

## **May, 2010: How Much is Too Much? How Do We Let Go?**

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A client posed these questions to me recently: “How much is enough? How much is too much?” We were working on her bedroom closet, switching her winter clothes for her spring and summer clothes. Just looking at the piles for each season was overwhelming to her.

These are important questions to ponder. I am working with another client on “What does ‘Done’ look like?”. All of these ideas make us scratch our heads and wonder what the limits should be on our time and our stuff.

So, this month, let me help you put some limits on your stuff, so that your Stuff does not limit you! Here are some ways to Recognize and Purge your clutter!

**Clutter is anything you Don’t Need, Use or Love.** What is the hurdle we need to clear, for us to let clutter go? Why do we keep clutter, and how do we learn to Let Clutter Go?

1. We keep our clutter because of Money or a skewed sense of frugality: “I spent money on that item!” or “That item is worth money!”

Yes, that item is worth some amount of money. Perhaps a lot! But is it worth that money to keep it around if the item is now a nuisance, causing negative feelings, disruption, etc? Sell it and recoup some of that money, if that helps!

If you now don’t need / use / love it, it is Clutter, and it is still costing you mental energy and negative feelings.

If you wait 10 years, and have to call in junk haulers or a dumpster (or a professional organizer), it will cost you again.

The real waste of your money and resources is the storage, upkeep and maintenance on items that are Clutter.

What is Peace of Mind worth? We need to put a dollar amount, a worth, a value on being organized, having less clutter and less stress, increasing the appeal and enjoyment our homes hold for us. Then we realize that Clutter has more value to us when it is gone from our home than when it is in our home.

2. We keep things because we are Sentimental.

We keep items because a loved one gave it to us, and now that person may have passed away or moved away, and we keep the item as a reminder. Or we keep an item as a memory of a certain time in our life.

But, **what if** our whole house is full of such items, and we no longer see them because they are always there? or we are frustrated because there are too many sentimental items? and our attachment to them decreases because of sheer numbers.

I have lots of things that I treasure. I have lots of people in my life that I treasure even more, though, so sentimentality doesn’t affect me too much.

We can let an item that has become Clutter without letting the loved one or their memories go. Honest. It’s okay.

I’ll let you keep some things, but not boxes and boxes of them.

Who are you really keeping the piles of baby items or preschool papers for? In 20 years, your kids may not want the stuff you keep for them while they grew up.

Toys, styles, safety regulations, and a million other things change all the time.

3. We keep things because we feel Guilty getting rid of our clutter.

This is one step past sentimentality. We recognize we don’t even like / need / use the clutter item, and we want to let it go, but guilt still holds us hostage.

Guilt attaches bad feelings to items we used to treasure. Treasure with bad feelings attached are clutter.

Sometimes we have a keep sake or treasure that started out positive, as a gift or memento from a loved one. But perhaps the relationship ended badly or the event has negative memories attached to it that you think of every time you see the item. Let it go! If you have to keep it, put away, but better yet, purge it.

Does the gift giver that gave you the item have the issues you have? You received and used a lovely gift. I never imagine that I will see every time I go to a friend's home the gift I bought for them years ago. Their lives are fuller than that, and so is mine.

Purge clutter from the area you are working on, but store it elsewhere. Assuages the guilt but clears the space in question.

4. We Should-a, We Could-a, We Would-a.... Our clutter represents opportunities, taken or missed. So we don't want to let go of the opportunity, the possibility the item represents.

Someday: My hubby bought a t-shirt on vacation. It reads "Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. See? There is no SomeDay".

Wouldn't you rather live better today, this day, than save things for SomeDay that ruin today and get in the way?

Did you stumble over things that you keep for SomeDay as you tried to get ready for work/class today? Let them GO!

5. We keep things for Just In Case:

There are Opportunity Costs from Just in case

Any time we choose to buy/keep something, it eliminates the opportunity for something else.

\$100 spent on one thing cannot be spent on something else.

Someone else is not benefiting from the stuff that is weighing us down

Be honest with yourself. Often a client will try to ease out the old or grungy clothing items by calling them workout clothes or cleaning clothes. When there are 20 grungy t-shirts in a drawer for "working out", you are deluding your self. You do not need 20. Or even 10. Let's say 5 old t-shirts, recognizing you do laundry at least once in a while, and face it – you would be more motivated to exercise if you had a few nice work out shirts instead.

Duplicates:

- a. Items you have too many of are clutter. Not all of them, just some of them. Black tank tops are great, I have a few myself. But I worked with a client who had 14. In varying degrees of wear-ability.
- b. In my classes, I offer an idea about purging duplicates I call Mug math: How many coffee drinkers do you have? How often do they drink coffee? And how many mugs do you have? I give the example—I can have 25 people in my house sitting down drinking coffee. No more than that will fit for a sit-down event. So I don't need more than 25 cups, china or every day combined, period. I have a client who had 74 coffee mugs in her kitchen. Some just had to GO!
- c. JJust how many sets of towels do you need? And are they all in good shape? Would you be embarrassed to offer them to a guest? Aren't you worth it, to use nice ones? Yes you are. Fewer-but-nicer is better!
- d. Do you ever get to the bottom of the piles, or the last of the piles (like plastic cups or storage containers)? If not, then you don't need as many as you have.
- e. Some times items, for example clothing, are Just wrong, and need to go. Wrong size, wrong season, wrong feel. Itchy, smelly, uncomfortable, sooo not your color. Let it GO!
- f. If you look at it and you get that crease in your forehead above your nose, because you are trying hard to imagine any situation you would honestly wear / use that item and you are coming up blank. Let it GO!

I can help you, but in the end, You have to answer to the questions "How Much is Enough? How Much is Too Much?" for yourself, in your own situation. I hope these ideas help you determine your own answers! The Clear Space and Peace of Mind are worth it, trust me!