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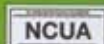


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Health

Take away the clutter

Stress may reside with all those piles on your desk and in your room. Here's how to get control back. *by Karen Giles-Smith*

How much time do you spend looking for stuff? If you answered, "A lot," you may be a prime candidate for clutter-busting. Clutter is the excess stuff in your life that you want to get rid of but haven't. Clutter causes problems, whether you realize it or not. Michaeline Raczka, a certified life coach who specializes in clutter-busting (clutterbustingcoach.com), says clutter distracts, overwhelms and drains energy which can cause stress.

Since clutter causes so much consternation, why do so many of us insist on cultivating clutter?

"Our lives are on autopilot," says Raczka. "We're multitasking and we haven't set ourselves up for balance and harmony. We're bombarded with all of this stuff and we don't know what to do with it. We're afraid we'll do the wrong thing, so we don't do anything at all." Subconsciously, we decide to put up with clutter to avoid dealing with other things in life. Clutter can be a crutch. Clutter can also be a security blanket. We keep clutter just in case we might need it later, to keep memories close, to suppress emotions and as a testament to our personal identity or status. "We have to realize that we are not our stuff and our memories are not our stuff," says Raczka. "We have memories with or without our stuff." Some people are shocked to realize their stuff is an issue. That's okay, because the first step in clearing clutter is awareness.

Raczka recommends you ask yourself two questions to get a handle on clutter:

Where would I be without clutter?

What would I be doing if clutter didn't obstruct me?

Although clearing the clutter takes time and effort and it's certainly not a miracle cure, Raczka's clients say de-cluttering makes them feel free-er, lighter and unstuck. Raczka says one of the best things about clearing clutter is that it makes room for new opportunities. "Excess stuff keeps us stuck in the past," says Raczka. "It stops us from moving forward."

When you're ready to commit to de-clutter, Raczka recommends the following preparation exercises:

- 1). **Envision.** What do you want your space and your life to look and feel like?
- 2). **Journal.** Write about why you think/feel you need to keep stuff. Make a list of all the things standing in the way of de-cluttering. Release the blocks. Forgive yourself.
- 3). **Meditate.** Breathe, relax and clear your mind. Being in a calmer state will help you get through the process of de-cluttering.

Keep or Toss?

To help you decide whether or not to keep an item, consider these points:

- 1). Do I love it?
- 2). Does it give me good memories?
- 3). Is it holding me back?

Raczka tells of her mother's wedding gown, a lovely calf-length blue dress that Raczka used to play with as a child. When her mother passed away, Raczka came across the dress and considered taking it home. It had been stored in basements and attics and was smelly and torn. Instead of conjuring good memories, the dress made Raczka feel sad for its sorry state. When she remembered the photos she had of her mom wearing the dress, she realized she didn't need to keep the dress itself to preserve the memories. Raczka also had lots of doilies, pillowcases and handkerchiefs that were handmade by her mother and grandmother. Instead of packing them away, she selected her favorites and had them framed. Now, she enjoys them every day and



Bedroom before



Bedroom after



Bookshelf before



Bookshelf after

photos by Jodi Cary

also gives them as gifts to family members.

Once you decide what to keep, says Raczka, take the time to figure out an organization system that works for you. Raczka suggests delaying buying containers until you know where you're headed, otherwise, you'll run the risk of the containers becoming clutter. If you decide to use containers, try clear ones and label them. The reason so many organizational efforts fail is that people adopt someone else's system. That's why Raczka believes coaching is so important for de-cluttering and organizing. Often a coach is needed to help people through the process: to help develop a vision, goals and strategies which allow the client to do the physical work between coaching sessions.

After things are in their place, the next step is to establish a routine to keep them there. For example, establish a "landing spot" to place and sort through everything that comes in and out of the house, such as mail. If multiple people are handling certain items, then the spot and the organization process must be mutually beneficial and agreed upon or it probably won't work. One client set up a basket by the front door for incoming mail, but her husband continued to dump the mail on the dining room table. The client forgot to ask her husband what kind of system would work for him!

"We've gotten away from routines because of our busy schedules," says Raczka. "But they really do work." Routines help us manage things on a small scale before they get out of control, overwhelm us and then never get done. In the case of clutter, it's better to sweat the small stuff.

"That which you do not give away, you do not possess. It possesses you."
-Ivern Ball

For more about organizing and storing sports equipment, search the Internet for "organizing sports equipment" and "storing sports equipment." There's a storage solution for everything. For example, "Ball Claws" attach to a wall and hold individual basketballs, soccer balls and footballs securely; and specially-designed bags store flying discs.

TIPS FOR DE-CLUTTERING FROM THE CLUTTER-BUSTING COACH

Ask yourself:

- Is it in good shape?
- If it's broken, can it be fixed?
- Do I really need it?
- Have I used it in the past year?
- Would it be hard to replace if I needed it again?
- Would I pay money to store it?
- Does someone else need it or LOVE it?

TIPS FOR STAYING ORGANIZED FROM THE CLUTTER-BUSTING COACH

- Use it or lose it
- When in doubt, throw it out
- Use appropriate storage systems
- Handle things once
- Have a place for everything and everything in its place
- Don't do things later—just do it
- Label things
- Call in professional help if needed

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The key to getting organized isn't simply buying storage aids such as racks, boxes, and dividers. It's about creating a system you can stick with over time. Here's how to get started:

- 1) Be sure you know how you want a particular area to function. Pin that down, and you can then determine the best way to organize it.
- 2) Take inventory of all your storage space and its limitations. Ask yourself if you really need more space, or if you just need to organize it more efficiently.
- 3) Look for unexpected storage—behind the sofa, between studs, vertical storage along a blank wall.
- 4) Purge. Your problem may simply be too much stuff. Clean out drawers and closets, and get rid of things you don't need or use.
- 5) Store items according to your routine. Put often-used things in reach.
- 6) Keep it simple. An easy-to-follow plan has the longest shelf life.

Source: Better Homes and Gardens, January 2008.

HOW TO STORE SPORTS EQUIPMENT

Is your sports equipment a hazard? Stash gear in mesh bags hung on hooks in the garage or hall closet. Stow tennis balls and baseballs in one bag and a basketball in another. Use an umbrella stand for bats, rackets and golf clubs.

Source: Real Simple magazine, June 2009.