

Four Steps to Becoming Clutter-Free

Cleaning up clutter around the house is a routine task. However, sometimes it becomes challenging because we're not sure what to do with it all and so put off making any decisions. Typically we think we are going to need all that stuff, or that it represents a part of our life history that we can't let go of. If these decisions are put off long enough, a massive project can result leaving you feeling overwhelmed.

Many people find themselves in this situation, turning a blind eye and shutting it out as best as they can. Have you or someone you know been in that situation, where the clutter builds, filling rooms or maybe even the whole house, spilling over into the garage and perhaps self storage? All this comes at a cost of lost energy, opportunities, mounting storage fees to say nothing of the waste of one's life. It can become so overwhelming, and such a burden, bringing with it feelings of embarrassment and shame. People shrink with avoidance, hoping others never find out about it, while family arguments erupt from the stress of so much stuff. The stress of clutter can totally disrupt a person's life, relationships and career.

Nowadays there are teams of people you can hire to help de-clutter and clean up a home. Sorting through the stuff certainly helps, however that just deals with the surface symptoms. Putting a bandaid on the symptom provides only temporary relief. Unless the root cause is addressed as to why you collected and hung on to the stuff in the first place, it won't be long before the stuff takes over again.

How do you let go of the stuff? Well, our stuff mirrors our life. For some people, their outer world is in physical chaos. One look around their house and the stuff is obvious, piled up in every corner and surface that's available. How does this compare to their personal life? How is their health? financial situation? relationships? Are they in chaos too?

For others, the surface can look quite tidy, but the chaos hides inside the cupboards, file cabinets and bookshelves, or perhaps it's been shipped off to self-storage lockers. They avoided dealing with the real problem and simply put it off to another day. Do their lives look put together on the

surface, yet do stress, tension and embarrassment run just underneath?

How do you deal with your stuff? Whether the stuff is strewn all over your home, behind cupboards or in an off-site storage locker, you pay a heavy cost to hang onto it. It adds emotional, financial and physical weight to your life and body, and holds you back from having what you really want.

The most powerful way to resolve any problem is to get to the root cause. To find the root cause of why we cling to the physical stuff on the outside, look for the attitudes, stories and beliefs we cling to on the inside.

Here's an approach that helps. By using this 4-step process you can quickly get to the heart of deciding what is really important and what can be given away, recycled or put in the garbage. Because once you are clear, the rest is simple.

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1. One Clear Thing
2. Clear the Decks
3. Completion Conversations
4. Cleanups

Step One: One Clear Thing.

In order to know what to clean-up, you need to know where you are headed. I call this "One Clear Thing". What is the one clear thing you know you want to achieve this lifetime, ie your deepest desire, those dreams that reach into the very core of your being. Make a list of those activities that help you fulfill that desire. Identify the core competencies or core areas of focus you must be good at in order to achieve your dreams.

For example, a few years ago I realized I was a singer. This was a new identity for me, a new way of thinking of myself. If I wanted to move forward in this new direction, it meant I needed to be good at new things. It meant focusing my energies on new priorities like song selection, songwriting, arranging, rehearsing, recording, performing etc. These were the core things I knew I had to be good at in order to be a good singer and performer.

Step Two: Clear the Decks

Once you identify your 'One Clear Thing', it's now possible to know what you DON'T need to do, the things that don't contribute to your new identity and direction. Use the 'no back door' policy here. Don't give yourself any outs to escape if you start to doubt your deepest desire. Make a list of those roles and responsibilities you are obligated to that do not serve your deepest desire. In order to start realizing your dream, you have to make room in your life and stop doing things you currently do that aren't aligned with your intention. Recognize the energy drain these activities take from your life. Make a plan to resign from those responsibilities as soon as you can. Face the challenges and take bold decisive action. You may need to finish up on a few final commitments to bring closure to these roles, however once you have clearly made the decision that you are leaving, you will be surprised at how easily things wrap up.

In my case, once I realized what core competencies and roles I needed to play to be a performer, it became clear what I needed to stop doing, like being treasurer for the condo association, resigning from a volunteer board, and discontinuing past accreditations that no longer applied to my preferred direction. This took a little time to wind up and honour my commitments so my integrity was intact. However, I absolutely had to make those breaks in order to let the new aspects of my life flow in.

Step Three: Completion Conversations

If you really want to accelerate your progress in any new direction, give serious thought to this step. Often the reason for hanging on to clutter and staying stuck in old patterns has to do with a lack of forgiveness. Hanging on to past grievances can suck years of life energy out of you.

Whether you need to forgive someone, ask for forgiveness, or forgive yourself, commit to completing these conversations face-to-face as soon as you can. Ask for help. While challenging, the return on energy invested in this step is so rewarding. You will feel like you have your life back.

Step Four: Clean-ups

This is the step where you actually start removing the clutter from your life. With laser clarity about who you are and where you're going, about what you don't need in your life, and the peace of mind

from completing important conversations, you can now zip through your home knowing easily what is really important, brings you energy and feels beautiful.

Make a list of all the items in your house that need cleaning up; stuff that's been hanging around too long and sucks your energy every time you see it: closets, photographs, painting, repairing; anything you have been tolerating. Select a week when you can spend an hour or more each day to focus on completing and cleaning these items. Then take a serious look at your list and decide to either 'Drop, Delegate or Do'.

Don't be afraid to ask for help here. Engage friends and family. Many people enjoy pitching in when it's not their stuff. If you have followed through on steps one, two, and three, you will be able to give them clear instructions and decision rules so you don't have to touch every single article yourself in order to make progress. Besides, they'll remind you of who you really are whenever you feel stuck.

The Results May Surprise You

Your natural talents and gifts are already within you. Your true joy and prosperity unfolds when you embrace them and allow them to lead your life. When you let go of the clutter in your life, you allow space for your gifts to shine through with more ease than you could have imagined. After following these four steps I found myself singing on Oprah's stage. It was a magical moment I could never have planned. What magic lies in store for you?

Ask for Help

You can create a whole new life for yourself in a very short period of time if you are willing to first take time to get clear on your deepest desires and who you say you are. Hire a coach who understands the underlying root causes of clutter, who can guide you through the process of discovering what's really important so you can move ahead and realize your dreams sooner.

Patty Shortreed can help you

Patty Shortreed is an international coach and communications trainer. Her coaching helps clients gain clarity and make key decisions so they move forward and achieve their dreams.

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