

De-Clutter Your Life Member Handout

The popularity of today's reality TV shows how people's lives have gotten out of control and have been taken over by their "stuff." Once too much "stuff" invades your space, you start feeling out-of control.

According to Webster's Dictionary, clutter is defined as a number of things scattered in disorder; jumble. Another definition might be "anything you own, possess or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis."

The challenge is to take stock of what we have and to simplify and downsize to give ourselves peace of mind and to leave a clutter free legacy to our families.

Organizational Strategies

1 – Make your system fit your own life. You need to examine your own lifestyle and choose a system that fits. There are lots of books and websites available that can help you.

2 – Sort and classify. Things that are used together belong together. Store them in one place.

3 – Clean out constantly. When you keep things you don't use, they get in the way and create more work. Keep on top of things. Get rid of the old as soon as you get new.

4 – Use storage devices to fit your system. Bad containers make things harder to manage. Label everything. Something left unlabeled causes frustration and is likely to disappear.

5 – Keep it simple. Take on only what you can handle and do no more.

6 – Decide to decide. Make a decision and follow-through.

7 – Ask for help. Delegate tasks or hire someone to do the things you can't do yourself.

8 – Organize year round. For example in January mail in warranties for products you received as holiday gifts and purge your files as you prepare your taxes.



Suggestions for clutter control

- Focus on one room – maybe the room where you spend the most time or alternatively the room that contains the most clutter. Start small – go through one drawer, one shelf or one counter per session.
- Get tough – dump the contents on the floor and consider each object.
- Go through your mail daily – toss what you'll never read, file bills for payment, recycle newspapers, magazines and catalogs.
- Set a limit on saving bags, food containers, or boxes.
- Get rid of two old garments every time you buy a new one. This rule also works for kitchen gadgets, shoes, books, videos or CD's, and toys.
- Pare down mementos – keep the Girl Scout badges instead of the whole uniform, the year books instead of everybody's school photos.
- Consider making a daily or biweekly uncluttering appointment. Set a specific date and time. Just 15 minutes a day can help, an hour a day is even better. Set a timer.
- Use labeled boxes or bags and group items into categories. Possible categories might include:
 1. Things you love and/or use – keepers
 2. Things you can give to someone else
 3. Trash
 4. Things you could sell
 5. Things that belong somewhere else

What Can You Do with Your “Good Stuff?”

Now that you've identified your clutter and thought about what to eliminate – where does your clutter go?

If it's hard to let go, ask yourself, “wouldn't you prefer to surround yourself with things you love and use?” If you don't love it - think of someone you know who might enjoy having what you no longer want – it could be a family member or it might mean giving it away or selling it to someone else who will cherish the item.

The primary outlets for secondhand items are consignment shops, classified advertising, internet auction sites, and, of course, yard and garage sales.

Here are some specific suggestions:

- Donate items to a local charitable organization for their rummage sale or to a local non-profit thrift shop. You can deduct this donation from your income taxes as a charitable donation. If you plan to use the donation as a tax deduction then you need to keep a record of the items donated and the value of each item. Make sure you obtain a receipt from the charitable organization for your donation.
- You can sell larger items directly by placing a classified advertisement in one of your local newspapers or through the internet. Items to consider advertising include furniture sets, large appliances or power equipment.
- To sell valuable items, such as jewelry, antiques, coin collections and musical instruments, look for stores that specialize in buying and selling these items. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. You may want to get more than one estimate to ensure that you are offered a fair price.
- Look into vintage resale/consignment shops to sell items that are more valuable. Check your local telephone directory or <http://www.yellowpages.com>. Use these possible key words – antiques, auction houses, consignment service, resale shops, or second hand dealers. To maximize your earnings, check out a few stores before choosing one and compare their stock and policies. Consignment shops accept all kinds of things, but some specialize in specific items, such as household furnishings, clothing, or sports equipment. Make sure that you check references for any business before you decide to use their services. You may also want to check with the Better Business Bureau, <http://search.bbb.org> or the Oregon Attorney General's Consumer Hotline, 1-877- 877-9392 (toll free) or by email consumer.hotline@doj.state.or.us to find out if a business is reputable.
- List your item on an internet swap/giveaway site.
- Try an online auction through one of the auction sites. There are probably individuals in your community who know how to participate in an online auction and can give you advice or help you set up an auction and an account for receiving the money. There are also businesses that will put your items up for auction on consignment. Again, check your local yellow pages or yellow pages on-line and make sure that you check references before making any business arrangements. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau and Oregon Attorney General to see if any complaints have been filed about a business.



Whether you're a buyer or a seller, understanding how internet auctions work can help you avoid problems. Check out "Tips for Online Auctions" from the Internet Fraud Watch, <http://www.fraud.org/tips/internet/onlineauctions.htm>. For more information on both the risks and how to protect yourself when either buying or selling through an internet auction, the Federal Trade Commission has published the booklet "Internet Auctions: A Guide for Buyers and Sellers." This booklet can be ordered free through the Federal Trade Commission website <http://www.ftc.gov>.

References

There are numerous websites and books available at your local book store on de-cluttering. Here are a few that were used to develop this lesson.

Aslett, Don. (2005). *Clutter's Last Stand – It's Time to De-Junk Your Life!* Avon, MA: Adams Media.

Dean, S. (2002, May), Clutter and Chaos. *Reader's Digest*, 90-97.

Lockwood, Georgene. *The 10 Laws of Stuff*. The Oaks, Menomonie, Wisconsin.

Recker, Nancy, Ohio State University Extension FCS Educator, Associate Professor and Clark, Lois, Ohio State University Extension FCS Educator, Associate Professor. *Getting Rid of Your Clutter Power Point*.

Smallin, Donna (2002). *Organizing Plain and Simple*. Banta Book Group.

Waddill, K. (2001). *The Organizing Source Book*. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books.

Flylady website, <http://www.flylady.com/index.asp> (daily tips on de-cluttering your home filled with advice and humor).

Paauperfully Organized website, <http://orgcoach.net/> (tips on controlling clutter including a free monthly newsletter).

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WHAT'S YOUR CLUTTER QUOTIENT?

Choose the number that best describes your response to each statement.

1 = rarely/never 2 = sometimes 3 = quite often 4 = almost always

- I get tired just thinking of what it would take to get me organized.
- My friends and family think I'm disorganized.
- I don't have enough time or space to get organized.
- I wish I could be more organized.
- I spend a lot of time looking for things every day.
- I am disorganized.
- I let mail pile up until I have time to deal with it.
- I save things I think I might need someday.
- I feel guilty about throwing away things.
- I have no time for myself.
- I can't bear the thought of parting with anything I own.
- I dread opening one or more closets in my home.
- When it comes to clutter, I think, "Why bother? It will just get cluttered again."
- When the clutter in my home gets to me, I go out.
- If someone stops by unexpectedly, I try to avoid letting them in.

-OVER-

**Add up your score and look below
to see how you handle clutter.**

Scoring

- 48 – 60** Make a commitment to deal with clutter today! Dealing with your clutter will decrease your high level of stress and frustration and free up time and energy.
- 36 – 47** Clutter has been building up for sometime. You can turn things around with the right combination of organizing systems and strategies.
- 24 – 35** You may not consider clutter to be a problem, but dealing with clutter now will keep it under control.
- 15 – 23** You stay on top of things and you derive pleasure from keeping clutter under control. Keep it up.



CLASSIFY YOUR CLUTTER

Travel Clutter: _____

It Used to be Important Clutter: _____

Phony Clutter: _____

Inheritance Clutter: _____

Bequeathed Clutter: _____

Rabbit Clutter: _____

Imposter Clutter: _____

Ambiance Clutter: _____

Get-to-it-someday Clutter: _____

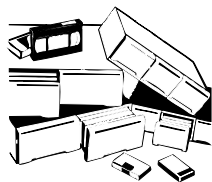
Eclectic Clutter: _____

Car Clutter: _____

Bob Hope Clutter: _____

Snob Clutter: _____

Mysterious Clutter: _____



TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR CLUTTER

Make a list of the cluttered areas around your home.
List everything that drives you crazy.



Cluttered Areas	Supplies Needed to Remedy Situation	Deadline to Conquer Clutter
Ex: Cleaning supplies under kitchen sink	Baskets to keep bottles organized	March 15

Tackling the Clutter

What mess bothers you the most?

Why does it bother you?

What prevents you from tackling the problem?

List those things about this mess that bother you the most.

What would it take to fix it (includes resources such as time, money, space, another person, etc.)?

Timeline (list dates for accomplishing each task).

How would you reward yourself for a job well done?

The "10" Laws of Stuff

1. The more you have, the more you need.
2. Useless stuff crowds out the good stuff.
3. Dirt and bugs love stuff.
4. Stuff stays where you put it.
5. Stuff multiplies to fill the spaces you have.
6. Over time, you don't see your stuff.
7. When you have a lot of stuff, you pay over and over for it.
8. Stuff affects your mental health.
9. Stuff is valuable only if you use it.
10. Stuff can't buy happiness.



Adapted from: Georgene Lockwood, 10 Laws of Stuff,
The Oaks, Menomonie, Wisconsin