and someone else might be able to use. What a great feeling. I don't want most people to know how bad it was but I might try to send you a link to my organization photo album when I get closer to done on the garage. Actually I may never be "done" but it's sooooo much better.

I now have a garden “zone” and Christmas “zone” and a tool “zone.” I'm using your ideas and my son is REALLY helping me to get into it without judgment or complaining—like the kids did when they were younger. We got a lot done during our early rainy summer but it's too hot to work very late any more. I was out there at 5:30 am yesterday but today I worked on my dresser top. Once you start organizing, you notice everything is messy! At least in my house and office, I am noticing it. Gotta go, but thought you'd like to know that I'm making great progress.

~ Bonnie,
Longmont, Colorado

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Dr. DeClutter,

Hi! Thanks. I received your confirmation for our organizing appointment and the Prep Tool List. Now I'm scared! But a sorta good scared, because I know it's a forward step. I'm telling myself to "enjoy the rush of anticipation!" Okay, the rush just rushed by me and I'm freaking out having you come into my home and see all this mess. No. I'm okay. Let's do it! Can't wait! Whew!

~ Paula
Ft. Collins, Colorado
Outer Clutter: Where Do I Start?

There is a famous Zen koan (philosophical riddle) which asks, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" It is used in Zen Buddhism as an aid to meditation and a means of gaining spiritual awakening.

Over the years of organizing people and their stuff, and their emotions about their stuff, I realized that there is an Organizing koan which goes like this, "What is the sound of one person needing to organize?" I watch most of the same whirlwind emotions show up at every job; I'm never surprised and can almost time them.

RESEARCH

Stress is an automatic reaction for women involving many areas of their lives, but specifically in relation to how they feel about their homes "Women feel that clutter is a negative reflection on them," says Susan M. Satya, a psychotherapist, faculty member at the New School for Social Research in New York City and director of Catalysts for Change in Southampton, New York. "After countless messages from the culture, we feel that caretaking, pleasing and comforting others—which certainly includes creating a nurturing space—is a woman's responsibility," she says. So when we enter a room cluttered with the sneakers, books, bags and papers of our busy lives, we often unconsciously get uneasy or overwhelmed. Our stress levels go up, our self-esteem goes down and our general feeling of health and well-being hits the dirt.

Sometimes, though, clutter makes it more difficult for women to do the overwhelming numbers of things that they do on a day-to-day basis. "Life is easier if you know where everything is," says Marjorie Hansen Shaevitz, director of the Institute of Family and Work Relationships in La Jolla, California, and author of The Superwoman Syndrome. But clutter means that things are not where they should be and that you'll probably have to spend valuable time hunting for them.

Here is the succession of emotions; statements and the roller coaster of energy that accompanies most declutter jobs.

- I'm so embarrassed that you have to see my house like this
- This is a soul-eating, spirit-killing mess
- I can't handle it anymore
- I'm so depressed and angry with myself
- I'll deal with this later
- I don't know what's wrong with me that I can't do this myself
- It's infuriating
- I'm so embarrassed (apologies again)
- I've been agonizing over this for so long I can't take it any more
- (Black hole moment, frozen, can't move)
- I feel so stupid that it's this way
- (Crying)
The 10-Steps to Declutter Anything
There are clear steps to take in order to get focused, stay focused and get your chaos moving in the direction of order. Continual right movement in the right direction is everything.

STEP #1: Schedule Uninterrupted and Exclusive Declutter “Time Blocks”
Designate and block out time on your calendar for organizing. Write it in making it as important as any other appointment that is a priority and that you won’t cancel for any reason. Putting it in your calendar will also keep it in the forefront of your mind as being important. A job might only take ten minutes, block out the time for it anyway. My minimum organizing appointment with clients is three hours to have the time to really dig...
deep and get a job finished. When you’re doing it yourself, plan 45 – 90 minutes for each session to make a serious dent in your focused project area, or to complete a section.

Your time block and plan must also include the following to keep you focused, in the room and doing the doing of the job.

- Let others in your family or office know that this is serious and to help you by not interrupting or distracting you during this time.
- If you have small children, you may want to get a babysitter.
- Shut off the phone. (Even stopping to “see who’s calling” without actually answering the phone will distract you, waste your precious organizing time block, and keep you from doing the job.)
- Shut off the computer. (Looking at the screen, incoming emails and hearing computer sounds can distract your mind.)
- Plan ahead to take with you some healthy protein rich snacks like nuts or an energy bar (preferably chocolate!) and water (nothing stronger) so that you don’t leave the room when your emotions get the best of you and you feel hungry.
- Whatever other measures particular to you and your situation that will keep you in the room and focused.

**STEP #2: Choose Your Space**

Think one doable space. Not your WHOLE HOUSE in one day, remember? Not even your whole small apartment, flat or RV in one day! It’s like saying you’re going to run a marathon today (and you haven’t been practicing for one) or you’re going to lose that last 20 lbs. this week (when it’s impossible—you can’t do what you can’t and “won’t” do. You’ll immediately resist, trance out, take a nap, eat, get on the phone, read emails and magazines or watch TV, or worse yet… shop! It’s too big and unreasonable.

**ZONES and SUB-ZONES**

Instead, think as big as a ZONE. A ZONE is a room or an area used for one or more definable activities. ZONES include the Kitchen, the Bedroom, the Bathroom, the Rec Room/Family Room or Den, the Garage, the Hall Closet, the Bedroom Closet, The Basement, etc. These are the big and wide areas where you live and all your stuff lives too. And, even within a large ZONE there are SUB-ZONES: The kitchen has a pantry; stove and cooking area; refrigerator and freezer; dishware, flatware, plastic storage container drawer or cabinet, junk drawer, etc.

**BONUS:**

Want to really feel good? When you do things that are not on your TO DO List, write them down and then check or cross them off! Even if it’s like, “got out of bed” (check); “put my clothes on the right way today” (check); “didn’t kill anybody” (check). Whoa, that feels good! YES!
As you decide on what area you are targeting for the big clean-out and re-organize project, narrow your big job down to a very doable project. Humans need “feel goods” more often than they realize. You want a project that you can really complete in the time you’ve allotted so that you can feel great about it when you’re done and motivated to do more. Taking one drawer, shelf, counter top or “chunk” at a time really shifts your energy and attitude about yourself quickly. Completing it so that you can check it off your list and feel good about it is the icing on the cake!

Chunk and chip projects down to small areas and tasks to make them doable and done. Completion is so rewarding.

Who couldn’t use more self-esteem?

STEP #3: Call for Help!

Make one call for help, whether it’s to a friend or Professional Organizer. Again, like when hiring a personal fitness trainer, let them keep you on track and moving. You will hear your support buddy say, "Just put one more item in the bag. Keep moving on this pile. Come back into the room!" Make sure not to ask someone however who will be judgmental or critical. Asking for help is important; we all need help now and then to get back to balance. Sometimes we need help because we have to move furniture or other heavy items that we can’t do ourselves. No matter the reason, having someone by our side it very helpful.

STEP #4: Necessary PREP TOOLS to Make Your Job a Breeze

All right, let’s say you’ve chosen the kitchen pantry (ZONE), top three shelves only (SUB-ZONE) for today—now what?

Think of this as not just a project with some tasks, but as an “operation.” Metaphorically, you’re at least the OR nurse who gets the operating room and tools ready for the doctor, but you also may be the doctor! So, be a great OR nurse to the focused Dr. You and get the tools prepped and ready for your surgery (project). These tools will keep you in the room with the project to completion.

1. Cleaning supplies.

Depending on what you’re decluttering or re-organizing, it’s usually good to have at least paper towels, glass cleaner, dust cloths, dusting spray or polish, a broom, dust pan and a vacuum cleaner ready. If you don’t already have these ready to use in a bucket or like-container, get one and put all the cleaning supplies in it and carry it easily with you to the project area so as not to keep leaving the room to get one more paper towel… then never coming back!
Burn Your House Down

Why have these ready at hand? After you’ve pulled everything off a shelf or out of a drawer, you want to wipe it clean. What a great feeling to know that when you put what you want back—all organized—it's all clean and fresh: in, back, under, on top, around, behind and through the area! How nice!

2. **Paper Organizing Specifics.**

   When working with paper, (I expand on this in PART THREE) have the following items ready to use: file folders, hanging files, file drawers, stapler, marker, labels, letter opener and scissors.

3. **Sorting Boxes / Containers**

   The most important items to have ready to make sorting a breeze are sorting boxes and/or containers. Sorting boxes or containers have a major role in decluttering. They will keep you IN THE ROOM! And, if you don't have them you will immediately be stuck because you won't have anything to put your stuff into when you say "yes" to keep or "no" to discard it. It will just be moved to another pile and you'll have gotten nowhere. (More on containers in a bit.)

4. **Notebook and Pen**

   You’re going to realize things, have ideas, need to measure something, remember a call you need to make or something important while you’re decluttering. Use a notebook for these brain droppings so that you don't stop your progress. Write the idea down and keep going.

   **TIP:** Wear an apron. One way to stay in the room or area is to use a utility or craft apron. I wear one when I work with my clients. It’s so great to just reach into your pocket to get scissors, a rubber band, a twist-tie, paper clip, letter opener, a measuring tape or transparent tape. It is especially helpful to have scissors in your apron saving you a lot of time looking for them or mislaying them.

**The 11 Containers Needed to Make Sorting Easy**

Depending on your organizing project, you'll use some or all of these.

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Green-Hug-a-Tree speech:

Our duty as the “enlightened” species (hmmm) on the planet is to be the best caretakers of this place we call home. As you might have heard, we’re not doing so great.

As individuals, we can do plenty in our daily lives by being conscious of what we buy and don’t buy, and how we dispose of and recycle our stuff and things. Getting organized and making conscious decisions about our consumerism is our duty to one another, ourselves and to the future.

Enjoy your “present” by being more “present!” Open yourself up more than you open stuff up, and containers of stuff, that are unnecessary, putting less in landfills.

Enjoy your life and support the health and joy of others and the planet, one choice at a time.

Thank you, I’ll step down now!
**Burn Your House Down**

**TIP:** Make sure to label your sorting boxes/containers if you have several so that you don’t waste time trying to remember what goes in which container because each will be moved to a designated somewhere when you’re finished. It’s especially helpful when someone is helping you and no time is lost confusing containers and their contents.

### 3 Overall Sorting Containers to Get You Started

**Boxes, Bins, Trash Bags and Plastic Zipper Bags**

**#1: Boxes, Bins**

You can use cardboard boxes, laundry baskets, bins or tubs or any container that is square, solid and easy to carry. If you know that the items you're sorting go to donation, then use a cardboard box and label it DONATION, when it's full you close the top and it's all ready to go out the door.

**TIP:** Storage tubs and bins come in many sizes and shapes. If you're going to stack and store the tubs into which you're sorting make sure you buy several of the same size at one time so that they stack perfectly. Manufacturers change styles too quickly and you might not be able to get that exact kind again even a week or two later. When they don't stack perfectly they wobble and sometimes crack. (Always keep the receipt if you buy a lot of them so you may easily take unused ones back.) Rubbermaid® are some of the best quality.

**#2: Trash Bags and Baggies**

**Trash bags:** All sizes are great for lots of jobs, but not if you want to stack and store items because trash bags will become a big frustrating heap of mush. For stacking see #1 above.

**Baggies:** The Ziploc® type bags (gallon and quart size): Have plenty of each on hand, they are great for those small items that need to stay together in categories.

Use zipper baggies for everything! Whether you need to corral and contain kids’ toys, batteries, cotton-swabs and cotton balls, sewing room buttons, miscellaneous tea bags, or pens, pencils and crayons, Ziploc® bags and other brands of this make are the key. They are clear, clean, easy to use and inexpensive. Always have plenty on hand for organizing anything that is small or has lots of parts. They make life much easier.

**TIP:** Use baggies for travel too, not “just” for the few couple-ounce-bottles-of-liquid-containers you can take on the plane but for all kinds of things like socks, medication, hygiene items, film, etc. They keep things contained and dry, and you can easily write on them to label the contents or date. They're also
great to use for storing ink pens, highlighters, markers, crayons and pencils/lead writing tools in so that “just in case” they leak or rub in a jacket, coat pocket or in a suitcase, they won’t get on your clothing or other material and ruin it and your day! I obviously use them a lot!

**NOTE: Boxes vs. Trash Bags for Prep Containers**

Can you use trash bags instead of boxes for any of these Prep Containers? Yes and no. A plastic trash bag liner in the trashcan is great. But, as noted earlier, without the structure of a bin trash bags are flimsy and constantly fold down onto the floor wasting a lot of time picking up the opening to get items in. Open top boxes are so much easier, stronger, stackable and, functional. At the same time, it’s good to have trash bags of all kinds, including plastic and paper grocery bags if you already have them to put some items in and especially for the trash can. (These options will change over time as we move away from plastic grocery bags.)

**#3: Trash Container: For real trash**

I’m all about recycling everything that can be reused and repurposed again and again, but, sometimes things are just trash and must go. Unfortunately, what is trash in one declutterer’s eyes is just fine for use in another's!

Examples:

#1: I worked with a client to clean out her basement storage area where one of the items she was ready to toss into the trash was a glass hurricane lamp, still sloshing with oil. I grabbed it from her hand before it hit the container and said I’d put it into the donation box. She said, “Who’d want it?” Well, plenty of people! I could see that it wasn’t an antique, but it was fine, not even dusty!

#2: I have a friend on the east coast who told me the story of a high-end newlywed couple, related to co-workers of his, who upon opening their very bright and shiny new and wonderful wedding gifts literally threw into the garbage anything they didn’t want or of which they had duplicates!!! Okay, this is beyond “not okay” in my book. I still twitch when I tell the story or think about it. It’s very sad and unconscious and terribly childish and… and I’m glad I didn’t know them or I would have had to hurt them!!!!

So, these three are the basic, most important, but there are several more that really make sorting and organizing flow.

**Sorting Container #4: Shredder**

Can we say, “Identity Theft?” Yes, today we can, more than ever and it will only get worse. When first starting this book there was a trust-shattering news report regarding the stolen personal information
disk of millions of veterans and, more recently, several news stories about legal firms, medical and other companies who dumped all of their client and patient files into the dumpster for anyone to take and use.

If you have a debit or credit card, if you have a bank account, if you've ever been to a doctor or hospital, and if you shop online you’re on lists, lots of lists. You can’t secure all of them, that’s their job. However, on a day-to-day basis, you personally must take your own measures not to release or let sit around your most important personal information. Shred any documents with your Social Security Number, bank documents, stocks and bonds, etc. when they are not in your active filing system. You can take control of what comes into your house and how you manage the use of your plastic and paper when purchasing items. The recommended shredder is a crosshatch shredding machine.

**TIP:** Search online for “identity fraud” and “how to prevent identity theft” to find the most recent (but always changing) links for information about securing your personal information.

**Shred Days**
Check your local banks, city office and recycle center to find out when they might be having a Shred Day. Sometimes these are sponsored by charity groups like Kiwanis Clubs as well. Shred Days are designated times when a company or group sponsors a massive shredder truck to be at a location. They will indicate how many boxes of paper they'll shred for you. Many are free events with possible donation to a charity. Collecting your paper and having it dumped in the truck and shredded in a matter of seconds right before your eyes is quite wonderful! Shocking sometimes, but wonderful! They always have Police or Security of some sort at these events to make sure that no one takes any of the paper before it gets into the shredder.

**Sorting Container #5: Recycle for Glass / Paper / Plastic / Cardboard, etc.**
Different cities and areas of the country and the world have the capability to deal with recycling at different levels. Living in Boulder County, Colorado, recycling is a norm and is expected. Some individuals and companies still do it more diligently and completely than others, but more often than not, this area of the nation is one of the leaders in recycling.
**Reroute**

This box is VERY important. As you’re sorting, you’ll naturally come across objects that belong in other rooms, to neighbors or that go back to your job. You may also find books that are overdue and need to be returned to the library. These items are put in the “reroute box” to be “rerouted” AFTER you’re finished with your declutter job. This will keep you “in the room” to get the job done.

**Repair**

When you’re decluttering an area have only one repair box, then reroute the items to possible other repair boxes throughout the house. These can include: a clothing repair box in the clothes closet, a mechanical and tools repair box in the garage or basement, a toy repair box in the kids room, etc. This box may also house toys, electronics and such that need batteries or have a missing part that might be somewhere else in the house. Then, “schedule the time” to get the repairs done.

Another box you might also have that isn’t quite “repair” but needs similar time and attention may be in a closet or laundry room for dry-cleaning, another for extra attention to stains, and others that are particular to your needs.

**Garage, Yard or Tag Sale**

Garage, Yard, Tag or Estate… whatever kind of sale you’re having, putting items right into a box and then taking the box to the garage or other specified area is extremely helpful. Make sure however that you or others in your family don’t dig around in them later and drag all the items back into the house!

If you’re not sure a Garage Sale is really going to be worth your time, you might just label the boxes DONATION and call the local charities to come pick them up. Otherwise, that old “energy” keeps...
nagging at you, now taking up space again, in your head. It's sort of like the mythical Greek sirens calling you to come rescue them! LET IT GO! (See Sorting Container #9)

**TIP:** The next time a charity calls to find out if you have something for them because they'll be in your neighborhood soon, say yes! Start a donation bag or box in your garage or somewhere you can drop items into when you find something ready to declutter. Also, when you say yes you are giving yourself a deadline—their pick up date—and you'll actually find more things and make faster decisions to let them go.

**STORY**

I have a client who buys most of her (too-many-and-heaped-up-everywhere) clothes and items through the mail and online. We had a good laugh after she picked up a copy of Lands' End Catalog, noting that she bought through their website. I said, "The problem with Americans is that we buy through LandsEnd.com but it ends up in LandFillsEnd.com!"

How does this happen? Like the T-shirt that reads, "I don't have clutter, I'm a collector!" shopping, buying, hoarding, holding onto and not enjoying our possessions are symptoms of unhappiness, fear, lack-programming from childhood, or low self-esteem. These old, core hurts create present day soft-addons and habits that keep us distracted and out of balance.

Please buy the things you love, need and want from Lands' End and everyone else, but monitor what you really "need" and wake yourself up from your "consumer trance" that if left unchecked will only further complicate your life. Find your "no."

While on this topic, are you a Garage Sale junkie? Just say "no!" Look, don't buy. Get creative, do something else instead.

**Self-Inquiry Regarding Possible Unnecessary Purchases**

Garage Sales are great, I like them too! But like anything else, if you're buying compulsively, even if you "only spent a dime!" the same questions apply whenever you buy something:

1. Can I afford it? Really? (Even if it’s only a dollar, keep reading!)
2. Am I going to use it?
3. Am I going to use it now, or in the near future?
4. Where is it going to go? Where will it "live"?
5. What would happen if I don’t buy it now?
6. Why do I think this is important to own?
7. Why do I think I need it?
8. Would I be fine if I don’t have it?
9. Are there other ways to use my money than to buy this?
10. Are there other ways to use my energy and time than to do this?

Coupons and clearance sales can easily fit into the “Garage Sale” section. It’s a challenge for some people to stop buying “just because they have a coupon” or “it was on sale.” As we know, compulsive buying is a problem for many in our society. I’ve been in homes with 2-bay garages stacked to the ceiling with stuff bought at Garage Sales and other sales never used, “But it was so cheap! I got such a good deal!”

**Sorting Container #9: Re-purpose and/or Donate**

To “re-purpose” something means to reuse it yourself, or to release it to the world and let it live another life. It means to give it purpose again in the same form, or to be made into something new. Donate as much as possible whether you take it yourself or call a charity or thrift store to pick it up. Basically, ANYTHING that can be reused by someone somewhere needs to go on to donation.

**Donations:** Don’t spend time trying to figure out if it’s “good enough.” Unless it is really stained, torn or worn out, give it to the thrift store, church or charity and let them decide if it’s good enough. I most often give donations to a local charity thrift store that moves their overstock to other local charities as well as ships clothing overseas to third-world countries. A great place to take used and surplus building supplies is Habitat for Humanity’s ReStore.

**Consignment:** Have you ever bought a used, excuse me, “pre-owned” car, and loved it? With the advent of used-clothing shops that are more upscale and carry clothes that are less worn, we have great new opportunities on both sides of this endeavor. There are gently used wedding gown stores as well as used sports equipment stores. You can purchase items at a lower price or it’s a great way to move out your still lovely items to these shops and get a couple of dollars back when someone else buys it for a fraction of the new cost. Everyone wins.

To put items on consignment, they need to be near-new and just washed or dry-cleaned. Sometimes the expense getting them ready isn’t worth it. Check with your local consignment shops to find out their guidelines.

Organize with your head, not your heart.
STORY

When my last vehicle went to car heaven, I donated it to Colorado National Public Radio (NPR) and then thought about what I wanted for my next “pre-owned” vehicle. I decided on a van. Being a professional organizer a van really comes in handy! I went to a car dealership and walked around outside for just a moment before a dealer came up to me and asked what I was looking for. I said, “I need a 2,000 lb. cassette player.” He hesitated only a second then pointed at three older model vans. I tried them out, settled on one and drove it home.

2,000 lb. cassette player? I don’t care for music CD’s much and I'm not an Mp3/ipod music fan (or whatever is the newest tech-gadget). Someday I’ll have to upgrade of course, but I have tons of cassette music and lecture tapes that I already own and enjoy listening to on long drives. It makes no sense to get rid of them and buy them all again in a new format.

Use Online and offline Tag Sales! Here are some online ways to move your stuff out, for cash or carry.

Freecycle.org: It’s free; you can’t charge or be charged for stuff here. Find out who locally wants your stuff and will come get it for free, or what others have that you want and can pick up for free! Win/Win!

Craigslist.org: Sell, buy and trade items locally. I’ve used Craigslist many times with great and fast results buying and selling. You might want to use the income for something more fun!

Ebay.com: Sell your stuff worldwide! Not everyone wants to deal with the minimal hassle of it, but for those who are willing to spend the time on photographing, advertising and shipping of items, it can be a very good way to move your items out for some cash, or even make a business of it. There are also storefronts that do the online work for you to sell your items, they take a percentage of the sale for their work. Check your local directory or go online to find them.

Shwapping Party!: When you “shop” and “swap” til you drop, you get shwapping! Call a couple friends who have a couple friends who have similar sizes in clothing and shoes as well as jewelry. Schedule a date, time and home where you can all bring your items to try on—shop, swap and party! You each walk away with something brand-spanking used but new to you at no cost, helping one another out while having some good fun.

Books: Trading for cash or credit. There are used bookstores in many cities that will sell your books, audios and movies. When I take mine in, whatever they don't accept I take to the library for their annual fundraiser sale or to a thrift store. You might also check online to trade books at www.bookmooch.com.

My friend Chris calls me once in a while when she's off for another trip and laughs, "Yup, I told my kids I was going skiing!" That's code for Spending Kids Inheritance.
**CDs, DVDs and Vinyl Records:** With technology upgrading every minute, letting us upload music from our computers and mobile devices, it’s a wild world where you can find many different ways to listen to music or watch movies, entertained and educated. There are stores that trade for CDs and DVDs, and, they’re hard to find but some music trade shops still take vinyl records. They buy yours at a discount or give you in-store credit for music and movies from all eras. These are usually found in college towns as they have a good, ever changing customer base.

**Garage, Tag or Yard Sale:** If you really have enough good stuff, have the time and nice weather, a Garage Sale can actually be fun. Better yet, organize a bigger event; have a neighborhood sale to attract more people and share the cost of advertising. You also get to hang out all day or weekend with your neighbors, which is good for relationship building too. Always pre-plan with a call to your local charity to pick up the left-overs ASAP after the sale so that it’s not sitting in your garage taking up space.

**Curb Free:** In some cities, especially college towns, it’s easy to just leave your items on the front lawn with a “FREE” sign and someone will walk off with it in minutes!

**STORY**

Some countries, like Germany, have to pay tax for everything, so instead of buying anything new they have an annual or bi-annual swap. Everyone puts their items they are ready to release out on the front lawn and then go for a stroll through the neighborhoods where others have done the same. They get what they want and take it home for free, no money exchanges hands so no one gets taxed.

**Sorting Container #10: Memorabilia Container**

You will come across photos, Girl and Boy Scout badges, souvenirs, baby items and other odds and ends from the past that you want to keep for scrapbooks or to give to your children “someday.” This container should be a good quality plastic or rubber tub with a tight fitting lid so that you can close it and store it with no concern for bugs or other intruders over time. Be sure to label it for each child’s items or whatever its future is. Plus, if you need to add to it, like children’s school papers and art projects, keep it in an area with easy access or at least with nothing heavy stacked on top of it.

**Sorting Container #11: Gift, Re-Gift and Greeting Card Box(es)**

**Gift and Re-Gift first:** These are fun ones! Some people shop ahead or are great clearance and coupon shoppers for practical means. When you find items that are on sale months ahead of gift-giving events then you are ready. Put your purchases in your Gift Box, then, all you have to do is go to your Gift Box, pick the perfect item, wrap it up and take it! YEA! And, here’s the bonus savings—less stress and chaos with “last minute decisions to run and buy something”. This is especially helpful when you
have small children and that surprise birthday party pops up that you didn’t remember or know about ahead of time. Shopping for less ahead and keeping your goodies in the Gift Box is also great for future events like planned family or class reunions, weddings, anniversaries and celebrations of all kinds.

The other name for the Gift Box is the Re-Gift Box! How many times have you found a gift that you bought for someone months or even years ago, but forgot to send or give to them for their wedding, shower, birthday, etc? It happens often enough. Now, you feel like it’s too late, or they’re already divorced! Or, you’ve received those wonderful, really, nice and precious gifts, or not so precious, from others that you just haven’t and won’t use, but they’re still nice. In this case the Re-Gift Box is the new temporary HOME for these treasures… just waiting for someone who needs them more than you.

**Tip:** This is very important! If you received a gift from someone and it goes into the Re-Gift Box, and this gift giver is someone you’ll be giving back to in the future, pay close attention here. Before you put the gift into the Re-Gift Box, make sure to put a note on it as to who gave it to you. You know why?!
You don’t want to Re-Gift it back to the same person!

**Greeting Card Box**
The third box in this category is the Greeting Card Box. Be prepared for birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, get well wishes, congrats, and times of sympathy with a box that holds a number of each of these topical cards. You can use a shoebox, banker’s box, plastic or decorative box to hold them with index card dividers labeled for each topic. Or, you can buy them in decorative boxes at many card shops already filled with an assortment of cards.

The bottom line is, why waste time and money stressing out over getting last minute, “Why didn’t you tell me sooner,” or “I can’t believe I forgot and don’t have any cards” when you can be prepared?!
You’re doing yourself, your bank account and your immune system (less stress) a BIG favor!

**Now, It’s Time to Start!**

**How to Sort**
Okay, now let’s go over our To Do List:
1. You’ve scheduled your declutter time block. CHECK✓
2. You have your protein snack and water. CHECK✓
3. You’ve shut off phone ringers, the computer and limit other distractions. CHECK✓
4. You’ve decided on what and where you’re going to declutter, the ZONE and SUB-ZONE (Example: Kitchen Pantry, top three shelves only). CHECK✓
5. You’ve collected your Prep Tools: cleaning supplies, boxes, containers and possibly even a supplied apron. CHECK✓

STEP #5: SORTING, WORKSPACE and/or STAGING AREA

Having a “workspace” is very helpful for sorting through items. Unfortunately, you may need to declutter your workspace before you can actually dig too deeply into your chosen ZONE. And, even if you just don’t have anywhere to go with piles and need to get started, an easy make-shift clean counter top can be made out of a large bath or beach towel, blanket or sheet. Drape it over the top of the surface on which you want to sort, even though there might be a layer of mail or other items that can’t be moved quite yet. Or use an empty box lid or even plastic storage box of any size. You can also turn a cardboard box upside down and use it as a table top. When you do get a space cleared, use the countertop, table or even the floor as your holding and processing area.

Basically, use something that is clean, flat and empty in which you can go through the sorting process with less visual distraction and confusion.

TIP: When cleaning out junk and other drawers in the kitchen or bathroom, just put a big towel on the counter and pull out and dump the drawer of items onto the towel. Then, clean the drawer, put it back, sort the items on the towel and put only the items back into the drawer that you want (in categories in containers). Toss the trash and debris on the towel and shake out the towel! All done!

SORTING 101—Here We Go!


You’re standing in front of your pantry, paper bag ready for hyperventilating… (just kidding!) Just work with one shelf at a time. If the shelves are long and or deep, do just a one or two foot section at a time. As you pull all the boxes, cans, containers, and broken packages that have spilled, etc. off the shelf, either put them directly on the workspace and make decisions there, or be ready to read expiration dates as you pull items down and decide if they go into the garbage right away. If they are still good and you’re going to use them they will go onto the workspace area for further decisions.

Remember, this is the sorting process. At this stage it will feel like nothing is happening and that it actually looks worse than it did before you started! That’s okay, just keep chunking and chipping away!

WARNING AND NOTE TO HUSBANDS: It’s going to look worse before it gets better.

Plan on it! So, no snickering, eye-rolling or judging during the sorting process. Wait until it’s all done, please!
When the shelf is clear of items, clean and dry it. (Ooooohhhh, doesn’t that feel good!?) As you put each item back, check and discard expired items, open and leaking containers, and so forth. Inspect the cans, boxes and bags of food; wipe each item off when necessary before putting it back on the shelf where you want it. Also, decide if you will eat or otherwise use the items before they expire. If the product is still usable, under the expiration date, and still sealed but you know you’re not going to eat it, you can put it into your Donation Box. Make a separate box for food. Food distribution centers are happy to get food, but do not send them expired food, they will have to throw it out too.

**TIP:** Kitchen pantries are a good place to store the zipper baggies and small containers to use for combining and keeping similar products. Examples are tea bags, coffee filters, toothpicks, bouillon cubes, seasoning and dressing packets.

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**STORY**

I have helped clients throw away hundreds of dollars of food, cosmetics, hygiene products, medication and other items that were forgotten and unused, but no longer useable. There is so much wasted food sitting in pantries, in garages and in storage rooms. Please go through all your food and bring everything up-to-date. Then keep it up-to-date so as not to waste it or to attract unwanted ants and other hungry insects or rodents.

Here’s another thought… unless you have the “six month bulk food and supply system” down pat, don’t buy more in bulk than you can realistically use. Just because it was “cheaper,” “I had a coupon,” or “it was on sale!” are not good reasons to buy more then you need. Save money and be good to the environment.

**TIP:** If you’re determined to buy food in bulk to save money, plan your menu schedule ahead in order to know when and how you’re going to use it all. Or, split it with friends and neighbors who split the cost with you.

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**Overview**

1) You’ve taken everything out of your designated Sub-Zone space.

2) You’ve cleaned the space and items.

3) You’ve sorted items for going back into the pantry and into Prep Boxes for designated destinations.

   Great! Good job! Whoohoo! I’m proud of you! High-five!

4) If you haven’t put back the items into your clean pantry or shelf, you have this pile of stuff and are feeling a bit faint, because you don’t know how to put it back in an organized fashion.
STOP. Breathe. Take a big drink… of water… don’t leave the room. Stand back for a minute and admire the clean, fresh area you’ve opened up for better use. Now, let’s keep going!

STUDY

From the Farm… to the Market… to the Table… to the Dump
- 96 billion pounds of food—or 27% of the 356 billion pounds of edible food available—is wasted each year in the U.S. according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- On his “Wasted Food” blog, Jonathan Bloom places that figure at more than 150 billion pounds.
- The amount of food required to eliminate hunger in the U.S. is only 5 billion pounds annually, says charity Feeding America.
- If just 5 percent of food scraps were recovered, states the USDA, it would equal a day’s worth of food for 4 million people; recovery of 25 percent would feed 20 million.
- According to the U.N. World Food Programme, the total U.S. food surplus could satisfy “every empty stomach in Africa”.
- It costs the nation around $1 billion annually to dispose of all its food waste. (EPA)
- This excessive waste not only eats at our pocketbooks to the tune of $130 billion plus a year, but at our ethical core: Some 49 million people could benefit from these discarded resources.

Now, What Do You Do With All the Stuff You’ve Sorted Out?
There’s an easy formula for putting everything back and finishing your project so that you can sit back and feel really complete!

STEP #6: THE 5-STAGE DECLUTTER FORMULA
1) Everything needs a HOME,
2) in which to LIVE and dwell, and then can be
3) easily found in CATEGORIES,
4) in CONTAINERS and that are
5) LABELED.

That’s it! And, when you can think of all five of these stages flowing together, organization is a snap!

I’ll go through these separately now.

Stages 1 and 2: Everything needs a HOME or it is HOMELESS! Everything needs to LIVE somewhere to be found easily and effortlessly when needed.
Without designated HOMES, your “stuff and things” will wander aimlessly around your house and be in the way or lost most of the time—or forever. Always ask yourself, “Where is its HOME? Where does it LIVE?”
Kids catch on quickly to things being in their HOMES and LIVING in a designated place.
Stage 3: Everything belongs in a CATEGORY.
Think pre-school or kids’ TV shows. “Can you match like items, kids?” Like goes with like. This is part of the sorting process that makes life so much easier. Our brains naturally work this way, but we lose this natural sharpness and focus when we have too much and when we don’t take time to focus on our life simply.

Whether it’s that socks go with socks in a drawer or basket, or that all the pasta goes in one area in a container on the shelf in your pantry—like goes with like—everything belongs someplace where it’s easy to remember, by CATEGORY.

So when you are organizing, put things back into CATEGORIES that make sense. This naturally helps you find them again with less stress and effort. You also save money by not buying more because you can't find the ones we already own.

The Shelf Life of Items
Find and categorize all of your lotions, potions, gels, etc. in the bathroom. “Now, here’ are the rules: You cannot buy any more of these kind of products until you use all the ones up that you already have. Why? Lotions, potions, gels, cosmetics, etc., even vitamins and other health products have a shelf life of about 6-9
months, some are less. So people buy these, or get them as gifts, and end up throwing out full bottles or barely used products after they've sat for years and have become rancid or dried up.

Anything with an expiration date should be used ASAP before buying more.

### STORY

Clare tried on some of the clothes while we decluttered her closets. She pulled down a shoe box from a shelf with high heels that were from many years ago. She had always loved them and was excited to put them on and show how they looked on her. Within moments of sliding into them they literally disintegrated before our eyes!

Moral of the story: Even if items are in boxes or bins, they still age, and not well.

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### Stage 4: Everything needs to be CONTAINED.

Items that are left *uncontained* get pushed back behind items used most often and in the front. They get lost easily or are always in the way, wasting your time moving them aside looking for other items, or spending more money buying them again when not easily found.

I’ll say more about CONTAINERS in the next section, but I want to repeat this here: choose the types of containers that work best for your space and your personality. Use clean boxes, shoeboxes, clear plastic, opaque plastic, high-end beautiful, low-end frugal and functional... it doesn’t matter as long as it serves its purpose and works for you and you like it.

### Stage 5: Everything needs to be clearly LABELED.

Keep it simple or make it grand; labels can be made from pieces of scrap paper and tape, index cards, masking tape for quick labeling, white computer printer address labels or writing directly on the container. Use a dark broad permanent marker when labeling for easy reading. Use any label system that works for you that is clean, easy to read, to write on and stays put.

Fancy it up for file folders by printing your labels from the computer with the text and font you want. Also, there are great labeling machines on the market that offer very clean and "perfect" results. However, you don’t need to be Martha-Stewart-perfect with your label gun, unless you want to. (I've had clients who bought labelers but couldn't find them when we met to get them organized. Or, they wasted a lot of time making the labels perfect, while getting less organizing actually done.)

"Being organized. It's a good thing." ~ Martha Stewart

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Kim Wolinski, MSW “Dr. DeClutter” www.drdeclutter.com
Burn Your House Down

Whatever works for your visual needs that are functional and effective is fine. Just make sure that the labels can be easily found and easily read on the container.

Labeling Tips

- When a container has multiple items in it, make a content list and tape to the side.
- To see the labels on large boxes and tubs, especially when stacked in garages and storage units, it’s a good idea to label two sides, a long and short side and possibly on the top as well in order to see the label from different angles.
- Label file folders and hanging files clearly, and by category of overall topic and subtopics.
- Label and title computer efiles, efolders and CDs/software with titles you can easily remember and find quickly.
- Label archive boxes and storage bins well so that you don’t open them time and again to remember what’s in them.

STORY

John went to help his grandmother, Connie a few times a week, as her health was failing. He knew it would be up to him to clear out her house after she died, so without telling her he would go to the basement and start looking through containers and start pitching items that were no good anyway to get ahead of the process. He found gallon coffee cans on the floor, a good number of them, filled with sand. He didn’t want to ask his grandmother what they were for so he just started dumping them out. Each can had another container buried in the sand with cash, lots of cash. Connie grew up in the Depression and didn’t feel safe putting all her money into the bank. With her failing mind, she didn’t remember that she’d put the money in these cans.

Label All Chargers and Electric/Tech Cords for Your Sanity!

How many times have you come across a cord or charger for a cell phone, computer, digital camera or other tech-gadget and didn’t have a clue what it belonged to? Too many to remember?

I watch the lost and bewildered faces of my clients time and time again, examining a charger or cord. When they finally decide to give a voice to their confusion I hear, “I have no clue what this is for, but I suppose I’d better keep it, we might figure it out later and need it.” So, it ends up in the keep box, but may never really be looked at again. Or, I hear “Just get rid of it”, ending up in the trash, recycle or donate box. And of course they risk the possibility of being very sorry they got rid of it later.

The solution to this problem is to LABEL your cords and chargers AS SOON as you get them out of the product box. Use a sticky address label folded around the cord and onto itself to leave a tag with the description on it, including the date and what the gadget is or belongs to. Or, use masking tape or tape with a piece of paper attached, anything that can be read and identified by anyone. These latter two options.
are good for items you may return and you can easily remove the tape. This one act of organizing will save you lots of stress, wasted time and possibly money and your marriage!

**Organizing Brings Joy to Your Home**

How wonderful to open a pantry, supply cabinet, medicine cabinet, closet or drawer and find exactly what you want in seconds in CONTAINERS of CATEGORICALLY defined items that are also LABELED! It’s heaven!

**TIP:** Decluttering and organizing your possessions is for you, but the other great reason to organize and label containers well is for others. Even if you live alone, someday someone is going to need to know quickly what is where. And, certainly if you live with others this makes your life much easier as everyone can read and find things themselves.

**Step #7: Work With Your Personality or You Will Fight with Your System**

How important are the containers you choose and use and how your re-organization looks? As discussed earlier, if you are a highly visual learner—which most people are—what surrounds you in your environment visually can give you energy, or take it away. It’s important to create your home or office as a place where you love being, where you enjoy your time and where you enjoy inviting others in. Enjoy the environment you love and in which you feel nurtured, safe and at peace.

### STORY

Linda had me help her get her paper files back to manageable. While we were working on them I suggested that she’s probably a visual learner and needs to have her files out to remember they are there. She said that it was more than just that, “I had some brain trauma a while back and have been really lost with paper work. I missed paying a health insurance bill because of it and almost lost my insurance. Now that you say it’s okay to create a system to keep files “out” I know that I wouldn’t have lost that bill had I been able to “see” it when I needed to.”

Being a visual learner means “out of sight is out of mind,” which affects your system, storage and organizing needs. A visual learner will need systems that are open topped or “out” as opposed to put away in drawers or behind cabinet doors, including in file cabinets (more on this in Part 3.) They will need to “see” everything to remember that they have it.

**EXERCISE TO DEFINE YOUR JOY**

*Here is an exercise that can be fun, maybe scary, but certainly helpful to identify what to keep and what to release. Go outside your house, close the door behind you. Now, open the door and come back in as a stranger, an observer of this person’s home that you’ve never been to before. Walk room to room looking and seeing everything, just observing with detachment. Don’t judge what you like or don’t like, but when you*
**Step #8: Deciding What to Keep and What to Let Go**

A few more questions that tend to come up in the sorting process include:

- What's the best way to go through what I want and what I don’t?
- How do I know when it's time to let it go?
- How do I decide without being overwhelmed?

Using one of my ReDecisions Technique, go with the YES/NO Method.

**ReDecide: The YES/NO Method**

**Example: Clothing.** This method of re-deciding what to keep and what goes works great with anything, especially with heaps of clothing. Pull all your clothes out of the closet, or as many as you can, and drape them in piles on the bed. Then, one at a time hold each piece up in front of you and start saying out loud, “YES” or “NO.” “YES,” I’m going to keep it and really wear it, or “NO,” I haven’t worn it in years and it’s taking up room, I don’t like it anymore, it’s faded, it's out of style, it needs repair, etc.

At first it might seem hard to decide that quickly and the process might go slowly, but after you get going, it takes on its own rhythm and goes much faster. The clothes you say “YES” to go back into your closet. The “NOs” go into your sorting boxes or trash bags and off to thrift stores or charities.

**TIP:** In most communities a good place to take nice, current clothes are organizations that help men and women train for jobs and get back out into the workforce. They need nice clothes and shoes for job interviews. Check with your city offices.

**How Long to Keep Clothes**

Some organizers use the 6 or 12-month rule on getting rid of clothing articles; i.e., *if you haven’t worn it in 6 to 12 months, get rid of it.* I don’t support this rule, nor does it work for many people financially. Whether I’ve helped clients sort through their Armani’s and Prada’s, clothing with tags that were just purchased in the past 6 months or pre-owned and hand-me-downs I give a broader suggestion. If you love it and wear it, if you love it and know you will wear it, or if you love it and only wear it once every 5 years because it’s classic, keep it, you already own it.
TIP: Classic clothes—like that basic black dress—may be something you literally only wear once or twice a year to formal events, funerals or weddings, but it never goes out of style. If it fits and still looks nice, keep it.

Weight Fluctuation and Clothes

If for any reason you have several different sizes of clothes in your closet I suggest this: clear out all except those that fit you right now. Store the other sizes in containers marked with the size and season and move them out of your daily closet. This will help you stop feeling bad about not losing weight to fit into smaller sizes and give your mind a rest.

GETTING PAST OUR PAST: It's time to get ruthless

So much of our clutter is from our past. Burn Your House Down philosophy means letting go of the past and committing to your present and future you truly desire. I call this process “pushing our reset buttons.”

STORY

My brother saw my clothes hanging on the clothesline once. He stopped and stared, then asked, “What? Are you Amish?” I have very few clothes and shoes. If the GNP depended on me the economy would surely have been at a standstill long ago!

I have nice clothes, but my clothes and shoes are more functional than not (I’m sure that comes as no surprise by now!) They all match, mostly solid (I don’t do patterns well) black, red, purple, teal, fuchsia, moss, olive and what I like to call “Martha Stewart green.” I also don’t have much jewelry. I wear the same earrings 99% of the time, American Indian silver clip-ons with turquoise stones that I’ve had since the 70s. I get compliments on my earrings all the time.

You’ve heard of clotheshorses, well, I’m a “clothesmule!” I just have never enjoyed spending time thinking about clothing—my “Functional Way” mentality. But, it also keeps my life simple, which I value and which is a priority for me.

By the way, I keep good company. Albert Einstein filled his closet with numerous pairs of the same shirts and pants so as not to have to waste a single iota of time deciding what to wear. (Now it’s called OCD, then it was genius!)

Jay Leno keeps it simple too. Leno says that he hadn’t been in a store in 17 years during his talk show years. "I don't own any suits of my own. Before the show, my clothes are laid out for me—the suit, shirt, tie, even the shoes. I put them on and walk out on stage." But when he's off stage, Leno wears the same uniform he's worn for at least two decades: blue jeans, blue work shirt, black lace-up work boots.

When asked how many of those jeans, shirts, and boots he has hanging at home in the closet he said, "I'll say, 'Get me 50 of these shirts. Twenty-five of these pants.'" Fifty of the exact same shirts? "Oh, no, not 50," says Leno, "I've probably got 500 of these shirts." The shoes come from Payless® "Fourteen bucks. I buy 'em by the case."

In 1961 Martha Stewart was named one of Glamour’s 10 Best Dressed College Girls. "One of the reasons I stood out," she recalls, "was because I sewed all my own clothes." She even sewed her own wedding dress (of course). The embroidered Swiss organdy gown and matching hat she wore to her 1961 nuptials were the culmination of years of practice. "I learned to sew as a little girl."

And pure closet simplicity belongs of course to nuns, priests and monks, but you get the point! Conscious choice and simplicity. And as Martha Stewart would, embellish—add beauty, imagination and creativity of your own that matches your personality and style.
Push your RESET button more often!

- Who do I want to be now? RESET
- How much do I want to dust? RESET
- How big of a house do I want to maintain? RESET
- How much clutter am I willing to live with? RESET

**STORY**

I met a couple who have had items, lots of items, in a storage unit that they have paid for since their wedding over 27 years earlier in another state! After finally deciding to deal with it, they had it all shipped to their new location, which cost more money and it is now sitting in a new storage unit, that they pay for, because it’s too overwhelming to deal with.

**STUDY**

According to the Self Storage Association, 10% of Americans have maxed out their at-home storage and are renting storage units to the tune of $15 billion a year.

Crazy! I met a couple who bought the house next door, moved in and left their old house as “storage.” (No comment!)

**TIP:** Define your past, present and future to serve your best life now.

Another clean and simple way to define what is staying and what is going is by holding this thought or affirmation in mind, “I let go of everything that does not positively support my present and future.” The thing people don’t realize is the positive emotional and energetic shifts and changes that will happen when the past is released. If it doesn’t bring you joy now, if you don’t LOVE it now, if it doesn’t love you back or if it pulls you into your past… let it go. Let someone else enjoy it.

**Photos of the Past**

Photographs can be a big problem for some people. Photos of loved ones, family, friends or even pets who have passed away can be loving, but can also bring you down emotionally as they bring up grief, sadness, hurt, sometimes guilt, remorse and so many other negative emotions. You have to ask yourself, “How does this photo and memory serve my most positive present and future?”

Maybe it’s time to get rid of them or at least put them away in storage.

Use "out of sight out of mind" for a positive spin.

Push your “reset button” and enjoy your home anew.

“What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others.”

~ Pericles
Ancient Greek Politician, General and Statesman, of the aristocratic Alcmaeonid family. (495 - 429 BC)
Step #9: Storage and Systems to Corral Your “Stuff”
There is a great line from a poem that the wonderful and funny columnist, author and human being, Erma Bombeck wrote before she died in 1996. In “If I Had Another Shot At Life”, one brilliant line reads, “I would have burned the pink candle sculpted like a rose before it melted in storage.”

I cannot say it enough; use what you have before buying more. “Think Amish!” Live simply.

Money and the Human Condition
While organizing for and with others I have learned a lot about humans and their value for material items and money. We hear people complain so much about not having enough money, but some of these are the same people who spend a lot of money every year to store things they don’t use or even remember exist.

And “storage” isn’t just the big space with a garage door, basement, attic, shed, “POD” or barn; it’s purses, pocket books, old wallets, sports bags, luggage, pants pockets, jackets, coat pockets, rafters and cubby holes… the list goes on. There are so many places where our “stuff” lives, and that we quit visiting long ago.

STORY
Bonnie, one of my clients decluttered many trash bags of items during one 5-hour appointment at her home. Part of my service is to take away the bags of donations. I take them to thrift stores for the client so that a) the bags don’t sit in the garage and they never get rid of them, and b) so that they don’t open the bags and take it all back in the house!

Before I take them to donation I take the extra time to quickly go through everything when I return home. Why? I’ve found too many mementoes, rings, watches, photos and important personal papers in those bags that people, being overwhelmed, just can’t discern from the garbage while deciding, sorting and pitching. I get these items back to my clients. In one of the donation bags was a travel wallet with $285.00 cash. I called my client and told her. We laughed, and then Bonnie said, “I guess that will cover your next ‘Dr. Call’ to my house!” It did!

Lost and buried in my client’s purses, travel, gym and tote bags are medications, make-up, passports, credit cards, social security cards, birth certificates and so much more. All forgotten, many stuck together with something that spilled months or years ago. Items wasted or have become generators of frustration, confusion and a lot of stress as these important items can’t be found when needed.

STORY
Sandy, a client moved into a larger home. When the kitchen was all organized, we still had one drawer in the kitchen island with nothing in it. She really didn’t have enough stuff to put into every drawer, cabinet, cupboard, nook and cranny because the new kitchen was so much larger than her last. Looking into the empty island drawer she said, with lots of energy, “It can’t be empty!” and stuffed a couple of table mats in it. She felt better!

“At one time I had 27 storage units. I don’t have a big enough house. My mom had it, it’s my mother’s fault. She saved the diaper I came home from the hospital in.”
~ Delta Burke, Actress
TIP: Drawers and cupboards, shelves and storage can have "no-thing" in them. It’s really okay.

The Best Way to Store Items
The Importance of “Systems” to Get and Stay Organized, or “Got Gravity?”
Without systems in which to store items, we would always be cluttered. We need shelves, containers, file cabinets and file folders for papers, in and outboxes, paper bins, shoe bins, closet hanger rods, etc. They “hold” our stuff and keep it contained and organized while it waits to be used. They hold stuff up vertically and in place so that gravity can’t land it on the floor in a horizontal pile.

As I noted earlier, with any kind of storage, it’s best to store with style AND function. Make it work to match your needs and personality.

What is a System?
Remember making ice cubes in ice cube trays? If you didn't have a tray with dividers and sides in which to pour the water, or Jell-O® mold for Jell-O®, you'd have a big mess in the freezer and fridge! Same goes for all your stuff and things. They belong in SYSTEMS. Books need bookshelves, paper needs filing cabinets and vertical storage, utensils in your kitchen need drawers and dividers and writing tools need holders.

A SYSTEM is any container, shelf, cupboard, inbox, file cabinets or bookshelf that CONTAINS your items efficiently, as well as helps to streamline the movement of items along effectively when necessary. A system gives structure to what needs to be held within it. A good SYSTEM—whether it’s a zipper-bag, shoe box, or garage shelf—is a place you “put things” to stay in one place where you can find them when needed.

A good SYSTEM should
- Save
- You
- Space
- Time
- Energy and
- Money

There are 5 Types of Storage Systems
1. Open and Closed Storage
Open Storage boxes and containers can be open on top for easy use for items such as toys, games, files, books, etc. Closed Systems have a lid for stacking. Make sure these are labeled so
that you don’t waste time opening them numerous times over the years only to hear yourself say, “Oh yeah, that’s where I put that.”

2. Temporary Storage
Your closets are good examples of this. Your clothes are always in the closet—for several seasons in some areas of the world—so it’s temporary. You will take it out, use it, and put it back, over and over again. Sports equipment can fall into this category too.

3. Seasonal Storage
This is storage for just that, seasonal items; those things you use or store depending on the time of year. Use plastic tubs and label them so that it’s easy to trade them out when the next season comes. If you don’t have room for seasonal storage and your closets are stuffed, either start letting go of some of the clothes and items you don’t wear or use anymore, or if possible leave them in the same closet, with seasonal items moved over to the side.

**TIP:** One very cool way to know if you’re really wearing all of your clothes from season to season is to have all your current seasons’ clothes on hangers facing one way. After you wear an item and wash it, put it back with the hanger hanging the opposite way. You will easily see which clothes you wear all the time and those you didn’t touch again this year. Then, decide about culling out those that haven’t been worn.

Temporary and Seasonal Storage can often be on the open shelves above the clothes in the closet. It’s not that easy to reach towards the ceiling, but you can still see it and get it when you want it.

4. Ready or Convenient Storage
Ready Storage indicates that whatever is in a crock or cup, container or holder of any kind and is on the counter, table or desktop is ready to use quickly when needed—and returned just as quickly and easily when finished. Kitchen cooking and baking utensils are a great example of this, as is makeup, hygiene products, hair care items, office pens and other every day use items.

5. Deep or Archive Storage
These are the boxes that you don’t get into except for holidays or for retrieving family photos, memorabilia, important papers, and such. These are also boxes that you may never look into again (this is especially true for

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**The 80/20 Rule**
Over 80% of what most people have is either out-of-date, hasn’t been used in years or will be of no further use to them. Bottom-line, we only use 20% of what we have! Choose to release more of the 80%.
paper), so make sure they are stored in stackable dry containers and labeled well.

**TIP:** Don't set yourself up to be a "mental list keeper" of your household. Unless you live alone, make sure your family members know where items are when they are in storage or put away in containers. Get yourself out of the "Where is it?" loop. "Teach" them to use all storage areas too; to put things back where they found them and to create systems like this for themselves.

**The 80 / 20 RULE**

The 80/20 Rule is an important principle to remember as a simple little reset button to push in order to get back to center when feeling a bit lost in the heaps and piles. The 80/20 Rule in organizing, and much of life, states that "over 80% of what most people have will never be used." This includes items either out-of-date, archived, in deep storage, lost, forgotten, expired or that will be of no further use to them.

We only use 20% of what we have. Find, maintain, enjoy and use the 20%, choose to let go of more of the 80%.

So, as you go through drawers and shelves and piles, sort out more and more of the 80% that you just do not use no matter how well it fit “20 years ago!” As I mentioned earlier, I have very few clothes, which works for me. And, even with my sparse wardrobe, I still only wear 20% of it and have to work at wearing the rest because they just aren’t my “favorites” or the ones that fit so perfectly. You know, those wonderful clothes that feel like friends and that even when almost in rags, we will wear before other options. It’s a human thing.

**TIP:** Remember the clothes hanger tip from earlier? When it comes to figuring out which clothes you wear most and which you don’t wear at all, take all your clothes in the closet and turn the hangers holding them in one direction. After you wear and launder each, turn the hanger the other direction. After several weeks and months, or a season, you will notice that about 20% of the hangers are turned around, the rest, yes; about 80% are still facing the original direction. Cull out from that 80% or start wearing and enjoying the ones you keep.

**More on Systems and Streamlining for Perfect Order**

Need to organize your garage? A couple of deep (over 14") wire shelving units in a garage will make all the difference. Otherwise, horizontal piling, stagnation and gravity take over! Peg boards, bike hooks and other CONTAINERS and SYSTEMS will help everything LIVE in HOMES where they can easily be stacked, stored and found anytime.

Just say "No" to horizontal stacks, piles and layers.

Say "Yes" to vertical storage.
Burn Your House Down

You will find that many areas of your home need SYSTEMS and you will be asking, "How much do I have to spend on containers and systems?" Organizing does not mean BUY ME! SPEND MONEY ON ME! Organizing will cost you your time, but often there are plenty of containers around the house that can be used or repurposed. Look around your house and see what containers you already have. You'll find tubs and bins, all sizes of boxes, shoe boxes, greeting card boxes, bank check boxes (great for desk drawers/pens/pencils), plastic food containers, baskets, etc.

**Organization is a Process**

Organization is process, it is not product. It involves time, thought, motivation and effort plus a little creative fun and even coordination. A team effort with help from others is nice too. Use what you already have effectively before buying more "products."

**TIP:** Before buying storage containers make sure to measure areas you want to add a container or shelving to before going to the store to purchase. Have a notebook with your ideas and shopping list in order to find exactly what you want with ease. Plus, keep your receipts in case you need to return them.

Office paperwork needs a SYSTEM too. Without a good “filing system,” paper will be lost and handled far too many times with nowhere to go. If you’re a computer person who uses less paper and more efiles, you still need a system of how to CATEGORIZE, title and archive your files and folders in order to find them when you need them. (More on paper management in PART 4.)

**4 Overall Organizing Tips for Completion**

Here are 4 tips to help you to stop agonizing over whether or not you are finished with your organizing:

1. This is very important: **There is no perfect system.** If you have a system that works for you at 80%, and 20% of it is still a bit frustrating… think of it like a marriage! If your marriage works for you 80% of the time, keep it, enjoy it and let go of and stop struggling with the 20% that is a little rough around the edges and never going to change! This is heaven!
2. Be only as organized as you need to be. Anything more will swirl you into perfectionism, wasting your precious time and energy with little gain.
3. Establish a workable system for yourself that you like and that you know you can follow for a long time.
4. Teach others in your family to use the system that works. Everybody wins!

"I really do believe that we have to be reasonably well organized in this fast-paced world to accomplish even one-half of what we want..." [Organization] can transform any room in your home into an organized oasis—your closet, pantry, kid’s room, garage—the possibilities are endless."

~ Melissa Reiff, President of The Container Store
Is Disorganization Ever Appropriate?
Absolutely! Disorganization is appropriate when you are processing, incubating and in the creative process. Also, when you are sorting, purging, deciding what to do and where to put things and when you are in the middle of a project, construction or reconstruction.

It is said that, disorganization indicates organization rearranging itself to achieve its intended purpose. This is the way the universe was and continues to be created, through constant change, rearranging and reorganizing. There are plenty of times when what looks like disorganization is exactly what is necessary to go from chaos to order.

For humans, the right-brain creative process has a life of its own and needs a little chaos (or a lot) to make sense of where it wants to go. Think about an artist’s studio with paint or tools all over the room where ideas are in process, creating sensational end products.

Product Suggestion
There are plenty of books on the market about organizing and a few focused on the creative person. Dorothy Lehmkuhl & Dolores Cotter Lamping, C.S.W. wrote one with almost exactly that title, Organizing for the Creative Person. They say, “As scientific studies have shown, creativity resides in the right hemisphere of the brain. However, the right hemisphere lacks any concept of time, structure, or detail, and has no analytic ability; these traits reside in the left brain.” So, “If you're the kind of person for whom conventional checklists and filing systems don't feel natural, you're probably right-brain dominant.”

Can You Be Too Organized?
There’s a difference between being organized and being too compulsive about organizing or needing to be organized out of fear of what others will think or say. A person who becomes obsessive and rigid about being organized, or self-critical when they’re not, makes for a very unhappy camper. Causes for this thinking and behavior can be linked to many causes, including a brain chemistry imbalance, childhood patterning or basic low self-esteem.

Step #10: Maintenance Plan for Day-To-Day and Future Order
I hear so many people complain about all their clutter and “stuff” and I am always happy to remind them that 90% of life is maintenance.

Think about it. If you buy a new car, as soon as you drive it off the lot you have to maintain it. You have a baby—same. New appliance—same. New hair style, clothes, shoes, weight loss, pet, relationship—same, same, same, same, same, same! But, remember, you only have to maintain something if you want to keep it nice, enjoyable and useful.

“One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.”
~ Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher, classical philologist

90% of life is maintenance.
A good life is about consciously choosing how much you want to maintain. Think of the end goal, big picture first before bringing and adding more stuff to your life. Ask yourself, "Do I want to maintain this? Do I want to take care of it or pay someone else to maintain it?" If the answer is no (from puppy to guppy, or the lifestyle of a yuppy) then, "No."

Your sanity depends on setting up a maintenance program that keeps you organized.

**Keys to Maintaining Clutter and Staying Organized**

1. Don’t let clutter start.
2. Don’t bring in what you don’t love, won’t use, don’t need and don’t have room for.
3. Declutter daily as you go: "chunk and chip" even a little. Set your timer for 15-30 minutes.
4. Prepare the night before to be organized every morning in order to start your day well.
5. Have HOMES and CONTAINERS for everything.
6. LABEL and put things away right away.
7. Take 15-20 minutes at the end of the day to clean up what you’ve messed up.

**STORY**

My client Barbara loves to travel and has a great time doing it. On one of my most recent jobs at her house we picked up the extra room, where books, photos, travel bags and tote bags were layered. I opened several Las Vegas Red Hat Convention tote bags. Each had all the pamphlets, brochures, cute Red Hat purchases, Vegas show bills, vendor gadgets and giveaways, including jewelry and t-shirts she’d purchased. The convention was four years earlier.

Barbara is married, a part-time teacher, is busy with grandkids and a good life. But, not taking time to enjoy the treasures she picks up on her trips and organizing them when she returns home each time doesn’t support happiness and joy full circle.

**TIP:** Whether at your next expo, vendor event or festival, wherever you can pick up “free stuff!” or are handed a brochure or ad for something, just say "no thanks." Simply keep your hands in your pockets, behind your back or down and closed so that you don’t fill up a tote or pockets or goodie bag with all the stuff that will end up in the recycle bin or garbage or worse, your house soon enough.

**STORY**

I have to say that I enjoy the moment I’m working with a client when I hear, “Oh, that’s where that is!” It never fails.

I was doing a three hour declutter and reorganizing job in one of my personal wellness practitioners’ home office. She said she knew where everything was, it just got a bit piled up and because she’d been to one of my workshops she said, “You won’t hear me say, ‘Oh, that’s where it is!’” A few hours of unpiling and putting things back where they belonged, the office looked shiny and good again. Then, while passing her desk, I noticed a small piece of paper on the floor between it and the fax table, about a three inch gap. I dug it out and gave it to her. She immediately said, “Oh, that’s where that is!” Ha! Priceless!
Organizing and Time Management are Two Sides of the Same Coin

Everything we do is divided up into projects and tasks. A project is the big picture with a goal in mind. Tasks are the incremental actions to develop and complete the project. Projects and tasks rely on scheduling and activity, which is made up of time management, planning and organizing.

Just for the record, ask any Physicist and they'll tell you that there is actually no such thing as time. What we do is choose the events, projects and tasks we want to experience and get accomplished in a certain block of what we all "time." So, we block our "time" into increments during our day or night and do the activity until it is done, one chunk at a time. Physics tells us that there is only now. When we can relax into decluttering in the "now" of doing it, making the activity the focus, not the time, we get much more accomplished.

Just like goal setting, to ensure that a single goal or project gets finished, you need to:

1. Visualize the big picture. See the end result of your organized space. See the whole project. See your room, closet, basement, etc. organized, decluttered and rearranged as you'd like it.
2. See the steps to get you to the end result.
3. Break the steps down into doable and incremental tasks.
4. Schedule the activities and tasks on a timeline.

There is nothing that isn't accomplished without this simple breakdown of project development, time management, planning and organization.

A COMMENTARY ON TIME

"Time is an illusion we created to try and measure the rate of change of the Present. It's always NOW. But it's an ever changing NOW. In a effort to cope with the change, we have invented time. It's a handy mental device that helps us deal with the higher order derivatives of the rate of change.

This change that we experience in the ever-present Present does have a "direction." Things change in the general direction of having greater entropy. Entropy is a measure of the amount of disorder in a system. That's why when we measure time we find it restricted to one direction (unlike when we measure distance)—things are changing such that the overall system has more and more entropy.

Although the illusionary nature of time is the deep truth in this matter, it's not particularly practical. To be totally in harmony with this truth, you'd need to wear a watch that always said "now", but you'd be late for a lot of meetings...."

~ Leigh Brasington
Written in honor of Kurt Gödel, who also didn't believe in Time
(New Yorker ~ Feb 28, 2005, pg 80ff)

Why Do I Have to Do it All?

Women take on the bulk of the house cleaning, organizing and other household and family responsibilities due to social training and some natural propensity for it. We are still in the battle of the household sexes due to childhood training: girls do this, boys do that. There are plenty of men who are great at organizing,
house work and other such tasks as well. However, in order not to end up in the black hole of despair when "they" keep messing up your tidy home, which will feel like an endless war, here are a few tips to help everyone win.

1. Teach everyone how to organize the way you need it done (being mindful that you're not over the top perfectionistic however).
2. Make sure they know HOW to do the organizing on their own, or know that they can ask questions for help when needed. It may not be exactly as you like it sometimes, but it may be "good enough" and done.
3. Then, take on only your share of the work. Expect others to do their share.
4. Remind yourself that you are not your clutter, but that your life is multifaceted and that clutter is a reflection of an involved and interesting life!
5. Consider using a chore/allowance system to reinforce the tasks and life-skill of organizing.
6. When all else fails (especially with children’s bedrooms), just close the door so you don’t have to look at it! I go by the rule that as long as there’s nothing growing, moving, smelling or otherwise scary in a child’s bedroom, messy is okay.

“Above the Delphic oracle in ancient Greece, the inscription, “Nothing in Excess” created a wisdom message for all to follow. Again and again life presents us with choices: wisdom or excess.”
~ Science of Mind Magazine
PART THREE:
Paper Management: Home and Office

Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I recently went for a job interview and boy, this guy really needs help. I’m going to give you his contact information; maybe he’ll let you help him out.

He is a family law lawyer yet his office looks like a bomb went off... papers and private documents on the floor on the tables as well as books everywhere even private documents are lying where clients can see them in the waiting room! He has no sign of an office shredder anywhere and has numerous trash cans with private legal documents in them. His file drawers seem like they haven’t been touched in ages with the display titles unstuck and falling off. His computers and software are a bit outdated.

He really cares about his clients. He is also in midlife crises with a divorce and 3 young children. I am professional and I’d like to keep it that way. If possible I would like to stay anonymous as to who sold him out...lol

~ Mandy
San Francisco, California

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Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I hope you can help me. I get overwhelmed trying to put things into an orderly fashion. I have totes here, boxes there anything that will hold my things. Some are sentimental and some are just junk but good junk. Paper everywhere. I am going to drive myself crazy if I don't get organized pretty soon. I try and have good intentions but I just can't make myself do it. Anything you can help me with I would appreciate. Thank you, I am making myself sick over this problem.

~ Lana
Chicago, Illinois
Burn Your House Down

Don’t Let Your Desk and Paper Clutter Stack Up

Paper management means to effectively decide upon, route, file, keep, move and store paper and information in our “paperless” society. Are you laughing? We’re far from paperless and add to “real” paper e-files and e-folders, email and e-communication, we’re on the edge of overwhelm most days, wasting a lot of time and energy on our information evolution. One thing is for sure, information is only powerful if you can access it.

Lost documents, contracts, bills, insurance forms, notes, emails... it’s so very easy to keep dumping unopened mail, printed emails and online articles, those little sticky-notes, half sheets of paper and envelopes with scribbles, books, ripped out articles and TO DO projects on your desk. You had it organized one time; you vaguely remember this picture in your mind. Then, you look at your reality—two to ten inches high, and growing. Paper, pens, bills, receipts, books, the purse you forgot to empty, travel brochures from the fantasy trip you want to take, one earring, the watch that needs a battery, a button from one of your shirts that you can’t find, reading glasses with one arm missing, two tech-gadgets that need to be returned (when you can find the receipt), several old coffee cups with very cute sayings on them, sticky notes with computer passwords on them, some checks you forgot to send (last month) and some checks and rebates you forgot to deposit or cash (from last year—which by now you might not be able to cash.)

Your mind becomes a blur, trance settles in. You hear it softly, slowly, but growing…

h o r...i... z o n... t a l h e l l l l l l l l !

“Happiness is a very small desk and a very big wastebasket.”
~ Robert Orben, editor

STORY

One of my clients said that, “Dealing with paper is like sorting confetti in a tunnel!” Whether these kinds of statements tell only their frustration at the time or spur them into action, I’ve collected a few funny statements from workshop participants and clients over the years for their discontent at organizing paper. They include:

“Stuff and shove it.” ~ Pat

“I have a PhD in paper management. Piled Higher and Deeper!” ~ Carol

“I have a Trauma File. I put all the papers I can’t handle in a file titled ‘Trauma.’” ~ Debbie

“When I can’t handle it, I just say, ‘It stays where it lays.’” ~ Ben

“I’m the ‘gonna girl!’ I really am gonna get to that paper soon!” ~ Beatrice

“I have a filing system, I call it my “crack filing system”; things keep falling through the cracks.” ~ Tracy

“Don’t put it down, put it away.” ~ Penny

“Screw it! Do it!” ~ Dean
Now, you start thinking and worrying that you might actually have mislaid or delayed some project, bill or TO DO under that pile, more than the checks and TO DOs you already see. One answer is to clean sweep it all off the desk into a box, basket, tub or box lid just to “contain” it while you work on more important projects!

Oh! Oops! Houston we have a problem! You see that you have three other boxes on the floor that were all horizontal heaps on your desk not that long ago. You clean swept them off the desk too. You wonder what’s in them. It must not be imperative because you haven’t missed anything – that you know of. You'll get it sorted out and organized "later." HAHAHAHA! We’re all so funny!

And this scenario assumes you’re the only one who goes into your office! Now, add others' paper and projects, kids toys, school teacher/parent forms to be signed, clothes, food and pet hair. What do you do?

There's one sure solution to this mess—OHIO!

How many times have you handled the same mail or paper and it's still not filed or acted upon effectively. You're not alone. There’s even an acronym for effective paper management, “OHIO”:

   ONLY
   HANDLE
   IT
   ONCE!

Well, sure, OHIO might work for some people, but again, everyone is different. If you are highly visual and kinesthetic, needing to see and feel things in order to think and process through situations, you’ll handle paper much more than someone whose mind doesn’t work that way.

**Useless Desks and Systems**

Not that long ago, builders and architects started putting that built-in quaint and semi-functional little writing desk in the kitchen as standard in new homes. Many homeowners got tired of trying to figure out how to best use them and just tore them out, replacing them with more pantry space. The problem is that they
mostly serve as a catchall and no help to really work as a functional home office. My conclusion: More architects and builders need to be women (or at least ask and listen to women)—who tend to spend the most time in kitchens and know that they need more functional cabinet, shelf, drawer and storage space, not a barely useful desk. I will say however that I’ve seen a few homes where they put a laptop computer with ever-changing family photos on the screen, multi-purposing it for a picture frame and quick workspace for a young mom and her kids.

**TIP:** If you don't organize because you can't do it according to some TV show or "expert" advice, like “You should Only Handle It Once”—causing you to feel bad, or guilty, or wrong and quitting altogether—then don't follow that advice. Find a formula that works for you and use it.

We waste a lot of time in our “paperless society” looking for things in the office. Paper clutter, misplaced documents and disorganization account for six to eight hours a week lost in homes and corporate offices.

**RESEARCH**

More than 4 million tons (105 billion pieces) of junk mail are produced yearly. (globaljunkmailcrisis.org)

More than 100 million trees’ worth of bulk mail arrives in American mail boxes each year—that’s the equivalent of deforesting the entire Rocky Mountain National Park every four months. (New American Dream calculation from Conservatree and U.S. Forest Service statistics)

In 2005, more than 19 billion catalogs were mailed to American consumers—whether they wanted them or not—creating millions of tons of wasted paper and jamming millions of mailboxes full of unwanted catalogs. (globaljunkmailcrisis.org)

In 2005, 5.8 million tons of catalogs and other direct mailings ended up in the U.S. municipal solid waste stream—enough to fill over 450,000 garbage trucks. Parked bumper to bumper these garbage trucks would extend from Atlanta to Albuquerque. Less than 36% of this ad mail was recycled. (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

**How to Tackle Paper Clutter Anywhere**

Organization is one of the best stress-reduction strategies you can ever master. The key to cutting back on paper clutter problems in your home and home office is to

a) reduce the incoming paper (get off lists, recycle and shred before it gets too far) and

b) create regular places, or HOMES, LABELED CONTAINERS and SYSTEMS in which to store the important information that comes in.
So, where to start? First, take care of all incoming information and paper clutter daily. It's easy to get overwhelmed with the volume of "I'll look at it later" piles that stack up easily everywhere. The key is to start with **today first** and get control of what is most immediately important before scheduling time to dig into those piles from the past (some from the very deep past).

**Clutter Prevention: Stop Paper Clutter from Coming into Your Life**

There are times of the year that paper can show up in your life more than others. Holidays, festivals and election years are big opportunities for paper-mania. Pamphlets, flyers and whatever else comes handed to you at the doors of your grocery store (feed the poor); at work (give); at your place of worship or community (upcoming events or donate); buy and see "this" at the upcoming festival or event; and VOTE FOR… .

Some of these events and opportunities are important to you and you may even want to donate, be informed, involved, and entertained. However, you don't have to take the flyer to do it. The idea here is to stop more unwanted, unsolicited pieces of paper from cluttering up your car, purse, briefcase, pockets, house, office and mind.

While at events I've learned that the easiest way for me to do this is to keep my hands in my pockets or behind my back. I used to be one of those people who just automatically accepted stuff that was put in front of me. The first couple of times I didn't accept those pieces of paper I felt odd, kind of wrong, like something was missing, but I got over it! In fact, at a recent festival a woman handed me a flyer. I was interested in the service and read the flyer. Then, decided I'd not use it, so I walked back to the woman and gave it back to her. Recycle on the spot for immediate reuse.

Vendor events are the same. Vendors are there to sell you on their product. That's all fine and good. But, if you know you are not going to use it, don't take the information. And, don't sign up for anything! You'll be getting calls, emails or snail mail if you do. It's okay not to accept pieces of paper, including business cards. When there's ample time, I just write down their name and number and/or website or email address in the notebook or day-calendar that I carry in my purse. Others can put the information directly into their mobile device, cell phone or other tech-gadget and be done. It's okay to listen to the pitch. It's great to give and participate. But, be selective about collecting the associated paper.

**THE BASIC STEPS TO ORGANIZE PAPER**

These steps are valid for electronic filing as well.
The 5 D’S to Effective Paper Management

1. Do it: Complete it, pay it or systemize it.
2. Delegate it. Even if you’re alone, you can use this one: set up your online payments in an auto-pay-schedule.
4. Dump it: Trash, recycle or shred.
5. Delete it. For email, electronic folders and files, etc.

Streamline your paper management before it gets into the house or office. Stop paper clutter from starting. Your immediate paper clutter includes mail: snail mail, junk mail, email, etc.

- Immediately discard junk into paper recycle and trash bins.
- Shred important documents and those with any legal information or account numbers.
- Quickly mark and file what is important: You will need file folders, hanging files with labels, file cabinet or file container of some sort to hold the files (a system).
- Think vertical, not horizontal. Horizontal inboxes can easily go untouched for months and years, ending up one big pile. You lose time, space and energy looking for things layered and cluttered. Vertical “systems” are stair step file-folder holders and racks of any kind that will hold paper and folders up vertically so that you can see and read the tabs easily and find what you need quickly. Any office supply store has plenty of choices.

**TIP:** For mail coming into your home, don't let it pile up on the kitchen island, table or hall stand. If you don't have time to deal with it right away or you live with others who may bring it in, put a CONTAINER of some sort, like a basket, in the easiest traffic area. All incoming mail goes there. If someone wants it, it LIVES in this CONTAINER—it’s HOME—until you take it to your desk or wherever you process it.

Two types of files are necessary:

1) **Action Files** for frequent jobs, upcoming events and activities that will call for action immediately or soon.

2) **Archive Files** for seldom used paper and documents (Reminder: much of this is that 80% that you will never look at again.)

   • Use appropriately labeled storage including file systems, file cabinets, and archive boxes.
   Three-ring notebooks can also be used to keep ongoing paperwork in, such as monthly

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Kim Wolinski, MSW  “Dr. DeClutter”  www.drdeclutter.com  98
investment papers, quarterly or annual reports plus insurance and medical papers. LABEL the spine.

- Have a system for paying bills that keeps you current, on or offline. You might use auto-pay and only have to check your bank statements online often enough to make sure they are taking the payment out appropriately.

- Have a mail and message station to keep stamps, addresses, return labels, pens, notepads, etc. prepared for all incoming and outgoing mail. You can also keep your family activity calendar here. This is also very helpful when other family members can all come to the same place to get the items needed and also see the calendar of events so that everyone stays on the same page.

**Upcoming Events Folder**

A great way to keep track of upcoming events it to create a file folder for workshops, festivals and events that need tickets, coupons or gift certificates to be used and not mislaid. Make a few such folders and LABEL clearly. Keep in a file holder in your kitchen or where, especially if you have family members who have upcoming events too, you can stay on top of deadlines and the family calendar. This will also keep you from double-scheduling events and missing out on something really fun, or important.

**Magazines**

1. **EVALUATE YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS.** Keep only the subscriptions you love and read on a regular basis, but make sure to schedule time to really read and enjoy them too! Cancel subscriptions that you know you will not read. When they come due again don't subscribe and ask to be taken off their mail list. It can take about six months to get off a mailing list because the labels are usually preprinted that far ahead.

2. **KEEP ONLY THE ARTICLES OF INTEREST.** Instead of keeping the whole magazine, which takes up room, rip out articles you want to keep and read later; put into a TO READ File. Send the rest into recycle.

3. **DONATE.** Consider donating magazines when finished (only if they have all the pages). Libraries, medical and dental offices, senior centers and nursing homes are happy to take complete magazines. Many schools like them for kids to cut out pictures for projects. Call those in your area to find out. (Schools sometimes like old calendars too for the beautiful pictures.) Make sure to pull or cut your mailing sticker off before giving away.

4. **DUMP.** If you're just overwhelmed with weeks, months and years of newspapers, newsletters, magazines and such that you were "going to get too," take a deep breath and route them all to the paper recycle bin and then start with today's incoming paper and decide anew.
5. **SAY NO.** Don't say yes to "free" magazines from a telephone marketing call or other "good deal." That can get out of hand too quickly. If your local school, college, club or group needs money and is selling magazines, figure out how much you'd spend on the magazine and give them 100% of the money directly instead.

6. **UNIQUE INTERESTS.** The most current information in almost any case is going to be found online, however your unique interests, hobbies and joy may be in hardcopy print magazines or articles. You can read most periodicals at the library as well.

**Coupons**
Are you a clipper? I am! It's my Sunday morning paper ritual. Coupons are great money-savers, from grocery shopping to restaurants, coffee shops to retail stores, but they are no good to you if they're at home and you're out and about. Carry them in your purse, brief case, or in the car. Make sure to cull them out often as they do expire.

**Bottom line**
Don't let mail, information, magazines, articles, bills and documents pile up to "get to later." Later doesn't always come as soon as you'd planned. You can also find yourself wasting much more time by reading newspapers and magazines that are out of date.

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**STORY**
One of my clients had piles of paper, mostly bills and invoices that hadn't been filed for a long time, making her very afraid that she'd missed paying some bills or something else equally important. We discussed the project, got all the prep tools together and sat down to go through the paper, making folders and getting them categorized for filing. About an hour into the project, after she'd gotten out of her trance and was present and conscious again, she said, "So, I'm paying you to sit here and help me do this, right?" I said yes and could see by her stopping in mid-air with her paper pile that she was wondering why she was paying someone at all. I then said, "If I wasn't here would you do it?" She said, "No," and we went back to work.

**Be Kind to Your Brain, Limit Stress and Overload**
This is very important: your brain's job is to process; fix and problem-solve everything that comes in. When you keep putting off deciding to take appropriate action on bills, filing, attending to paperwork and piles—even if it's clipping recipes or reading the obituaries—your brain remains on alert. Being on constant alert depletes energy and mind-space "bytes" that you could and should be using for more important things, even if it's doing nothing.

Your brain is tired. And furthermore, your adrenal system is stressed out and tired as well which, being affected, creates overwhelm, fatigue and at some point, illness.
My client Ruth found the answer to her procrastination by joining the **PTA Club—Put Things Away Club**! Get your paper-pile-put-away-plan into place and action, one piece, chunk or pile at a time until finished. Release the past and bring your paper and information into the present.

**How to Opt Out and Get Off Mailing and Call lists**

Wouldn’t you just once like to get one of those envelopes for a credit card in the mail that says, “You’ve been PRE-DENIED for our credit card!”?... And then they’d quit sending them? Yeah, well, that’s not going to happen. But, you *can* stop paper clutter (spam) from even getting into your mail box—save trees, landfills and your peace of mind—and marketing/spam phone calls from interrupting you.

Opt out of pre-screened credit offers, catalogs, magazines and other “snail mail spam” and phone calls by doing the following:

1. When you get any mailer with a return envelope with NO STAMP NEEDED where the stamp usually goes, take the part of the mailer that you would fill out to accept it, write across it in big bold black ink, “TAKE OFF LIST. DO NOT SELL.” Then, put it back into their “free!” envelope and drop in the post box. NOTE: It can take up to 3-6 months to get off these lists because many companies (especially catalog and magazine) have list labels pre-printed months ahead of time. If you get more of the same mailing, do it again for as many as you get. This method works great!

2. If there is no envelope with a “no postage necessary” option, you can follow through on #1 and add your own stamp to their envelope and send back, call any phone number on the mailer or use their web address to contact them to TAKE THIS ADDRESS OFF YOUR LIST. You don’t owe them an explanation. Make sure that you have the full mailer in front of you at the time because you will need the exact spelling, or in many cases *misspelling* of your name and address.

3. You can go online to specified “Opt Out” sites and address the ones you want. These change often enough, adding and subtracting options, but currently they include:

   a) Opt-out of Pre-screened Credit offers. [http://www.optoutprescreen.com/opt_form.cgi](http://www.optoutprescreen.com/opt_form.cgi)


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“**If your company has a clean-desk policy, the company is nuts and you’re nuts to stay there.**”

~Tom Peters, Business consultant, author

“**If your desk isn’t cluttered, you probably aren’t doing your job.**”

~Harold S. Geneen, Businessman

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**Attention: Visual Learners**

If you are a visual person you may need to have open top file systems or files held vertically in stair step wire or plastic file holders.

For *very* visual learners a file cabinet, no matter how cool or costly, will never be used well. Once the door are closed, it’s just a big box with handles!

Use the file cabinet for archives—that 80% you may never see again—and label them well.

Use active files on or close to the desk.
c) ProQuo is a site that helps you to remove your name and personal information from thousands of marketing lists, data brokers and other organizations that send you unsolicited mail. http://www.proquo.com/

d) Direct Mail Association has information on how to get off of the many lists that are part of everyday life in the information age. http://www.dmachoice.org/consumerassistance.php They do ask for a credit card in the name you are trying to remove. This is a reputable site. There will be no charge made to your credit card.

4. Do Not Call Lists: When you get a live solicitation call tell them to take your number off their call list, they legally have to do it. http://www.donotcall.gov

TIP: Search the Internet for "how to opt off mailing lists" and "how to opt off call lists" for any new or updated current sites.

WARNING - Identity Theft

Never give your Social Security, bank account, credit card numbers, birth date, PIN or passwords to anyone who calls requesting them. Ask them for their number and company and then call back to the main number or go online to find out what you need to report them. This is true for email requests as well.

How to Design Your Office for Maximum Organization

Home offices can look like many things: a closet, dining room table, extra bedroom, family room corner or the passenger seat of a car. These small spaces can work very well if you design and use them efficiently. This also means that a big room isn’t any more efficient than a small one if you manage it well for your needs.

Decide what you absolutely have to have, based on the needs of your business. Some office supplies are basic, like paper and pens, and today, it’s imperative to have a computer and printer. More often for some the use of a mobile phone or e-gadget du jour is their office! And let’s not forget a filing system and storage. Here is a quick list of the basic “working parts of an office” that will help you sit down and get to work efficiently.

1. Space use: There are entire books and workshops on this topic, but the basics are: have room for a functional and user-friendly chair, table, light, ventilation, privacy, electrical hookups, filing system and storage.

2. Office supplies: Have storage containers for supplies to keep them corralled and in their “homes” to find and replace easily. Use a drawer divider with compartments for different sized items. Use a coffee mug or cup for pens, etc. unless you want to buy something fancier. Do you travel and need
to take a little of your office with you? There are plenty of small school and art supply boxes or other plastic containers that fit easily in your car or briefcase to hold hanging file folders and the essentials. Or, go high-end and find what you love, making sure that it's functional too.

3. **Technology and tech-gadgetry:** It doesn’t pay to say too much about the best technological gadgets to use as they change so quickly. But, if space is a real premium, a laptop computer may be better than a desktop computer allowing for more flexibility. Obviously you can take the laptop with you when you go. Many people are opting for the all-in-one, combined printer/scanner/copier/fax systems as the prices keep coming down; you clearly have more tools in one machine, taking up less space. And, your telephone system has more options than ever before, landline or mobile, your preference.

4. **Storage:**
   
   **Your Hardcopy Storage** will consist of file cabinets, shelves, tubs, banker-boxes (that you can get at any office supply store) and crates to hold office supplies and possible product overstock. The more hardcopies and documents, projects and products you have to keep or create, the more your storage area will need to expand over time. (See more on Hardcopy File System #6).

   **Electronic Storage** is a must as well. Probably the most important gadget you need is a backup system for your computer. It goes without saying that backup is imperative whether to a detachable external hard drive or jumpdrive, disk or online, web based system.

   **TIP:** Online backup systems are a must. If your computer crashes, which it will, you can and most likely will lose everything. If you have a lot of photos the online backup is great because it holds many times what your computer can. It will also open up space on your computer so it can run faster and allow you to do more important work. Online storage is very affordable and great as you can access it from anywhere in the world. Plus, online backup has the distinct advantage of being available even if your house does burn down! (Search online: “Free online data storage” for options.)

5. **Scan to Store:** Older paper documents may not be on your computer, but with a scanner and computer, you can scan and save to CDs or to your hard drive all important papers that you don’t need on hand physically, but may need to reference in the future. CDs (or whatever the current disk/CD/jump- or flashdrive) take up a lot less room than the paper and (bonus!) can be transported anywhere you go. Of course, create a master list or file system to know on which external document system you’ve put your data, or it will get lost too!
**TIP:** Keeping up with the rapid changes in electronic products and systems is important. CDs and DVDs may be extinct and "old" soon enough, and can also deteriorate. So, it's important to keep ahead of the curve and back up your disks every year or two just to be safe.

**PRODUCT SUGGESTION**
A great computer program to use for accessing any files—hardcopy or electronic—is Barbara Hemphill’s *Paper Tiger Software* for office organization, time management, records management or document management. You can find this at: http://www.hemphillinstitute.com under “products.”

6. Hardcopy File System: A file SYSTEM is imperative if you have information and forms you need to keep in hardcopy, refer back to or keep in archives. The best file cabinets or mobile file carry cases have the metal rails for hanging files. Though they have a limited capacity, you can also buy filing systems designed to hang from a hook on the back of a door. They can be hidden in a closet or behind the door when not in use. Some can be folded down to fit into a briefcase for travel too.

One of the best things you can do with your time is to create a well-planned file and storage system to keep papers flowing in and out of your life easily.

a) Make it Accessible: If you can’t get to it, the drawers are overflowing or stuck, bent or jammed, you can’t and won’t use it.

b) Make it Consistent: Label, code or index your hanging files and folders by alphabet, month, job, client, etc. to find them easily. This means CATEGORIZING, just as I explained for organizing everything else. Keep like topics in like categories and you’ll find them quickly. (I suggest Barbara Hemphill’s *Paper Tiger Software* again here. Visit hemphillinstitute.com “products.”)

c) Make it Maintainable: Remember, 90% of life is maintenance! If you can’t easily use and maintain your system, it will fail quickly and you’ll be back to piles and insanity. At the same time, **there are no perfect systems**, so if your system works well 80% of the time, it’s a keeper.

d) Make it Light: Regulate your files regularly. Update and cull out your files on a consistent basis to keep your system up to date and easy to use.

**TIP:** Get rid of outdated information annually. A good time to do this is before or right after the end of the year while you’re getting ready for taxes and need to have all your files, receipts and paperwork ready anyway. It’s a good cleanout time and RESET.
Email: Find the delete key. Use it! Cull your emails out often. Most emails can be distracting if you are not making a decision and completing the communication, or are leaving spam and jokes and newsletters in your INBOX that distract you from your work and joy. Remember, clutter is one decision and one action not taken. So, all those newsletters and such in your inbox become clutter and are distracting to your best "now." If you need to keep emails for archive or check-back use, you can make folders to the side of your email INBOX to keep by CATEGORY, just like a hardcopy, file the emails you want to keep.

TIP: Fast deletes. Though email programs can look a bit different, they all have the basic same categories to keep our information organized. To delete faster by category, go to the top of your INBOX and click on NAME, TOPIC, DATE or SIZE. This will sort and align them accordingly. From there it's a bit easier to delete (declutter) whole chunks of the same items quickly. When you're through with a CATEGORY folder you can delete the whole folder and all its email contents at once. High five!

MYTH: Humans Can Multi-task
Two of the main reasons for mental exhaustion—creating byproducts of overwhelm, anger, fear, confusion, trancing, clutter and dis-ease—are multi-tasking and constant distraction. The more you bring into your life, the more you have to maintain "it", pay attention to "it" and take care of "it". Your mind has to constantly figure out what to do with "it". Research shows that we in fact cannot multi-task. It’s a myth! Our brains can only do two goal oriented tasks at one time "well." The more choices and tasks we have and do at the same time, the more frustration we create in our minds. So, as I just explained about emails, and other areas of “too much,” cull them out, delete, unsubscribe, say no, stop, etc. Pair your choices for your attention and focus down to the important few that you really need or love and give your mind a break.

6 Keys for Handling Receipts

The fear of the IRS should not be your main reason for keeping your receipts organized! The better organized you are with your receipts and all your financial paperwork, the more you will be at peace, have more knowledge and control over your finances and... the IRS will be happy too.

1. Where do your receipts “live” in your home/office?
   Stuffing receipts into a plastic grocery bag, shoe box or overflowing-held-together-with-rubber-bands envelope is not the best system. Remember, everything has to have a HOME, or it is homeless and will get lost. You need to have a filing SYSTEM set up in hardcopy for sure, and then on your computer in any of the tax record software programs available today that keep great records of your data for printing anytime, and especially for automatic number crunching at tax time. (Search online for "Tax Preparation software.")
Your file system can be set up by month or category. Be sure to make notes on your receipts if you need to remember something about it later for tax proof.

Also, make sure to have a file or envelope for “Possible Returns” receipts. Then you can easily find them to take back items for refunds or exchange.

2. Establish a simple routine for dealing with receipts and stick to it.

It's a very good idea to have a routine place to put your receipts when you’re out and about, like your day-calendar that goes everywhere with you, a certain pocket in your purse or envelope in your car or briefcase. When you get back home or to your office, put the receipts into the appropriate file or folder you’ve created. Create a receipt "dropping point" that will temporarily hold the receipts until your weekly scheduled session of adding them into your tax record software or accounting sheets.

TIP: Your receipts and other "entry" systems need to have a conscious schedule. Whether it's weekly, monthly or quarterly—so that you don't drive yourself crazy doing it all at once for taxes—pre-plan your time to get your numbers entered and crunched.

3. Clean up receipts immediately.

Whether your receipt came from a credit or debit card payment or from cash, it's imperative to clean up the receipt before entry in to tax record software and then filed for good. Why? Receipt paper print can be faint, non-existent and fade completely away over time. How frustrating to go back through your receipts hours, days or months later to try to remember what it says and to fill it in, again stressing your mind. Check your receipts for missing or faded information immediately and fill in. Also, all the information you need may just not be there anyway. For business tax purposes, you need the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY. I also find it necessary to copy receipts that are really important if they are on the satiny paper that fades out quickly.

4. Use technology.

In lieu of copying a receipt, you can also scan your receipt. You can use your office scanner or there are receipt pocket and handheld scanners on the market that you can use anywhere to scan the paper receipt into its software and then to your computer and into your tax software program. Very cool! Search "receipt scanner" online to see the latest options.

5. Print online purchases.
When you buy online you will get the opportunity to “PRINT” your receipt. Make sure not to bypass this step. It’s easy to forget some purchases for tax-expenses this way. You can also print to an efile—“save as” electronically—onto your computer so that you save a tree altogether!

6. Print online banking.
   Like online purchases, you may have one or plenty of automatic withdrawals for monthly payments. You may have gone "paperless" and will not get a hardcopy receipt, mailer or email confirming your payment. Make sure to download your monthly statement from your online banking.

7. Don't let the receipts and data entry pile up.
   If you have a bookkeeper, get them the receipts on a weekly or monthly scheduled basis. If you're the one doing it, schedule time every week to do the data entry. This is a must because it’s so easy to let it slide. A lot of unnecessary stress is laced into our lives by not following through on taking care of receipts, specifically for taxes, way before it “has to be” done.

Following these easy keys to receipt bliss will make it much easier, organized, efficient and way less stressful.

How to Organize and Maintain Important and Vital Documents

Have you ever hyperventilated because you couldn't find your birth certificate, marriage license, passport, insurance papers, car title, credit card or other important and Vital Documents? Most people have because they have not taken the time to get these lifesaving papers organized.

If organizing important papers is non-existent, or a scattered process in your home, here are some quick tips and keys to getting them organized and to stay on top of what you need when you need it—because someday you or your family will need them.

Reality Check: Do you have your Vital Documents and End Of Life paperwork and wishes organized, copied and in a SYSTEM and CONTAINER that at least one other person knows about to find and use in case of an (“thee”) emergency? If the answer is no, this is a very important chapter for you.

The reality is that our last day on this little speck of dust—in midst of the big immense infinite shifting of other specks of dust—will be over someday. And, here’s the thing… we don’t know when that “someday”
is going to be. No matter our age, health, wealth, heritage, family name or business, we’re going to die, and it could be right this second. (If you’re still reading, it wasn’t this second! Yea!) Now, how does not having your important documents in order serve those people who will need to take care of your body, funeral, bills, paperwork, estate, legacy, and, oh, yeah… clutter? Or, what if you have an accident, or better yet what if you have a good reason, like you’re out of the country having a to-live-for time and you need some important document but have no idea where it is and how to tell someone else to find it (over the phone long, long distance and it’s costing you an arm and a leg to figure it out.)

**Important Document Organization**

There are Two Layers of Important Documents to Organize.

1. Important Papers are everyday documents, information and policies you need to find quickly.
2. Vital Documents are all from #1 plus End of Life Information that others need to find quickly.

I want to assure you that organizing your Vital Documents doesn’t have to be overwhelming. Just like any other project of “find, sort, categorize, label, file and systemize” you’re merely creating an inventory of your most important records and wishes. As noted above, this is so that 1) you can find them as needed and that 2) in an emergency—which “Vital Documents” sort of denotes!—that you and others usually can find or reconstruct them with ease.

**Who Needs to Use This Information When Complete?**

First, it’s for you. Like all organization, you need to always know where to find all of your important documents for your needs when and should they arise, making your life efficient, easier and less stressful.

Second, it’s a guide for the executor of your estate, containing all important information, summary pages and documents (more about this later.)

**What matters most is that**

a) you have it all in a safe and easy to access location so you don’t have to search for it

b) your organization within this the system you’ve created makes sense to you

c) it is explained in a master document

d) copies are made for a mirror file and given to a family member, close friend and/or executor of your Will

e) that the master document must be easy to find by you and your chosen decision makers

Now, onto the set up and organize your Important and Vital Documents.
PHASE 1: Prepare File System and MASTER LIST

You need to have a SYSTEM and CONTAINER in which to put your found and orderly documents. If your documents are necessary to keep, but not active, like tax returns up to 7 years old, you can keep them in well-labeled boxes in archive storage. However, for Vital Documents, like life, car and health insurance, investment papers, household inventories and others, they need to be easily accessible in a file cabinet or fireproof strong box. Some papers may need to go into a safety deposit box at your bank or a fire proof safe in your home, all noted on your MASTER LIST (more about this under Inventory #1 below).

STORY

A local businesses was robbed, the thief got away with a safe. The assumption is of course that he thought it was full of cash. It was full of stamps! $17,000 worth of postage stamps. I asked how he could take the safe. They said it wasn’t attached to anything. The new safe is not only fireproof, but is thief proof, it’s bolted to the floor!

So, just as with organizing anything else, which if you’ve read this far you know the drill… schedule designated TIME to create your SYSTEM in which to put your documents. You’ll need about two to three uninterrupted hours to get started and get some kind of systemization going in which to continue keeping it together and current.

If you have a 2-4 drawer filing cabinet—but it’s never opened and used for storage for who-knows-what—clean it out and set it up with hanging files and file folders for categories you’ll need. If you don’t have room for a file cabinet (which by the way is more fire proof than plastic tubs and cardboard boxes) you of course can use tubs and boxes and stow them in small spaces as possible.

Inventory #1: VITAL DOCUMENTS LOCATION LIST

After preparing your SYSTEM, it’s time to create your MASTER LIST. This is a list of the generic and usual 27 Categories listed below for your Vital Documents. You will add or subtract from this list as needed. Some documents are 1) vital, like a Living Will, some are 2) important, like employment records and cancelled checks, and some 3) good-to-keep-to-make-life-easier, like manuals for appliances.

TIP: After completing your MASTER LIST, keep it in the front of your file cabinet in its own labeled hanging folder so that it’s easy to access and you or anyone you appoint can use it to find your documents quickly.
Your MASTER LIST Sheet Has the Following 4 Headings

(This list was adapted from one by Julie Morgenstern [http://www.juliemorgenstern.com/](http://www.juliemorgenstern.com/))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Location (Original)</th>
<th>Location (Copy)</th>
<th>How Long to Keep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use the list below for your document list in this column and file folder / hanging file labels.</td>
<td>Write the actual “location” of where each item is in this column for easy and effortless retrieval, by you or anyone you allow to use this information. Keep originals in bank safety deposit box or home burglar and fire proof safe.</td>
<td>Same as Location (Original) but keep the copies at home in your file cabinet for easy access.</td>
<td>Documents are kept for different time frames, see the list below. Keep your folders current by culling and archiving when necessary the outdated documents as often as indicated. Note: Most records are kept either short term, 7 years or for life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MASTER LIST CATEGORIES and HANGING FILE FOLDER CATEGORIES

1. Automotive Records: Titles, registration, repairs, auto clubs.
   Keep: as long as you own the vehicle(s).
2. Appointment Books (past).
   Keep: These are kept for IRS needs, as well as business and personal/memorabilia. 1-10 years, depending on how you need/use them. Seven years is needed for IRS. NOTE: Check with your accountant for possible changes in this policy each year around tax time.
   Keep: Standard is 6 years plus current year for taxes. It’s not necessary to keep ATM slips after accounting for them. If you bank online (paperless) check with your bank to see how long you can access your statements.
   Keep: As long as you own the account.
5. Credit Card Statements.
   Keep: Standard is 6 years if tax-related purchases on statements; otherwise until annual interest statement is issued by the company.
   Keep: As long as current.
7. Dividend payment records.
   Keep: Until annual statement is supplied by the company, then just annual statements.
8. Employee benefit statements and plans: This helps you keep track of additional job benefits, like flexible spending plans, along with the documentation on how they work. NOTE: Don’t forget about benefits at work like these and learn how to use them as they are often free money.
   Keep: As long as you are employed at the company.

9. Family history information and negatives of important photos.
   Keep: Permanently. Personal Choice. (Try to get them uploaded to your computer and backed up.)

10. Hard Drive Backups: Personal or Business/Project.
    Keep: Back up weekly. Keep permanently. NOTE: This is a good use for backup systems discussed earlier including online backups for large amounts of information.

11. Household inventory and appraisals, including video of possessions.
    Keep: As long as current.

12. Insurance Policies: Auto, sports utility, homeowners, liability, etc.
    Keep: As long as statute of limitations in the event of a late claim.

    Keep: As long as you own.

    Keep: As long as you own. If you own property, you must keep documentation to prove your original cost plus improvements in case you ever sell or transfer the property.

15. Investments: Sales records
    Keep: Standard 6 years for year-end statements, 1 year for monthly/quarterly statements if year-end is saved.

16. Lease and loan agreements, loan payment books and debt documentation: Create a folder describing any and all debts you owe, as well as any and all debts owed to you.
    Keep: As long as under the term, until paid off.

17. Military records.
    Keep: Permanently.

18. Mortgage/lien documents, loan discharge, property deeds, title papers.
    Keep: As long as you own, or 6 years after discharge; or until statute of limitations ends after property sold or transferred (depends on state law).

19. Receipts: Appliance, art, antiques, collectibles, home improvements, household repairs, major purchases.
    Keep: As long as you own items.

20. Receipts: Clothing, food.
    Keep: When non-business oriented, keep only for 60-90 days as per store policy for returns or exchange, or personal needs. May need to use for rebates, or need to keep for warranties, resale or taxes. If keeping for a rebate offer, complete paperwork and send in immediately; copy and keep information until you receive the rebate.
21. Resume: Permanently. Keep more recent up front, and/or on your computer only.

22. Retirement statements/plans, Pension Plans, Social Security statements. These demonstrate the savings you have made for retirement, as well as your pension options.
   Keep: Permanently.

   Keep: Permanently.

24. Tax Records and Home based business records: Bank statements and cancelled checks, deposit slips, contracts, charitable contributions, credit card statements, income tax returns, medical bills, pension-plan records, pay stubs, tax returns, supporting documentation such as all documentation used to substantiate your tax return, including W-2 and 1099 forms.
   Keep: Current year and 6 prior. (Cross-cut shred when disposing of past tax records).

25. Trust.
   Keep: As long as current, replace when updated.

26. Warranty and Information Manuals.
   Keep: As long as you have the item.

27. Will / Living Will / Durable power of attorney.
   Keep: As long as current, replace when updated.

Disclaimer: This section is not meant to be anything more than the most current information available to the public. Rules and policies change. Check with your bank, investment companies, bookkeeper, accountant, financial consultant, attorney and online for your state for the most current “rules” for how long to keep these types of important papers.

PHASE 2: Seek and Find

1. Schedule Time: As I explained earlier in PART TWO, like organizing anything else schedule designated and undisturbed time to gather your documents.

2. Create a system in which to file/store them: You’ll need about two to three uninterrupted hours to get started and to get some kind of systemization going in which to continue keeping it together and current.

3. Locate current records and documents and create a MASTER LIST: Open each CONTAINER, file drawer or box where you keep your records and make a list of what you have and where they are. Example:
   - Bank box in the hall closet—medical records 2005-2008 (might need for taxes).
   - Basket on top shelf in mudroom—appliance manuals.
Burn Your House Down

- File in office, second drawer from top—current paid bills.
- Bottom drawer of the tan four-drawer filing cabinet—birth certificates, car titles, club memberships, life insurance policies, health insurance policies.
- Garage bank boxes in SW corner—tax records from last seven years starting with 2008.

Keep this list in a very safe place, of course.

It’s Now. Do You Know Where Your Financial Holdings Are?

When it comes to savings, checking and credit cards, as well as investment and insurance records, there’s another reason you need to know where your accounts are. You could have money coming to you! I did just this past year. Okay, it was only $50 from some credit card dispute that bazillions of customers got in on, but hey, it’s $50! Every once in a while there will be a state or national news alert about these events. On the news recently a farmer in Illinois got over a million dollars from money that he forgot about in the Illinois state system!

The reality is that millions of dollars go unclaimed every year because people lose track of their holdings. Or, you may have bought an insurance policy or government bond, CD or other savings account that you, or someone started for you, in high school or college. Or, an annuity you have has accrued to a much larger pot of interest than you realized and you could use it if you need it now. We move; time goes by; papers get shuffled into boxes and forgotten pretty easily. This isn't even considering someone else in your family that could have these same good fortunes.

"Write down every bank, credit card, investment and insurance account you have. For each, list the institution, type of account (checking? money market?), owner or policyholder (you? you and a relative?), account number and contact information. Add frequent flier accounts, computer access codes and any other key passwords to this document."

~ Julie Morgenstern, Professional Organizer

Author of Organizing from the Inside Out and many other great books

Inventory #2: Safety Deposit Box and Key

For the best protection against events such as floods, tornadoes, fire and burglary a bank safety deposit box is a good place to store the originals of your Vital Documents and recommended copies of other lists; like the household inventory, notarized copies of the deeds and titles.
Burn Your House Down

It goes without saying, but I'll say it, make sure you mark your MASTER LIST and have your file folder ready in your Important Documents System in which to place your safety deposit box key! Yes, after and each time you store items in or take items out of the safety deposit box, update your list that goes in the box and back home in the front of your file cabinet with your important papers location list for easy retrieval.

The safety deposit box is also a good place for a list of all the irreplaceables such as jewelry, photo negatives, heirlooms and where they are stored and video of your home for insurance purposes.

PHASE 3: Store MASTER LIST

Once you've completed your Vital Documents project, store a copy of the MASTER LIST in three different places:

1. in a clearly marked and accessible folder in your home or office
2. with your attorney, a close friend, or a family member who doesn't live with you (In case of fire, tornado, flood or other disaster type problems. If you are the only one with only one copy and it's up in smoke or gone, it is of no help.)
3. in your safe-deposit box.

We have plenty of everyday important documents as well. There are a couple of ways to organize your daily financial, legal and other important documents that you must keep track of for business and family records.

Inventory #3: Wallet Papers Photocopies

Have you ever lost your wallet or had it stolen? Did you remember what you had in it? How easily was it to replace it all?

To short-circuit chaos, fear and massive stress in this area, do two simple things:

1. Make a copy of all the credit and ID cards you carry around. Place as many cards as will fit on the screen of a copier (you can make this up to a 14X16 sheet of paper), photocopy, then flip the cards over and do the other side. You'll have everything accounted for quickly for reference “just in case” including phone numbers to call to cancel credit, debit and other cards, etc. If you can't read something after copying, write it out before filing it. Put this inventory sheet in your file system under WALLET INVENTORY.
2. Keep these numbers in your WALLET INVENTORY file and all those linked to your specific inventory to report lost or stolen cards immediately. Here are some basic few. These numbers stay pretty consistent, but changes can happen, check online.
   
   Visa (800-VISA-911)
   American Express (800-441-0519)
MasterCard (800-307-7309)

Register for fraud alert with the three credit bureaus after you call the above:
Equifax (800-525-6285)
Experian (888-EXPERIAN)
TransUnion (800-680-7289)

Inventory #4: Online Information
Keep your online account access, user names, passwords and PINS in a file, booklet or a sheet that states where to find them all when needed. These will be needed in your End of Life Documents to access your accounts for family, closing of accounts and completions.

Inventory #5: Household Video/Photo Inventory
Video tape or photograph your belongings to create a household inventory. This documentation (proof), on video tape or digital video and kept online is for financial, insurance and other legalities in case of disaster, theft or other loss. Keep it in your bank security box, or fire/burglar proof system at home.

So, after all is said and done—about important documents management—it’s not very exciting to keep on top of your paperwork. Remember, “90% of life is maintenance?” Paperwork is absolutely about maintenance. But, to stay in good fiscal shape and stress free about your legalities, important papers, financial and Vital Records, organizing is a must.

If you don’t have time or just can’t do it yourself, ask for help, hire a professional organizer, or consider hiring other experts to get you on the right track, like a bookkeeper, financial consultant or a certified financial planner.

Inventory #6: Personal Letters and Messages
Aside from the basics, your records may also include personal letters or videos to people for them to read or view in the event of your passing.

Vital Document Organization = Freedom
Remember, your financial-paper organizing is for you—you’ll have a greater peace of mind and personal power in return—and at the same time, it really considers your parents, spouse, children, heirs, family and business partners. The better your documents are organized, the better everything will be taken care of for you, in case of any emergency, and for “someday when.” That’s a really good, kind and conscious gift to give them all.
When my father died I was very grateful that my mom is great at taking care of paperwork and filing. I helped her with all of the life and health insurance paperwork, etc. It took some time, but was easy compared to so many people who are clueless as to where any documents are, or if they even exist. Good job mom!

**Who Needs to Use this Information When Complete?**

Your diligent work collecting and organizing your life's documents are the all-important guide for the executor of your estate, containing all the vital information, summary pages and documents.

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**STORY**

I was speaking at a conference in Reno, NV where I met Becky. I eavesdropped on the last part of her workshop on Organizing Vital Documents in the system she created titled *answers™*, a fill-in-the-blanks format in a three-ring binder with sleeve pages for documents and documentation. The reason she traveled speaking on this subject was due to the sudden death of her husband, in his late 30s on the tennis court. When she was asked to find his life, health, and other policies and important documents she was at a loss. Her husband was very organized, but had not shared where this information was. And, why would he? He was a healthy business man in his thirties!

Due to this painful experience, Becky put together a list of items she had to find and gave these pages of TO DOs to her family and friends to fill out for themselves and their loved ones so that no one around her would have to go through what she had. They all suggested she create a book to sell because others wanted it too.

At any age death is painful. It is a time for family and friends to gather around and support a person in their grief. It is not a time for fear, stress and confusion over paperwork to distract and take front stage.

The rest of the story is that I met and befriended Becky as we cashed in $10 apiece for rolls of nickels playing 5-cent slots (losing it all) while we waited for our 4 a.m. shuttle to the airport. (I meet great people out speaking!)

Becky doesn’t speak on her books’ information anymore. She's been remarried and doesn’t want to keep telling her past and painful story over and over again. Her tragedy however is a blessing to everyone ready to get this information together.

Becky Barker’s book *answers™: A Practical Survival Kit to Help You Organize Your Personal and Financial Matters* can be found at http://www.answersbook.com. There are many books and notebooks on the market now for End of Life and Vital Records Keeping. Check your local bookstores or search online.

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**End of Life Material Possessions Planning**

Who gets your stuff when you die? This isn't a question we think about often, nor do most people want to think about at all. However, if you don't decide the reality is, most of your possessions will end up in a big dumpster or picked up by a thrift shop.

So, day-by-day, you can pre-plan NOW what happens to your precious items, family heirlooms, photos, etc.
**STORY**

My maternal grandmother, Carrie, was great at pre-planning. She had two to three items of furniture, dishes, clocks, jewelry, etc. marked with a tapped piece of paper designating which child and grandchild would inherit what years before she was ill and passed away from cancer. She didn't have to be in chaos and drama “at the end” when it wasn't necessary.

This was a great exercise in self and life-responsibility; helping her children with her estate and helping to give her the freedom to "be complete" with these decisions when she wouldn't have the time or energy to deal with it at the “end of life.”

My mother has a notebook with a list of items that go to us children and her grandchildren; the rest goes on the estate sale, or whatever we choose to do with it.

When we preplan and get completions done where possible now, we open the door to mental and emotional freedom and to the time to do what we enjoy today.

**Clutter’s Last Stand! Ancient Wisdom and Rituals**

The ancient Egyptians, as we well know, buried King Tut and other pharaohs with their stuff, as well as their animals and some servants, so that they’d have them in the afterlife.

Many North American Native tribes upon death gave away the persons possessions to the family and friends who attended the funeral services.

The Zulu tribe of South America burns all the possessions of the dead to dispel evil spirits.

Others call family and "the village" to come and visit them to give away their possessions when they know they are ready to "pass on."

Such ancient wisdom is good! In modern American culture we just spend more money on industrial sized dumpsters and haul it all out to the landfill, or keep it in storage or "PODS" and pay for it over and over again for one or two generations. Because we can!
PART FOUR:
Other Specific Areas and Items

Hi Dr. DeClutter,

We have to decide which is worse: garage or basement. They are both so bad, we can't face it. I think my husband is still traumatized from your last visit. Not a reflection on you. Making him concentrate for 4 hours on decluttering was hard. I loved it. Someone else making him do it. But if he's not here he can't protect his stuff, and you know how we feel about other people's stuff.

~ Sandi
Longmont, Colorado

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Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I have all three kinds of clutter, but I have three or four areas that weigh heavy on my mind of what to keep and what not to keep. My husband is out of a job so I feel the need to sell stuff instead of donating things. I keep buying storage containers and bringing home boxes, but then it just sits. I can make lists, and have all my life, but don't know how to make priorities when they all seem very important. Started a "when I die" book before I saw your article of how to prepare for this, but it is also on "stuck". I think I would just rather die and then not care where all this STUFF goes.

~ Jackie
Concord, Massachusetts

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Dear Dr. DeClutter,

I have way too many things for my 1000 sq ft home; would like a quiet organized bedroom with a reading area/chair, and an organized office corner in my living room. Every time I think I have a handle on the office it demolishes itself. I would love to have an organized garage where I could park my car, but it seems like when we clear out a space it gets filled with the overflow from the rest of the house.

I look forward to reading your newsletters and getting more insight on how to turn my life around, without all the clutter.....33+ years is more than enough!!

~ Debbie
Oakland, California
One of my most enjoyable statements of feedback from many of my clients is, “You are so non-judgmental and make this so fun!” Well, true! Because a) I love organizing, b) I love helping people be less stressed, c) I can only see CATEGORIES, and d) it’s not my stuff! I have no history or relationship to “your” stuff that brings up stories or emotions, good or bad for you.

It’s important to remember that the only problem we really have with clutter and material stuff is feeling overwhelmed and thinking it’s all “too much” to deal with, and the cascade of negative emotions laced through it all. I know plenty of people who are very cluttered, but they live happy, safe and wonderful lives because it truly doesn’t bother them.

However, I do get affected, though still not judgmental, by what people think is “junk” and throw in the garbage. I hate waste!

Country singer, Barbara Mandrell made famous a song with the lyrics, “I was country when country wasn’t cool.” Well, I grew up in a small farming community in Nebraska (pop. 170), where everyone recycled, reused and repurposed before it was called "recycling" and before recycling and "green" was cool. We did it, and they still do, out of common sense and necessity. I’m programmed for it. Having what you needed and just a little more was the way most everyone lived and still do. Maybe that’s why Nebraska was named the Happiest State in the U.S. financially! People are pretty content with what they have. I grew up learning Day-One that you don't throw things out; you don't "waste" anything. I learned instead to reuse and repurpose everything at least once if not 100 times! (Though, I realize, sometimes it’s good to let things go way before using them 100 times!) I can use one box of plastic zipper-baggies for more than a year because I wash and rinse them out and reuse them. (There of course are biodegradable “green” baggies now too.)

STORY
My client Jennifer’s garage has a good number of filled 18 gallon blue tubs. She said that the manager of her condo complex asked her and other residents if they wanted these tubs because one of the residents had just moved there and was going to throw them out. Why? She used them instead of cardboard boxes in which to pack for the move and she was finished with them. We both gasped at the thought.* This new resident bought over fifty 18 gallon Rubbermaid® lidded tubs in place of boxes and was just going to throw them into the trash. I’m always just speechless for a time after I hear these stories. Jennifer and I were both glad that she could "rescue" some of them and use them for good.

*Cash in the trash plus unnecessary landfill items. I tend to grasp my throat with both hands and act like I'm strangling myself, eye-rolling, the whole deal, in my frustration with humankind.

This chapter is for everything not yet covered and Special Areas of Clutter.
Family Heirlooms
What do you do with family heirlooms that you really don't have room for or don't use, like or want? You might remember that this book started off with the story about the veterinarian in Baltimore, MD who having found that his house burned down meant he didn't have to decide what to do with family heirlooms anymore felt free of it all and moved on to his next best life. The bottom-line is, your home is for YOU—it's your present and future home, not the home of family past and histories you may not know or care about.

Plus, those THINGS aren't THOSE PEOPLE. They are just things—things that hold stories and emotions. Remember the people with love and gratitude, let go of the things to other family members who want them, sell or give them away.

Start a Family Blog!
As I suggested earlier, take photos of some of the cool things before releasing them, and enjoy the photo on display or scrapbook them, which takes up so little room. If you have a large family who would enjoy seeing these items start a blog and have everyone contribute photos of heirlooms.

**STORY**
I had told the story earlier about my grandma Carrie who did such a great job labeling items for her heirs before she died. One of the items I received was a painted china sugar and creamer set from her grandmother. They are of course very fragile. I don’t have a china cabinet or anywhere to put them. I left them in the box for years and just a few years ago it dawned on me to give them to my mom to put in her hutch to enjoy while she’s alive.

Memories: Photos and Memorabilia to Keep and Cherish
Create a place for the memories that you do want to keep. Big stackable plastic tubs work great to keep your items clean and tidy. Baby’s first blanket and booties, first “this” and anniversary “that” will stay happy—bug, dust and water free for a long time in plastic tubs. LABEL them well.

**STORY**
During a move, my friend Sylvia decided to send her 38 year old son the box of baby stuff she had been saving for him. She didn’t want to move it “one more time.” She sent it off in the mail and even though she didn’t expect a big fan fair about it, she thought she’d get a call that he appreciated it. A few weeks went by and she called her son to find out if he got the package of memorabilia. He said he did and that he threw most of it out! Needless to say, Sylvia was gasping for air! She told me about it and said, “He should have told me and I would have taken what he didn’t want back!” I asked her, “What would you do with it then?” Her son is married, but not having children. This is the end of the line for those precious keepsakes. After she thought about it, she agreed that it was okay to let them go for good, no matter what.
Youth artwork, birthday cards and other memories need their own storage. Consider giving each family member a container to store memories. Once the container is full they (or you) will have to make choices about what to keep and what to cull out, and what to move on to their homes as adults “someday when!”

**STORY**

My mom has room in the attic eves where she’s kept some of my and my two brother’s grade school papers and projects. “It’s not in the way and it’s not hurting anything,” says mom. So, a couple of years ago she gave me one of the boxes. It was a small box, not much bigger than a shoe box. I didn't open it for some time after she gave it to me as I didn't want to deal with my having to decide to declutter it now. When I finally opened it and lifted out the items from that I made around third grade…one by one and out came the smells of wooden floor, black chalk board, lift-top-hole-for-ink-well-desk Catholic grade school! Wow! I smelled the glue that was in those glass bottles with the rubber tip that you had to press down on to get the glue to come out, paint and wood from a jig-sawed horse head that I’d designed and painted, my writing from when I was a child and memories that had been stored in my mind for a long time. I tossed some items and kept the horse head! Thanks, mom!

**Death and Grief**

It can take a long time to clean out a loved one’s belongings from the closets, bedrooms, garages, and storage. Photos are hard to deal with too. Here are suggestions if you ever have to make these painful decisions.

1. Take at least a year to remove items. Grief takes time. It takes at least a year to go through all the holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. of a relationship that is gone. Unless you need the room it's okay to let it be and take your time as you grieve.

2. Ask for help. It’s very hard to go through a loved one’s belongings alone. Ask for help to go through it at your ability, making sure you have someone who will listen to the stories you need to tell and feelings you need to express in the process. It can be both a very painful ordeal and a happy one as you think of good stories to share.

3. Make sure to go through pockets of pants and jackets, purses, wallets, boxes, etc. so that you don't miss any important items.

4. Plan on donating most of it, someone can use it and get more good use out of it.

5. Keep a balanced number of items that will keep their memory close to you—if they make you feel good, not sad and depressed.

6. Give items to family, children and grandchildren as appropriate.

**STORY**

Mary, my dad's mother died when I was 15. Not long after that when I turned 16 my grandfather visited from just two doors over and gave me a ring that was hers. No one, including grandpa, even knew she had it. It's a solitaire ruby in a gold setting. The oldest daughters of each of my grandparent's three children received a ring. What's interesting is that my birthstone is ruby, and my cousins' birthstones matched exactly the rings they received! No one ever saw grandma wear any of these rings due to her hard working farming hands. I am grateful for this treasure.
Death and Photos
If you haven't scrapbooked most of your photos already, this can be a good time to do it and put your life's events and good memories in order. It can also be a time to give photos back to family and friends who would enjoy them too, especially if the deceased is older and their siblings may not have lots of decades left to enjoy these memories.

STORY
Mandy, a woman who looked a bit tired and sad, came up to me at a conference after I spoke. She said that her 16 year old daughter, Julie had died. I immediately told her how sorry I was and then listened to what she wanted to say. Julie had died eight years earlier. She had three siblings who all loved her and, holding back tears, Mandy wanted to know what to do with her daughter's photos. The holidays were a few months away and I suggested that she scrapbook her daughter's photos into four separate scrapbooks, one for each sibling and one for herself and her husband, giving her daughter the respect, love, honor and memories she deserved. Then at Christmas, give each child their scrapbook. Make some hot chocolate and sit around sharing good stories and more emotional completions as they leafed through them together.

I received a call from Mandy a while after Christmas. She said it was the best thing she could have ever done, giving her closure by creating the scrapbooks and then giving them to her other children while all talking about their beloved Julie.

Organizing Kids and Their Stuff
There's so much to say about kids. The comedienne Phyllis Diller says, “Cleaning up after kids is like shoveling when it’s still snowing!” Kids are kind of like decorator crabs. These friendly little crustaceans use various materials from their surroundings to disguise themselves. They pile on anything they can find from the sea floor to not look like a crab, or “lunch” in bigger sea creature language. Kids can be like that. They pile on clothes and toys and try stuff in all kinds of ways to figure out who they are and what they like. The more stuff they have to play with, the more they'll pile.

So, what about clutter and children's toys and rooms? They can accumulate so much little stuff. Plus, how do you decide what art and school projects to keep? HELP!

Many an overwhelmed mother has called me with these same questions. Here’s my cheat sheet on the subject:

1. Decide how much and how many is “enough” toys, shoes, clothes, etc. And, decide that “enough” toys, clothes, books, etc. is less than you think! Declutter what they are not using and grown out of.
Then, stop before buying one more “anything” and think through your purchases. In fact, don’t buy more things for your children for awhile because, as you well know, they grow out of their clothes and toys so quickly. Also, stop buying for awhile when you have grandparents and others who may be contributors to the heaps and piles and lost treasures.

**TIP:** Give those who will be giving gifts to your children a list of a very few things that your children want and will use and truly love, but a very short list. Tell them to “stick to the list!” to help everyone. Sometimes the "givers" are relieved too because it makes everything easier for them. Everybody wins.

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**STORY**

Connie, a mom with several kids hired me to help her with several areas of her home. One, which was really fun, was her daughter’s bedroom. Jenny, who was not home at the time, was ten and had a very nice bedroom. The problem for Jenny was that some systems were missing, like closet shelving and hanging rods at her height so clothes often ended up on the floor, a more functional bookshelf, and too many toys in her way. We zipped through her bedroom in no time and remedied the situation. I also left Connie with a list of measurements for a few more wire shelves in the closet. The day after this job I received an email from Connie, she said, "Jenny loves her bedroom!" She said she wants to spend time in it now and live in there, it's so organized and nice!"

**Choices: The Good, the Bad and the Overwhelming**

Because we are a consumer-based society and "land of the free delivery, buy-one-get-one (BOGO) and bulk buying (more is better!)", we have way too many choices. Our minds get overwhelmed and confused, indecision is the “trancing” outcome. A child’s young life is about development—to learn to choose and problem solve. When a child is overwhelmed with decisions everyday—between the simplest of things—that really don't matter, like which toys to play with when there are clearly too many, their brain is not really learning how to decide, but how to stay confused and indecisive. Too many choices and indecisions create clutter (Inner and Outer). Too many choices and indecisions (trances) create a throw-away mentality and behavior that follows people into adulthood. Too many choices also create a set up for failure. Everyone loses.

**STORY**

My client Gary says that he can hardly handle going into grocery stores any more. “It’s just too much! Do we really need a whole aisle for ketchup and mustard? Really?” He said that one day while waiting “too long” in line listening to other shoppers chatting about how much they had bought and not sure if they got the right price, if they should buy more, if they need more, etc., he put his basket of groceries down on the floor and left. He just went on “consumer tilt” and needed a breather.
Help your kids cut down on Inner and Outer Clutter. Take time to teach your children how to organize, where and how to put their toys and belongings away, and how to MAINTAIN their SYSTEMS. The "where" is into their HOMES where they LIVE so that you don't feel frustrated dealing with their piles every night and day. Less stuff equals less time putting it away, less space in which to put it and less opportunity for fights, failure and fear.

**TIP:** Remember, organizing is a *learned skill*. These are the organizational skills you are teaching them that will serve them for a lifetime.

### STUDY
Kathleen D. Vohs, PhD, a member of the University of Minnesota's marketing department and lead author of a study on *choice overload* found that making choices apparently depletes a precious resource within the human mind. "Maintaining one's focus while trying to solve problems or completing an unpleasant task was much harder for those who had made choices compared to those who had not. This pattern was found in the laboratory, classroom and shopping mall. Having to make the choice was the key. It did not matter if the researchers told them to make choices, or if it was a spontaneously made choice, or if making the choice had consequences or not." Plus, even if people are having fun making decisions, their cognitive functions are still being depleted with every choice they make. Vohs says these experiments provide evidence that making choices, as opposed to just thinking about options, is what is especially taxing. "There is a significant shift in the mental programming that is made at the time of choosing, whether the person acts on it at that time or sometime in the future. Therefore, simply the act of choosing can cause mental fatigue. Making choices can be difficult and taxing, and there is a personal price to choosing."

Source: American Psychological Association

2. Help them to redesign their room into ZONES with HOMES, CATEGORIES and EASY TO REACH AND USE CONTAINERS and HOOKS for book bags, coats, clothes, toys and schoolwork/projects. Make it EASY for them to put their stuff away and get it back out.

**TIP:** See their room from their perspective. If your children are still small get down on your knees, at your child’s level and then screw hooks into the walls. If it’s hard for your child to reach the hooks or shelves it will be very easy for items to end up on the floor and in piles.

3. School arts and crafts. Buy a large plastic tub for each child. LABEL it clearly with their name. Keep only one item or so a week that’s the best of the best from their projects and put it into the tub. This goes for schoolwork too. Cull these out again every 3-6 months.

Make their art a family joy! For their large paintings or drawings that are great for wall art and display, designate a hallway or a wall where you can frame these great masterpieces in frames of bright colors and hang them up. You can get inexpensive, pretty, colorful plastic and/or painted...
wooden frames that can be easily taken down and the pictures changed as often as you like. You could even create a Weekly Wall of Fame on their room bulletin board. If there really isn't room for a scale model of the erupting volcano or world map of the greenest countries, consider photographing the project and scrapbooking a page in an album with details of it, the grade received, the event and pictures of your child at the time. Everyone wins!

**BONUS!** Self-esteem in your children is priceless. Healthy self-esteem is a child's armor against the challenges of the world for their lifetime. Kids who feel good about themselves tend to have an easier time handling conflicts and resisting negative pressures. Displaying their art will help make them feel honored and loved by you. They can feel proud every time they look up and see their art and can show family and friends who come to visit.

4. School work. Set up a filing cabinet and/or bookshelf with inboxes for children to keep their paperwork and projects organized and easy to find. This gives each child a HOME to put their schoolwork, where it will LIVE when not in use or en route. File information by class, keeping a section for tests or notes that may be used later in cumulative finals. Keep track of “Parent Signature needed” slips in another designated INBOX for well LABELED folder.

**Story**

Lori, one of my clients, has several children from ages 6 – 13. They study at the kitchen table so that she and her husband can help them. They had piles of projects and supplies in cupboards and on the floor. To organize their schoolwork and projects we put two 2-shelf bookshelf units along the wall by the table with inboxes on each level. Each child got two inboxes. One inbox for incoming school projects, to-sign-parent forms, etc. The other was for outgoing material, parent's signed the notes, etc. This simple answer made the perfect and functional SYSTEM, with CONTAINERS (HOMES) LABELED for each child and helped to organize and guarantee that no school papers would be lost or mislaid again. A system like this cuts down on frustration, anger, arguments, hurt feelings, fear and stress all round while teaching a life-skill.

Remember, kids grow up so quickly and will be gone in a blink. Enjoy their fun young years and creative gestures by helping them to get and be organized for success, leaving more time for fun!

**Use the 1% Method: Chunk and Chip It Down**

Remember the 1% Method? If we take complete action on 1% of our piles and heaps and frustrations (our chunks)—Inner, Outer or Other—every day, we’ll chip away at our otherwise overwhelming barriers and feel renewed and refreshed more often. Even a little at a time will bring back our necessary internal feelings of order and balance affecting our lives positively.
You can teach children to *chunk and chip* their rooms easily too. Make it simple and fun. Helping them to learn these *important* life-skills will ultimately open up more time for you to do what you want to do, alone or with them as they take over more of their own room responsibilities. We want more of that!!

### SUGGESTED READING

**How to Teach Kids Time and Money Management Life-Skills**

One way to help your children and grandchildren learn the value of material possessions and how to take better care of them, is through the use of chore and time and money management skills.

Barbara Myers from *The Complete Guide to Organized Parenting* says, “Kids? Give them chores. Teachers report that kids who regularly do chores at home are more responsible in the classroom. Use a check-off list, which simplifies chores into steps. Make sure to reward your kids with a bit of attention to reinforce good habits. Help kids manage their time. Teach them to list all their responsibilities (chores, homework, soccer practice) and how much time each will take. Don't forget the stickers!”

Developmental research has proven kids learn best through experience and visual hands-on learning, so I also highly suggest *The Money Mama System* by Lori Mackey at www.prosperity4kids.com where you'll find this Award Winning System that changes the way your kids think about money for a life-time. It's the answer for parents and grandparents who want to teach their kids about money.

### STORY

My longtime friend Sherry and her 7 year old daughter Tessa came up with a great way to get and stay organized with no fights or pouting, from either of them! That's worth a lot too! They put a dry-erase wipe-off board on Tessa's bedroom door with all of the ZONES in her bedroom: toys, books, bed, study, clothes, etc. Each day after school and on weekends too, Tessa sets her timer for a "15-minute boogie", turn out the music and she and her mom jump into whatever section or heap or pile or cluttered part of the house and bedroom they have chosen. They get their jobs done and can do what they need and want for the rest of the evening or weekend.

The really great part of this is that Tessa is not only learning a life-skill, but she and her mom have a memory to share, something they do together and a way to bond that is really healthy, along with an organized home and a gift to dad/husband too! (He's a clean freak who's on the road a lot and loves to come home to a tidy house. So, everyone wins!)

They said I really needed to give www.FlyLady.net credit for this one! Thanks, FlyLady!

### House Rules & Good Manners

Life is really simple. Good manners alone will take care of a lot of life's squabbles and clutter. Being more orderly, organized and less cluttered equals freedom. The more freedom for less clutter and the less we have to maintain the easier it is to take care of the possessions we have in our environment on an ongoing basis. And the more time we have and less stressed we are the more fun we are and the more time we have to have more fun! YEA!

Teaching a few good manners and simple guidelines early in life create
Burn Your House Down

life-long life-skills and makes life so much better for everyone. Here is a great old list we’ve seen a million times that will always hold true, no matter how old "we" kids are.

If you use it, put it back
If you open it, close it
If you drop it, pick it up
If you wear it, hang it up
If you sleep in it, make it
If it barks, let it out
If you eat off of it, wash it
If you turn it on, turn it off
If you spill it, clean it up
If you cook it, eat it
If you say it, do it
If you break it, tell someone
so that they know it needs attention
If you used or ate the last one,
put it on the shopping list

Other’s Clutter in Your Space

Okay, I know, I've waited this long to say anything about all those other adults who leave their stuff and things behind in your way. These "others" can be your spouse, sibling, friend, colleague, neighbor, roommate, coworker or left over items from volunteering and helping some cause.

FAMILY: When it's family and they live with you, you need to sit down and have a real conversation about how their mess affects you emotionally, makes you late for work, stresses you out, etc. If your spouse is your messy-other, but they were that way when you married them (and you knew it) you can't rationally expect them to be different now. You said, "I do!... take on all your messiness too!" But, you can talk to them sanely and teach them if necessary what it means to you to be organized and visa versa. One of my clients decided that drawing a line down the center of the garage designating "one side mine | one side yours" was instrumental in saving their marriage! Or, make sure the messy person has "space" that is all theirs behind closable doors that can be how they want it. This helps keep the main family-living area nice and tidy for all to enjoy. If the messy others are roommates, this applies as well.

FRIENDS and ALL OTHERS: Sometimes there needs to be deadlines, ultimatums and consequences so that the mess or left over items get picked up and removed or organized. I know plenty of parents who say to their children, “If I have to walk over your toys, they get thrown out!” I don't agree with this method. They are kids. It’s your job to teach them where

P.I.B.
Put
It
Back

WE TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO TREAT US

Kim Wolinski, MSW  “Dr. DeClutter”  www.declutter.com  127
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the toys go and when. If you throw toys and other items out in that fashion what you are teaching them is to not trust you, to fear you, to fear security and to support the "throw away mentality" that is alive and strong already.

**STORY**

During one of my workshops, a participant awakened from her trance and said, "I thought I was being patient with myself and my family about our disorganization. I was tolerating!"

The bottom line is, don't live stressed out by others' clutter and disorganization or be dumped on by others. My motto is, WE TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO TREAT US. If you keep teaching them that it's alright to treat you this way, you need to redefine what you're teaching them.

**STORY**

My client Rhonda had a roommate over a year ago. The roommate, Carli is now getting married. Carli left tubs and boxes and a couch and other items at Rhonda's house. After many calls and contacts over the past year to ask Carli to come and get her stuff, Rhonda called me to help her figure out what to do. I told her to get all of Carli's stuff in one area of the garage, contact Carli one more time and set a date for her to come pick it up with the stipulation that "If you don't, I will call a charity to pick it up, I won't keep taking care of your belongings any longer." Rhonda tranced on that advice for a moment, and then got excited about it. She's appropriately tired of not having her own space for no reason. She doesn't owe Carli anything and is not responsible for the natural cause and effect of this situation that Carli has created. She agreed to get right on it. Oh, and, Rhonda said she was going to Carli's wedding shower soon after this and had to get a gift! HA! I told her she could take a few of Carli's boxes from the garage and put a bow on them! She hadn't seen them in over a year; they'd be new to her!

Other's clutter is a natural issue for human kind. It can even be neighbors who have junk cars, unfinished garages, terrible lawns, and other eyesores that you have to look at every day and can't change. As long as people live close enough to one another to visibly see what is all around, it will be a frustration.

**What About All the Other Areas of the House?**

Use these same methods for every area, room, ZONE and corner of your castle, car and kingdom. These strategies work everywhere: the garage, barn, attic, basement, library, cellar, shed, etc.

**What About My Office at Work, Study and Art Studio?**

Same answer! These basic skills and systems work anywhere.

**What About Recycling?**

I live in Boulder County, Colorado. We're all about recycling here. It's pretty much the norm for most people. After watching my clients feel overwhelmed with recycling everything they can, I realized that "recycling" is a Latin word for "stuff men create so that women have to use all their time dealing with it."
Most recycling, like family purchases and purchase decisions, is done by women 80% of the time. Some men, women, kids and families are better than others of course, but if taking care of the planet is going to be up to the wife, mother or woman "of the house" then something's going to give. She will wear out soon enough, feel frustrated and a like a victim or martyr too often. If you're going to recycle and you live with others, make sure that they are part of the process by teaching them how it all works. You might ever create a schedule for each family member to take out the recyclables on a weekly basis as part of chores to keep them moving out the door regularly.

What About Holidays Organizing?
No matter what holiday you celebrate there can be a ton of organizing, planning and decluttering to make it picture perfect. There is planning, travel, family decisions, gift buying and receiving, food and meal planning, budgeting of time and money and so much more. I have a wonderful ebook filled with answers, solutions, lists and questions. This guide will help you let go of holiday stress and bring order to your next holiday or any upcoming event where planning is necessary. It's packed with substantial information.

You can purchase *Simplify Your Holidays* at my online bookstore at www.drdeclutter.com.

Set yourself up for a stress-free life every day
Imagine going on a vacation knowing that everything is done and in its place... that you'll be able to really be-here-now on your vacation with family, friends and your experience. And, that you'll be able to find everything easily in its place when you get back. How does that feel? If it feels great, then jump right in and do what it takes, one pile at a time, to get it to this place.

Here is a Recap in “Rules” of the Basics I Covered on Getting and Staying Organized.

The 20 Rules to Organize and Control Clutter in Every Area of Your Life

**Rule 1:** Decide. All disorganization and clutter is due to at least one decision and one action not taken.

**Rule 2:** Take action. There is no “later!” Stop thinking about it. Stop talking about it. Stop stressing about it. Do something!

**Rule 3:** Handle something only once (as often as possible). Don’t keep repilling. Shake and wake yourself out of trances and complete your thought or action.

**Rule 4:** Use and reuse what you’ve got. Use it all up before buying more. ALL up.

"Never again clutter your days or nights with so many menial and unimportant things that you have no time to accept a real challenge when it comes along. This applies to play as well as work. A day merely survived is no cause for celebration. You are not here to fritter away your precious hours when you have the ability to accomplish so much by making a slight change in your routine. No more busy work. No more hiding from success. Leave time, leave space, to grow. Now. Now! Not tomorrow!"

~ Og Mandino, American Essayist and Psychologist, 1923 - 1996
Rule 5: The 80/20 Rule: Use it or lose it. You only use 20% of what you own, let go of more of the 80%. This is true in all areas of life. Get your treasures out of drawers and boxes, china cupboards and attics. Use them.

Rule 6: Repurpose, reuse.

Rule 7: Repair.

Rule 8: Recycle.

Rule 9: Donate.

Rule 10: When in doubt, throw it out, but only if you can’t donate it or give it to someone who can use it. (Donate it anyway! Let the donation or charity decide what is “good enough.”)

Rule 11: A place for everything, and everything in its place.

Rule 12: Everything must have a “HOME” — or it is “homeless!”


Rule 14: Use CONTAINERS for CATEGORIES; you’ll know quickly when you’re running low on something.

Rule 15: Use and create SYSTEMS that make everything flow. NOTE: No system is 100% perfect.

Rule 16: Everything you have should love you and you should love it. Display your lovely items with pleasure.

Rule 17: Get serious about important papers. Find them. File them. Use a locking, fireproof file cabinet.

Rule 18: Label things. Everything—so that a stranger could find it if you asked them to come into your home to get something you wanted.

Rule 19: 90% of life is maintenance. If you don’t want to maintain stuff, don’t get more of it. This includes kids, boyfriends and girlfriends, big houses and bodies (as in, if you gain weight you’ll have more to maintain, including health issues), etc!

Rule 20: Ask for help. Call in a professional organizer!

An Inner Clutter Purge Equals Outer Clutter Results
It's all connected. One affects the other. Declutter your “Inner Clutter reasons” for holding onto stuff and things, and you’ll automatically declutter your “Outer” space too! Or, just start somewhere and you’ll hear all kinds of clatter in your mind. That’s good! Pay attention to it, then move it aside so that you can change your story, life patterns and habits that got you here.

Last resort? Burn Your House Down!

Albert Einstein's three rules of work (that work everywhere):
1. Out of clutter, find simplicity
2. From discord, find harmony
3. In difficulty, find opportunity
No, sorry, I'm not liable if you actually burn your house down, but you do need to ask yourself these questions: "If your house burned down today, would you miss it? Would you miss any of your stuff and things? Would you in fact even remember you ever had 80% of them anyway?!" Live for the present, not in your past or for a future that is fuzzy at best.

This has been a plethora of information. What would you say is your most important message about decluttering and getting organized?

Mine are 1) That life’s too short to keep dealing with the same stuff over and over again. And, 2) that people need to make themselves, their relationships and their joy—present and future—their priority, not material items and the past. Make the time to declutter your life in all 3 Key Areas of Clutter, to reclaim your space and time, and to renew your freedom and peace of mind.

What's Really Important?

The ultimate question about getting and staying organized is "What's really important?" What do you want out of your life, job, family, friends, time and money? If you don’t make organizing and maintenance of your home and/or office important, it will soon get out of hand, making itself important for all the wrong reasons.

The universe abhors a vacuum. Nature and gardens are great metaphors for clutter. Have you ever noticed how quickly weeds (clutter) grow anywhere and everywhere, even where you’d least expect them? They will fill up space and take up valuable resources from important plants, flowers and vegetation if they are not managed.

The same is true for your days, weeks, months and years. If you don’t consciously put what you want in your garden—your space, time, schedule and choices—weeds will take over. Something else will fill that space that you may not like. And, the longer it's there the more rooted and harder it is to get out. This metaphor is absolutely true for our thoughts and minds as well.

I’ve heard so many times over the years from people, women mostly, chatting on and on about how embarrassed they are about their cluttery home, their unorganized house, their dusty and less than perfect housekeeping, etc. I say, that if someone is visiting me and they have trouble with my dust, as I love my windows open most of the time, then I can happily show them where my dust cloth and the Pledge® is! People don’t come to visit your house they come to visit you. Stop the "embarrassment, guilt and rationalization dance" about how your house looks, don’t waste that precious time and just enjoy their company. You are not your house or your clutter.
Burn Your House Down

With that, I’d like to add just a few more poetic lines from the late, great Erma Bombeck in "If I Had Another Shot At Life."

I would have invited friends over to dinner even if
the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.

I would have eaten the popcorn in the "GOOD" living room and worried much less about the dirt when someone wanted to light a fire in the fireplace.

STORY
I saw your class coming up, Burn Your House Down. How about, Flood Your Entire Basement Out. It happened! 32 years of stuff. Well, you know my stuff. Half of it was destroyed in ankle deep water that ran all night. I saw things so differently and got rid of even more stuff than you and I have decluttered several times. We’ll be able to get rid of what we could salvage at our yard sale this coming weekend...and then there are the piles to the charity pick up. It’s great! I found out there was not one, NOT ONE thing that I was so happy that it did not get ruined... so how important can any of my treasures really be? What an experience. I feel much lighter mentally despite the fact that I know the insurance company is going to give me a difficult time because all the receipts were under water and the ink goes away, funny how that works. I took lots of pictures and hopefully they will work with me, but I am not going to get crazy about it, it is not worth the headache. As I said, nothing was that important down there.
Have a great summer. Susan

Exercise: Turn Your House, Belongings and Life into a Love Story
I give you permission to turn everything that surrounds you into a love story! Since stress creates a lot of our clutter and disorganization problems... creating more stress, then the opposite will help you get back out of it.

When you are grateful and appreciative, you expand your heart and mind with more of the same, peace and love. If you keep seeing your home and environment negatively—thinking about trash and junk, clutter and disorganization—and thinking badly of yourself, you are pulling yourself down, stressing yourself out. Do the following exercises often to change these thought patterns and habits.

- Do a Gratitude Walk. Walk around the inside and the outside of your home feeling gratitude for everything about it. I mean everything! No negative judgments.
- Do a Gratitude Walk around your office feeling gratitude for everything about it. Everything!
- Do an Appreciation Walk through department stores, shopping malls, grocery and other stores being appreciative of all the good you have to choose from (but don’t have to buy!)
- Do an Appreciation Drive when you’re driving anywhere and always. Be appreciative of the highway, other cars, people, the scenery, sunshine and moonlight, stars and breeze.
• Do a Gratitude in the Mirror Review. Look into the mirror and be grateful for everything about you. Fall in love with yourself and your life just as it is right now. You are the only you that will ever be! You are a big deal! Enjoy yourself and this life now.

• Do a Gratitude for Your Clutter Walk. Walk around your house and be grateful for all your clutter! It wasn’t always “junk” or frustrating. Bring peace into your mind, thoughts, body and heart about your stuff and things.

**DUST IF YOU MUST**
~ Original author unknown

_Dust if you must_ but wouldn’t it be better,
To paint a picture or write a letter,
Bake a cake or plant a seed,
Ponder the difference between want and need?

_Dust if you must_ but there’s not much time,
With rivers to swim and mountains to climb,
Music to hear and books to read,
Friends to cherish, and life to lead.

_Dust if you must_ but the world’s out there,
With the sun in your eyes, and wind in your hair,
A flutter of snow, a shower of rain,
This day will not come around again.

_Dust if you must_ but bear in mind,
Old age will come and it’s not always kind.
And when you go and go you must,
You, yourself, will make more dust!

*Thank you again for investing your time and money in this important life-skill and my book. Enjoy your life, friends, family, home and belongings now.*

*Just start it! Good luck!*

Kim, “Dr. DeClutter”
RESOURCES

If you have the urge to purge and need some help, here are some good resources.

Organizing

Professional Organizers—Check your local area for organizers. Kim does travel anywhere you are as well!

National: NAPO—The National Association of Professional Organizers
http://www.napo.net

*Taming the Paper Tiger at Home* and *Taming the Paper Tiger at Work*, Barbara Hemphill
http://www.barbarahemphill.com/taming-the-paper-tiger-books

*Paper Tiger Software, Never look for paper again!* Barbara Hemphill
http://thepapertiger.com/

Mind/Body Healing Methods

Inner clutter causes outer clutter. The following mind/body healing techniques are very helpful as a means of releasing long-held mind/body traumas, beliefs, stress, acute emotional overload or subconscious resistance causing dis-ease, trancing and "stuckness." Search each field by the name given and then in your local area to find practitioners.

Kim is a Focused Life Coach and uses Emotional Freedom Technique.
http://www.drdeclutter.com/organizer/life-coach

**E.F.T.—Emotional Freedom Technique.** You can learn to use EFT on yourself as well.
http://www.theefthub.com
Carol Look, http://www.attractingabundance.com/

**N.E.T.—Neuro Emotional Technique.**
http://www.netmindbody.com/

**E.M.D.R.—Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing.**
http://www.emdr.com/
APPENDIX

The Top 33 Reasons for Not Decluttering, and How to Override Them (from page 32)

As I've said throughout this book, clutter steals your space, time, energy, money and precious present moments. If you don’t use half the stuff you own, it isn’t harmlessly lying around; it’s eating into at least 50% or more of your space and increasing the burden of your housework and stress.

What stops us from getting rid of the things that make our lives feel stuck and more complicated? Which excuses do we hide behind? Why do we make these excuses? Sometimes it comes down to not knowing how to make a decision about it. This is how the clutter build-up begins. Decide now to decide… to declutter the following reasons and excuses, blocks and trances from your life for good.

1. **As soon as I throw it out, I’ll need it, or I might need it “someday”**. This is pretty much an “old wives tale.” Sometimes we actually only know we “might need” something when we’ve found it again in an accidental unearthing in the back of the basement closet! When did you last need it? If it’s been a while, chances are you won’t ever need it. Could you borrow a similar object if you ever need it again? Could you rent or just buy it again easily enough?
   
   Also, it may or may not be true that “you’ll need it someday”, but in the meantime, while you’re taking a chance on that, you’re having to store it, possibly paying to store it, clean it, clean around it, be distracted by it, think about it, talk about it, and take care of it. All in all, a lot of wasted time, money and energy.

2. **It’s still “good enough.”** Lots of things we have cubbied-away are really not good enough anymore. Items with plastic, rubber and other degradable or melt-able parts won’t even work when you do need them—or they’re toxic and you shouldn’t use them! Everything has a shelf life.

3. **It was a gift.** Don’t let guilt and fear stop you from opening up space and energy in your life and home. Re-gift it, sell it, give it away. Bless someone else with your once loved, or not, item.

4. **I don’t want “them” to visit and not see this thing they gave me!** That’s right up there with #3. However you received it, if you’re past loving and using it, let it go. If they ever ask, let them know you’ve redecided and it was time to release it. Or, if it’s something they might use and want/need back, call and let them know. Have them pick it up right away or send it to them, or… it goes.

5. **It’s handmade.** Whether you made it or someone else did, unless you love it or use it regularly, it doesn’t matter.

6. **It was expensive.** Paying for material items once financially is one thing, paying again and again emotionally is another. The price of frustration, regret, guilt or confusion is wearing on your health and happiness.
7. **It's brand new! Or, It's never been worn.** Use the 80/20 Rule. If you haven't worn it in a year or more, it must be in your 80% collection of items that you just don't love. Make a point to wear it, or let it go. Plus, the longer you hold onto it and don't use it with joy, or give it away so someone else can use it, it's aging. Let it go now before no one wants it or something happens to it and it's no good at all.

8. **I'm going to fix it.** You won't. Bye-bye. Or, give yourself a stick-to-it deadline to “fix it, mend it, repair it, find the pieces to it” and if you don't. Bye-bye.

9. **It will fit me when I lose weight.** If and when you lose weight, you'll want to buy new clothes, and by then, possibly new styles. Holding onto “slimmer” clothes can also be depressing and a self-inflicted punishment.

10. **It might come back into fashion.** Fashion changes. The next time wide lapels or rhinestone jackets come into fashion there will be just enough difference about them that yours will still be out of style (or moldy, eaten by moths, pilled, faded, stained, etc.)

11. **I used to love it.** If you don't love it now, then it doesn't matter. We change and evolve, thank goodness! Take a photo of it for your scrapbook and let go of the item.

12. **It was a bargain.** Good! You're a great bargain hunter! You got it on clearance, on sale or even a silent auction. Do you use it? No? Let it go. Think hard before the next bargain you buy!

13. **I bought it with a coupon.** You clipped and hung onto that coupon for just the right time and saved money on the purchase, but if you're not using it, let it go.


15. **I got it free!** Whether you picked it up at a vendor or expo event, or someone kindly gave it to you, the same answer applies. Not using it? Let it go.

16. **I won it!** Same answer. Do you use it?

17. **It might be valuable one day, or It's an investment.** Maybe. Maybe not. Have you gotten it appraised or valued? Is it in mint condition, in its original box, and is it “really” unique, rare or antique? Then maybe, just maybe it will be valuable one day. Otherwise it's not. Markets and interests change. Can you sell it now? DO IT! Also, an “investment” is only and investment “IF”, big if here, IF someone else loves it and will pay for it, otherwise you just have a material item. You'd better love it!

18. **I'm saving it for… .** That's always a nice and kind gesture, but, as most mothers and grandmothers know, “the kids didn't even care that I saved all their childhood stuff and my antiques for them all these years!” Check with your friends “still to have babies” and see if they will really want your baby clothes, etc. Otherwise, you're just sucking up basement and attic and garage real estate like crazy!

19. **I can sell it on eBay, or somewhere.** Maybe, maybe not. If you're not an eBay person, it just won't happen. If you haven't taken the time to take the photo of your item(s), make the phone calls,
write and submit paper or online ads to sell it, no. Plus, for example, if it’s an electronic, tech-gadget, it may be “extinct” by the time you get it online.

20. **It’s a family heirloom.** Do you love it? Do you display and enjoy it? No? Someone else might. Let them love it while they can.

21. **It reminds me of…** Good memories are, good! If an item really does remind you of a positive event or occasion, great! But then keep it out to enjoy, don’t have it packed away where you never see it. Display it, see it, enjoy it!

22. **It was given to me by someone who has passed away.** Again; guilt, sadness and other low energy feelings around material items are not a good reason for keeping them. That kind of energy *does* affect us and our health.

23. **It’s a vacation or holiday souvenir.** Have you ever gotten home with a “souvenir” and wondered why you bought it? It happens all the time. What seemed cool and culturally charming and unusual when you were caught up in the moment of your vacation can seem, well, tacky and cheap when you get home. Even if it’s expensive and well crafted, does it really belong in your home every day and forever? Next time, take a picture. They don’t take up much space, and can contain a lot of information from your trip to remember. Even better, digital photos. You can share your great trip online with others through email, a blog or social media and then, “Click” delete!

24. **I might want it now that I’ve found it.** If it’s still good and you can see yourself using it, and plan to use it, great! However, if it has not immediate HOME and ends up back on a pile or in a dark, lidded box or bag, let it go.

25. **I might want to, or I might get around to reading it someday.** Whether it’s a book or magazine, think: where else can I find this information if I wanted it? Library, Internet, etc. **TIP:** Any sentence with “someday” as part of it is suspect!

26. **Someone might want to borrow it someday.** There’s that “someday” again! Have you heard of “co-dependency”?! Sometimes we assume the needs of others over our own. Your home is your “sanctuary”, not a lending library or storage unit for others’ “someday whens”. There is only today, now. Live for today for your life and your family’s joy first.

27. **I used to love this craft. I may take it up again someday.** We’re talking about artsy crafts here. So, when do you retire? We can only prioritize a few things in our lives on a good day, and in a good year, decade or lifetime. Everything can’t have our attention (unless you’re Martha Stewart, and that’s clearly extremely rare). Get crafts and project items out to someone who can use them now, which might even be to the Girl or Boy Scouts, Senior Center, schools, etc.

28. **I “should” use it.** “Should?” Should equals guilt and personal indecision. No, no, no. No shoulds.

29. **I don’t want to waste it.** If you give it to someone who will use it, you’re not wasting it. Recycling to others is a good thing.
30. **There’s a story connected to it.** For many of us, myself included, there is a “story” connected to our possessions. We actually love telling the story! The story can bring us happiness and good memories, but can also remind us of painful times and loss. Remind yourself that it’s time for new stories that bring you into the present.

31. **Who would want it? I may as well keep it.** Let your local thrift store decide if it’s good enough to move on to others.

32. **I’ll wait and take it to the consignment store.** Consignment stores are great, when they work out for you. But you have to have a very current, almost new looking, clean and “cleaned” and pressed item. It also has to be taken to them within weeks of the season for which the item is used. It’s not always workable. You have to take it to the shop and they may not accept it.

33. **It’s just so cute!** Ladies, *ladies!* Take a deep breath and release it like a dove to the breeze! Let someone else love its “cuteness” while you enjoy your home.
AUTHOR

Kim Wolinski, MSW is the founder of Wolinski & Associates, Ltd., ReDecisions Institute publishing company and Dr. DeClutter” Speaking and Professional Organizing based Longmont, Colorado.

She has a Masters degree in Social Work, and is a Stress, Change and Organizational Skills Expert, speaking internationally sharing comprehensive, down-to-earth, nuts-and-bolts “Formulas for Freedom,” laced with her unique brand of humor and wit. Her programs help others re-identify what is really important in life and how to renew their decisions to make the changes they desire.

Speaker: Kim presents keynote speeches, seminars and workshops throughout the world, from NASA and IBM to nurse conferences, universities, professional organizations, Fortune 500 corporations, healthcare, federal and state government associations and agencies. She has been called “a stand-up comic with a message” (and has actually done stand-up comedy in clubs!) and “the best speaker we have ever seen” and “the best response from our audience at the convention” in evaluations.

Kim has been a college teacher in five institutes for Nurses CEUs, Teachers and Professional Support Staff CEUs and Adult Education.

Professional Organizer: Kim has been a professional organizer for over 9 years, traveling nationally to declutter and reorganize in homes and offices.

Author: She is author of Letting Go With All Your Might, A guide to life transitions, change, choices and effective redecisions. A workbook used internationally by counselors and therapists, as well as everyday people ready to release blocks and the past. She has several ebooks, including Simplify Your Holidays and BURN YOUR HOUSE DOWN! And other organizing tips from Dr. DeClutter.

In Print: Kim is a contributor to national magazines and journals, and is a Blogger: Kim writes and publishes two online newsletter each month, Dr. DeClutter’s Blog, and is a contributor to other blogs.

On Air: Kim is a frequent guest on radio and blog radio programs. Frequently referred to as “the Permission Queen”, Kim gives her audiences and individuals the permission to shift their usual, and sometimes myopic or out-dated thinking and perceptions, let go of the past, renew their excitement for dreams put on hold, and create the changes and movement in their lives that have been stuck, limited and in limbo or in "mid-life-transition” for far too long.

CONTACT

Contact Kim at kim@drdeclutter.com or call 303.485.5280.

www.drdeclutter.com
What Kim’s Organizing Clients are Saying…

Dear Dr. DeClutter…
It has been way more manageable to conquer little piles since having you here. Today I had to bring a copy of my son’s vaccinations to register him for camp and VOILA found it in 1 minute!! Can’t tell you how good that feels.
I will see you on Wednesday night at your Stop Procrastination workshop. I feel like you wrote the lecture description about me personally.
Thanks Kim! Leanne, Longmont, CO
~~~
I couldn’t believe we’d actually spend money on someone to come here and organize our company storage space, but after just one day with you here, I have to say, boy, they made a great decision. I’m going to talk to my husband about hiring you for our house too.
Janice, Morgantown, WV
~~~
Well, the office still looks great. I haven’t bought the recycle/shredder bins/drawers yet but I will this week.
It feels so good to sit down at my desk now. I really bragged about your work at our Evening in Nicaragua fundraiser. I bragged so well, that some of the girls were telling the others “Shauna had Dr. DeClutter come over and said it was SO WORTH IT.” I started working on my closet and drawers (clothes) some this morning. Thank you SO much for the direction and motivation.
Shauna, Mead, CO
~~~
The best money I’ve ever spent! I’m telling everyone to hire you and get their lives back!
Susan, Boulder, CO
~~~
thanks kim,
boy, those 3 hours went quickly, but we got so much done and your guidance as to what to do next was so helpful.
so far I’ve called the handyman for shelves. next week hopefully I will see him.
took three hours to move two boxes of photos to one storage box and throw away, etc. masses of photos. took so long cause i have had those photos for a loooooooooooong time i guess. still have to deal with the bin with beads which really is not much in there.
the garage is the biggie. soon as shelves are in, i will get remotivated i think. it will be a good feeling when that’s done, it is overwhelming right now and i try not to think of it, but see it daily of course.
your clever suggestion to use those two drawers in the living room “for desk only” makes a big difference. great idea.
did get a small bin for next to black chair. that was a very helpful idea too.
my best. thank you so much kim!
lynnne, boulder, co
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www.drdeclutter.com

I'm so glad we could get you to speak at our annual perioperative nurse conference in Bend, OR this year, Kim. You wow'd our group! Here are comments: “I wish my whole team could hear her.” “Fun and informative!” “Invite her back, she’s great!” “You were talking to just me, right! How did you know what I needed?!” “I'll be able to take better care of 'me' from now on. Thank you, Kim!”
Ruth, State Council of Perioperative Nurses Conference, Bend, OR

~~~
NASA loved you one more time, Kim! Let's plan for next time soon!
Jean, NASA, FL

~~~
Thanks again for speaking to our Moms Group. I loved your talk. I came home, set up my vertical filing system (which I've been meaning to do for a long time), and my desk is clean! Even my husband noticed. Thanks!
Carrie, Louisville, CO

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Two of your workshop suggestions have been working out wonderfully well!...the staircase file system on top of my desk and opening all the 3rd class mail immediately, crossing off my name and address and printing "Please Delete" (or calling an 800# provided), and mailing back in postage free envelope (or on occasion adding a .42 stamp). Your hints are practical and though they sound simple, certainly help to simplify life!
Blessings...
Jean, Longmont, CO

~~~
I had been to your class on 10 Ways to Stop Procrastinating but somehow it didn't get much action. 😃
(Five days later)
Still no action about getting organized. My problem is paper clutter in my office. I have had office clutter most of my marriage which was 50 years last August, but can't recall to what degree that far back. I agree, it does nothing for happiness.
(Later)
I have been getting your e-newsletters and now the ones tell about your new 6 week LOSE YOUR BIG "BUTS" Audio Course Program. Last night I listened to the gift audio on your site twice; The 7 Keys to Effective Decision-Making and Solving Any Problem. You said the question isn't "What if I died tomorrow, but what if I live another 20 or 30 years the way I am." I think about wanting to get this clutter taken care of so I don't leave it to my sons.
(One day later)
Just wanted you to know I have worked in my office over two hours this afternoon and feel good about seeing some of my desk again, but not all yet. I gauge success by how full the waste basket gets. : ) So thanks for the gift of audio that got me motivated and started!!!
Blessings, Delores, Longmont, CO
About DrDeClutterBlog.com and DrDeClutter.com

You can sign up for Kim’s newsletter and blog post updates at
http://www.drdeclutter.com/bookstore/free-newsletter

I really enjoy your site and blog. I love it. You are there precisely when I need something. I'm saving my pennies and hope to meet you some day. You are very much appreciated. You are very informative and express yourself in an easy and pleasant way, which makes following your suggestions fun and something I look forward to doing.
Thanks, Gracie, Middletown, NY
~~~

Kim,
I was glad to stumble across your website. You are to be congratulated for creating & sharing so many exciting programs to help people improve their lives. I was officially diagnosed with OCD in February; most of the areas you cover are applicable to me. I look forward to receiving your newsletter; there's a good chance I'll use your services in the future. My best to you in your personal & professional life!
Thanks! Babs, Denver, CO
~~~

Dear Kim,
I have been on your e-newsletter list for a long time, I love it. Your 6 week LOSE YOUR BIG “BUTS” Audio Course Program and the gift audio, “The 7 Keys to Effective Decision-Making and Solving Any Problem” are so helpful. Keep up the great “practical” advise and humor you share always.
Mary, Tulsa, OK
~~~

Dear Doc!
Your blog articles are so helpful. They are so easy to read, practical information and guides to follow, and enjoyable too. I appreciate your humor and how you share your personal stories with your readers. It’s so nice to know that you’re human too!
Diane, Bozeman, MT
~~~

I’ve forwarded your enewsletter to a bunch of my friends and colleagues since I’ve been getting it. You have such common sense but inspirational ideas that have helped me so much. I just wanted to let you know! Thank you!
Tawnya, Baltimore, MD
Book—Letting Go With All Your Might Workbook

To find out more about Kim’s products, go to www.drdeclutter.com/bookstore

A well thought out and practical guide for change. If you are ready to let go - read it.
~ Dr. Bernie Siegel
Author, Love, Medicine & Miracles

In Letting Go With All Your Might, Kim weaves a beautiful tapestry that guides her audience in a journey of living life’s purpose, and how to recognize and use life’s lessons and transitions as a creative and driving force to get the most from each day. This is wonderful, wise, warm and insightful.
~ Barbara Dossey, RN, MS, FAAN
Director, Holistic Nursing Consultants
Author, Rituals of Healing: Using Imagery for Health and Wellness

This is a delightful book filled with many helpful ideas and exercises for increasing the beautiful moments of your life. I highly recommend it.
~ Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.
Author, Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway

Reading Kim Wolinski’s book is like having a conversation with Kim herself: enlightening, enlivening and entertaining!
~ Sue Thoele, MA
Author, The Courage To Be Yourself

Letting Go With All Your Might is a fresh and insightful guide to transition and transformation. A must for all who are dedicated and on-purpose.
~ Rev. Edwene Gaines
The Master’s School, author, The Four Spiritual Laws of Prosperity

This is really a lovely book. A book that can make a positive difference. It is a plethora of ideas to help people change the way they look at things, ways of refocusing and to objectively discover their purpose.
~ Lee Rindner, Psychotherapist
KNUS Radio Talk Show Host
Denver, Colorado

We use Letting Go… in our psychotherapy practice. Our clients get so much out of it and we use many of the practical and down-to-earth stories, quotes and exercises in our sessions. Very helpful.
~ Pat Miller, Psychotherapist, Dallas, TX

I attended a session at the Longmont Senior Center on your book, Letting Go With All Your Might. I felt like you were speaking directly to me re: mental models and stories. I bought your workbook and am going thru it now. I am actually doing the exercises, taking notes and working on it as consciously as possible, decluttering my INNER CLUTTER as you say. I am so motivated and inspired. Thank you so much for being who you are!
~ Alice, Louisville, CO

Kim,
Letting Go… is such an amazing book. The stories and the exercises, the art and quotations are so inspiring. I am making great changes since I started reading it. Thank you!
~ Jenna, Carlsbad, CA
Burn Your House Down

Products and Services

Books

- *Letting Go With All Your Might* Workbook, 2nd Edition

Ebooks

- *Simplify Your Holidays*
  Your Guide to Coping with Holiday (and everyday) Stress
  ~ or ~
  *The Complete Self-Help Guide for Those with Less than Perfect Holiday Experiences*

- *Burn Your House Down*
  And other organizing tips from Dr. DeClutter!

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I will work with you by telephone to help you move past Inner, Outer and Other Clutter. Find out more at [www.drdeclutter.com/organizer/life-coach](http://www.drdeclutter.com/organizer/life-coach) or call 303.485.5280.


**INNER CLUTTER:** Beliefs, emotions, thoughts, opinions and perceptions, create habits, patterns, relationships and stories that do not serve our best interest or our best life. INNER CLUTTER overall scares us away from our joy, love, peace, balance and most natural path — from our very selves.

What beliefs stop you from living the life of your dreams and desires?
- I’m not good enough.
- I’ve tried but it just won’t work for me.
- I can’t.
- I’m not young enough, old enough, attractive enough, rich enough, etc.
- Add your own!

Our natural, pure and positive life path was covered up, lost, reprogrammed and detoured long ago through childhood experiences with and by others, events, conditioning, traumas, beliefs, rules and limitations that are not ours.

It’s time to clean the slate, to let go of all that is not yours.

*Time to redefine your beliefs and live by them.*

It’s time to dust, dig and scrape off your path, to step back onto and into your flow, back to your most natural, precious and valuable life.

We all need help sometimes to wake up from our trances, to let go of conditioning, assumptions and presumptions that don’t work. We need guidance to get focused, refocused, figure out what to do, to find solutions and resolve questions and clear confusion. We need help to change our beliefs that don’t support us and our best life now.