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## Nine Tips for Decluttering Your Life

by Jeff Davidson

We all find ourselves awash in too much stuff - household items, business items, and everything in between. You instinctively know when you're hanging on to too much and when you'd like to pare down, but how can you begin decluttering with minimum pain and gnashing of teeth? Here are nine suggestions my clients find to be effective:



**1. Make a game of it.** If you're figuring out what to remove from a closet, drawer, or storage box, instead of laboring long and hard over what should go and what should stay, make a game of the situation. Pretend that you have two minutes to remove five items. What would those five items be? By approaching your holdings in this way, you quickly identify the bottom tier of items that you don't need to keep. Those items that quickly come to mind, when you make a game of it, invariably are the ones with which you can most easily part.

**2. Identify a worthy recipient.** When you contemplate who could benefit from the excess items you're retaining, it's easier to let go of them. Giving away a marginal possession that might have benefit to someone else gives you a sense of altruism and makes it easier to let go of the item.

**3. Marking items for discard in one year.** If you're in a quandary about retaining or removing items, place them in a box or storage container and attach a note that says, "Review in one year for discard or retention," and make a note on your calendar. When a year passes and you review the contents in the storage retainer, if you feel the urge to hang on to anything, go ahead. However, items out of sight and not used in a year will have less of a hold over you when you conduct the review. You'll be able to discard or give away much of what you boxed up and didn't miss.

**4. Leave instructions.** The reality of hanging on to too much is that if you don't manage your possessions, one day your children will have to. Retain what you think might be of value to them but leave instructions: "It's okay to riffle through this box or that, retain what you want, and toss or donate the rest." Don't leave them in the bind children often find themselves in - not wanting to discard anything that a parent left behind.

**5. Find alternative uses for items.** Some knickknacks collecting dust on the shelf do make excellent door stoppers. Likewise, you can review documents and paper files that are no longer relevant and use the backsides for scratch paper, notepads, and drafts. Old clothes you'll never wear again can be cut up for rags and used to clean around the house. Repurposing items you've been holding on to is an excellent way to save money, reduce your holdings, and gain extra value from your possessions.

**6. Retain the best of the best.** When you have collections such as stamps, coins, plates, mugs, figurines, dolls, and what have you, and your collection grows so large that it becomes

unwieldy, apply the best-of-the-best strategy. The odds are that 20 percent of your collection represents 80 percent of the value of the entire collection, or at the least 80 percent of your enjoyment. Therefore sell, trade, or give away the bottom 80 percent of the items, while retaining the top 20 percent. When your collection is a fraction of its former size, it takes up less space and requires less maintenance, yet your satisfaction is nearly as high as, or exactly the same as, it used to be. The best-of-the-best approach works just as well when it comes to assessing your clothing, shoes, DVD collection, and any other items you've accumulated.

**7. Take a picture of the item.** Many times voluminous or bulky items that we're holding on to as well as smaller items in our possession, serve us equally well if we take pictures of the items and then discard them. Let me explain. When it was time to sell my daughter's rickety upright piano and replace it with a baby grand piano, one of the techniques we were able to employ successfully was to take numerous pictures of the old upright piano before we sold it. The visual image of the old piano stays firmly in our memories, but we were able to clear space and make some money by no longer having the piano. Peruse your possessions and assess which ones you can safely part with, knowing beforehand that you'll take pictures of items and save those pictures forever.

**8. Scan items.** When it comes to documents, certificates, citations, licenses, letters of praise, and so on, rather than holding on to them, scanning them might be sufficient. Recently, I've scanned dozens of items that I realized I no longer need to retain as hard copies. Neatly filed on my computer and on a backup hard drive, I have medical records, family artifacts, citations, awards, press clippings, and article reprints. These items are easy to find, to review, and if needed, to print if I need a hard copy.

**9. Win the head game.** Much of what we keep represents a form of hanging on to pieces of the past. The items don't serve us in any way, have no economic value, and might not even have emotional value, yet we hang on to them because, well, we've had them for so long, and there must be a good reason, right? Hanging on to pieces of the past is a predictable formula for clutter. If you've seen the TV show *Hoarders*, where the afflicted souls in each episode have filled up every room of their homes with stuff because they can't bear to part with anything, take heart: this is not your issue. Your issue is much smaller, but hoarding in any form is rarely pretty. Use opportune moments, such as the arrival of your birthday, the change of the year, the change of seasons, a wedding, a graduation, a retirement party, or any excuse, to pare down the volume of items you retain.

Declare your freedom from excess material possessions. You know that you don't need to hang on to pieces of the past, and you'll appreciate the extra space both physically as well as mentally that de-cluttering provides.

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#### **About the author:**

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