

Clear Clutter
for Good

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LetClutterGo.com

The ART of Conquering Clutter



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By Debbie Bowie, CPO, MA, MS

Conscious about Clutter

Unlike many people who struggle with clutter, I intentionally have become conscious about how clutter happens and know how it can be managed. As a professional organizer, it is my job to know how to deal with clutter so I can help my clients get organized and manage their own clutter. (More about professional organizers later.)

Naturally, it made sense to use my own home and office as a study ground. You might think that because I am an organizer I have no clutter. I wish! No one is free from the influx and creep of clutter.

So, I spent two years watching myself do what I do quite naturally - de-cluttering to maintain a well-organized home and office. It has been a fun, creative process for me, and one that has benefited my husband and me immensely.

While in the process of observing myself, working with others and with the help of books and articles on organizing, I have fine-tuned the process and methods I use to manage clutter. I present them to you in this booklet with the hope that you will find them useful --a little light in a world of stuff.

Debbie Bowie

What Is Clutter?

Clutter is:

- Too much stuff;
- Stuff that has no "home;"
- Stuff that hasn't been put away;
- Stuff that hasn't been thrown away;
- Stuff that you can't figure out what to do with, and
- Stuff that you know what you need to do with but haven't done.

Clutter is a living thing. Like English Ivy it keeps growing if not regularly pruned and managed.

Our lives are never clutter free. Our homes and offices can momentarily be clutter free after a clean-up or an organizing effort, but our lives will never be clutter free. Stuff is constantly coming into our lives (paper, mail, newspapers, gifts, purchases, etc.), which, if not managed on a daily basis, becomes clutter.

Clutter can control you or you can control clutter.



Why People Accumulate Clutter

- They have difficulty making decisions about what to do with the stuff that comes into their lives. Simple decisions are difficult for some people -- decisions such as whether to keep or toss something, or where to put something. Each time a decision is postponed, clutter accumulates.
- They fail to throw away many things because they want to consider all the possibilities that life has to offer. They can't bear to part with something that might be useful someday.
- They have emotional attachments to things, even scraps of paper. The things evoke memories or have a symbolic meaning to them (e.g., holding onto an expensive article of clothing even though it is out of style because it symbolizes their financial success).
- They want to be prepared for any eventuality. Saving things makes them feel more secure.
- They don't have a method for managing the stuff in their lives on a daily basis. They haven't developed daily routines (some of which they find boring) that will help them create and maintain order.



The Cost of Clutter

It creates stress.

Because clutter is unattractive, it can signal to you that you should be doing something about it. If you don't have the time or make the time to get rid of it, you will feel stressed.

It creates judgment.

For many people clutter triggers thoughts like, "What's wrong with me that I have so much clutter?" or "What's wrong with me? I can't seem to deal with all this stuff?"

It depletes energy.

Clutter naturally draws your eyes to it and engages your thoughts and feelings. That takes energy; and, the negative thoughts and feelings that it usually generates take even more energy.

It creates an unhealthy environment.

Clutter is a haven for dust, dirt, mold and bugs. Allergies!
Asthma!!

It creates conflict.

Clutter can be the source of conflict in relationships when people have different levels of tolerance for clutter.

It costs money.

Bills caught up in clutter result in late fees and bank penalties.
Insurance policies can lapse



Benefits of Conquering Clutter

You will:

- Feel more in control of your life.
- Enjoy your living or work environment.
- Find it easier to keep your home and office clean.
- Feel less embarrassment about the condition of your space and find it easier to invite people into your space.
- Have less conflict with family members and/or coworkers who resent your clutter.
- Experience less impatience, criticism, nasty looks and heavy sighs from others because you can find things that they want or need for you to find.
- Save money because you won't have to buy an item you know you already have, but cannot find.
- Save money because your financial or business papers will be in order and you will be able to make good decisions.
- Save time because you won't be searching through piles of stuff to find what you need, and
- Be able to stop judging yourself so harshly for being disorganized.



How to Get Rid of Clutter

The short answer:

- ✓ Throw stuff away.
- ✓ Give stuff away.
- ✓ Put stuff away.
- ✓ Teach others to do the same.

This is what it takes to get rid of clutter. And, if it were really that simple, we would all have clutter-free lives.

Schedule a time to begin.

Pick a day. Mark it on your calendar. Let others close to you know you are rolling up your sleeves and getting to work, no matter what.

The real answer is more complicated and looks like this:

- Do an initial clean up:
 - ✓ Clump similar items (books, clothes)
 - ✓ Throw away trash and other items no one else can use
 - ✓ Decide what you will keep
 - ✓ Give away useful items that you aren't keeping
 - ✓ Sell stuff
- Put stuff away
- Keep clutter out of your space:
- Regularly purge items from your space;
- Deliberately keep stuff moving (create flow);
- Clean up every day, and
- Teach others to do the same



Do an Initial Clean-Up

Clump Similar Items

- Sort into piles of similar items.
- Start with big items first so you can quickly see progress.
- Stay in the room you are working in, until the sorting is completed
- When sorting is completed, take piles to the general location where they will be used.

Throw Stuff Away

- Throw away items that don't fit, are broken, outdated, soiled and not recyclable.
- Recycling old newspapers and magazines makes it easier to part with these sources of information.

Decide What You Will Keep - Keep something if:

- You like it (it lifts your spirit!);
- You use it regularly or episodically and;
- It is valuable - worth money\$\$\$ and means something to you or is useful, or
- You have room to display or store it.



Give Stuff Away

- Give away items that are still in good condition but which you no longer want, use, need or like.
- Give items to family or friends who aren't pack rats.
- Obtain tax deductions for donations to charity organizations like Goodwill, the Salvation Army, etc.
- Give items to special projects that serve people in need such as battered women's shelters and alternative education programs in public schools.

Sell Stuff

- Valuable items can be sold in consignment shops or in shopping newspapers like The Trading Post or The Community Shopper.
- Less valuable items can be sold in a yard sale, but coordinating the details of a yard sale can be stressful. Donating is an easier option.

Put Stuff Away

- At this stage in the organizing process create specific "homes" for items. A "home" is a place where an item is put away.
- Homes for frequently used items should be within a hand's reach of where they typically are used, to maximize the possibility that they will regularly find their way back there.
- Items used less frequently can have homes in more out of the way places.



Keep Clutter Out

Reduce the number of subscriptions for newspapers and magazines to a number that you can realistically read in a day/week/month.

Refuse handouts and flyers you will never look at again.

Say "NO!" Learn to graciously refuse clothing, furniture, appliances, books, magazines, etc. that are offered to you if:

- 1) You don't want them,
- 2) You don't need them,
- 3) You don't have room for them.

Leave soaps, shampoos and other sundries in hotel bathrooms unless you regularly use those samples.

When you inherit furniture and other household items, accept only those items you really like, can use and that comfortably fit into your home or office.

When you purchase a new item, immediately throw away any shopping bags and other packaging materials unless there is the possibility that an item may be returned.

Leave church bulletins at church and programs at events.



Make Clutter Leave: Routine Purging

- For every new item you bring into your home or office, sell, donate, or throw away at least one item of equivalent size.
- Make a donation every time a local charity asks by giving items clothing or household items you don't use, wear or like. Give clothing that is more than one size too small or big, stained, or out of style.
- Process mail daily next to the trash can or recycling container and:
 - ✓ Send junk mail directly to the recycle container (you really don't have to read every piece!), and
 - ✓ Immediately recycle outside envelopes.
- Give away or recycle magazines that are more than two months old.
- Give away or donate gifts you don't like or don't use.
- Keep a recycling bag beside your desk to collect waste paper for disposal every recycling day.
- Use garbage day as a cue to pick up loose trash (candy wrappers, scraps of paper, etc.).



Create Flow

Clutter occurs when stuff ends up somewhere other than its designated "home." You can facilitate the flow of stuff so it doesn't end up as clutter by creating "holding stations" throughout the house.

A **holding station** is a table, basket or box where items can be placed that belong in another part of the house. It readily identifies items that need to be transported back to their homes.

Whenever you pass a holding station, remove items that belong in the part of the house where you are headed.

Example 1: A small table in a family room can be designated as a place where snack plates and other food items can be placed until someone goes to the kitchen. The next person going to the kitchen takes the plates back to the kitchen.

Example 2: A basket or box located by the back door can be designated for recyclable items. Those items are placed there and are then taken to the recycling containers in the garage or on the porch whenever someone goes out the back door.

Make transporting items back to their homes part of family expectations and routines.



Clean Up Daily

- Take 5-10 minutes daily and straighten up your home (throw out trash, recycle newspapers, load the dishwasher, put dishes and clothes away).
- Take the last 10 minutes of each workday to straighten your desk, do miscellaneous filing, and put away projects and anything in your work area that doesn't belong there.
- Take 5-10 minutes to process the mail daily. Do this in the same location, preferably with a paper-recycling container close at hand. Make an initial decision about every item and put all items in one of the following places: recycling bin, trashcan, bill tray or folder, action file, reading file or basket, filing tray, possibilities tray (for items that you want to consider but do not require immediate action) or referral tray. Note: Not all items have to be opened. Junk mail can go directly into the recycling bin. If it does not go there immediately, it usually ends up in a pile of clutter!
- Every time you do a task, put associated items away when you are finished with the task and before moving on to other tasks.
- Make daily clean up a fun, positive, social time in order to ensure that you and others routinely do it. (Easier said than done!)



Teach Others to Do the Same

- Teach children to clean up. As soon as children are able to lift and place objects, direct them to place their toys in a toy box and reward them with much high praise and excitement when they do it.
- Make managing clutter a joint effort with your spouse or partner. Let your spouse or partner know about any organizing efforts you have made. Invite help in creating "homes" for everything in your house. Ask for cooperation in routinely returning items to their rightful place.
- Engage the cooperation of the children from a united front. Family-wide organizing efforts are most successful when couples are in agreement about their importance and the methods to be used. Together you can let children know that routinely putting things away is the way you both plan to operate in your home.



Social Organizing

Many people find facing their clutter an overwhelming task. They become paralyzed, often not knowing where to start, how to start, and what to do. Yet, when a friend or family member comes to the rescue to help them straighten up or clean out, they are able to make progress, to move through the inertia to get the job done - or at least get started. When organizing becomes a social process, they can and will do it.

Judith Kolberg, in her book *Conquering Chronic Disorganization*, describes social organizing as "the ongoing use of other people in the organizing process." In some cases, all a person needs is someone to be in the same space with them (not necessarily helping) to make facing clutter more palatable.

A benefit of social organizing is that it makes the whole process of organizing a fun, interactive event. And, with someone there for support, consultation, and help moving things around, the de-cluttering really gets done.

Social organizing can be done with friends, family members or professional organizers. It is not essential that social organizing be done with people who are experts at organizing. It is more important that they be supportive, nonjudgmental and committed to helping organize.



Professional Organizers

What Is a Professional Organizer?

"A professional organizer is a person who provides information, products and assistance to get others organized," according to the National Association of Professional Organizers. You can hire a professional organizer to come into your home or office to consult with you about how to set up methods and environments to keep clutter to a minimum.

How Does a Professional Organizer Work?

Professional organizers typically work in one of the following ways: they consult and make recommendations about organizing and managing clutter and clients do the work themselves; they work side by side with clients, de-cluttering their spaces, and they de-clutter in the absence of the client.

What Are the Benefits of Hiring an Organizer?

You will get:

- Non-judgmental support,
- An opportunity to learn organizing skills from a professional, and
- The work done.



Ensure Success

Hire a professional organizer:

- When you have made attempts to reduce clutter and have been unsuccessful;
- When you feel overwhelmed and don't know where or how to start de-cluttering, or
- When you really want more order in your life, but can't seem to make the time to create it.

You will get:

- Non-judgmental support;
- Hands-on assistance;
- Lots of organizing recommendations, and
- The work done!

You can conquer clutter and live simply organized!

Call: Debbie Bowie, Professional Feng Shui Organizer
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Clear Clutter for Good { Online Program }

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