

Overcoming the reluctance to toss



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Suppose you know you are retaining too many items in your life, too many pieces of paper, and too much information in general, but reflexively you seek to hang on to all of it:

"What if I need this later? Shouldn't I hold on to it just in case?"

How long are you going to hang on to white elephants and yesterday's news? When will you start trusting yourself? To overcome the reluctance to toss things, make function follow form. The guiding principle is: You only have so much space, *and* thank goodness it's not more!

Pretend you only have a two-foot cube to pack all data items of importance in your life. Could you do it? Usually, the answer is a resounding YES.

If you're still having second thoughts about tossing things, try this approach: View the item(s) or information on five separate days. If the item is best retained or is of value, then you intuitively feel this during

each review. At any point, you may toss the item. After five reviews, feel free to retain it.

YOU'LL FEEL GOOOOOOOD!

When you want to toss something, but are getting weak in the knees, as reinforcement, recall how good it felt to toss other items, how months passed, and how you never missed them. Then remember that in this over-information era, injudicious attachment to information and things becomes the greatest impediment to breathing space. The ability to let them go is heaven.

A BLAST FROM THE PAST

As further reinforcement against over-collecting in the present, look to your past. Review old tax returns or checkbooks and re-examine all of your prior purchases, deductions, and check stubs. If you saved credit card receipts or phone bills, scan them.

You may be struck by the incongruity between your chosen priorities and what you have been paying for and accumulating.

P.S.—Every year your tax receipts from three years earlier can be tossed safely because the government will no longer come after you for those years (unless it's a criminal suit!). So save copies of the forms you filed. The rest can go...

OH, IT'S NO USE!

If you can't bear to part with what you've

collected, may God bless you. Here are some parting options:

Set up your own "informational retrieval plan." Copy the title pages, cover pages, mastheads, addresses and/or phone numbers onto single pages. Then add them to database software programs or scan them.

Develop a single file or three-ring notebook labeled "Just in Case," specifically for these one page files. Now you can find references quickly if you need to while not being bogged down.

Box and store items of "possible future use." Remove them from your office, home, or immediate work area. Mark the box: "Review contents in April."

Whenever you want, feel free to box and store items "of possible future use." Mark your calendar for a six or twelve month review, but get the box out of your office or home.

You are the primary and indeed only force that can prevent the packratism from engulfing you.

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