

Organize IT

Advice On Organized And Productive Living Through Lifehacks And GTD

<http://www.mallosworld.co.uk/organize-it/>

Presents

Clutter 101

version 1.0

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Why Do We Keep Clutter?

It was a gift/present.

If a gift had any practical use to you it's likely it would already be serving its purpose and/or have a suitable place in your home, rather than be taking up space. If it could be used, use it now, otherwise give some careful thought to getting rid of it (keeping one or two big gifts for the sake of not offending someone is understandable, but bear in mind the majority of time they won't even remember).

It's expensive/It cost me a lot of money

Well if it's lumped in with your clutter, it's either served its purpose or been a big waste of money unfortunately. Either way, deal with it! Its costing you even more money to have it stuck around taking up room. Try selling it if it's worth that much, but if it's not shifting, see below...

I might be able to sell it on someday

Why do you think you can or will sell it in the future? What's stopping you from selling it now and clearing some space? If its some sort of investment like an antique or collectors item store it in an appropriate place (remember, a place for everything and everything in its place), otherwise put it on eBay or have a car-boot sale. Get rid of it now.

It might come in useful one day

If you have already had the item for a while and you haven't used it, it's safe to assume you are not going to be needing it any time soon. Simple really.

I would feel guilty throwing away so much stuff

Recycle it then, give it away to your friends or charity shops. There are so many options nowadays which are out of the scope of this particular article so I suggest you do a google search for recycling and clutter in your particular region/country.

I don't have time

Make time now and save loads later! You won't have to dig around in the back of boxes, struggle with space whenever you buy a new item, stress about losing a bill in the masses of paperwork stuffed in drawers. Once you are on top of the clutter in your home it's almost a natural (and quick!) process to stick with it.

I can't be bothered

If you are reading Organize IT or this paper then I would assume you are interested in becoming more productive and/or you want to make some positive steps in your life. Getting rid of all the clutter in your life is one aspect of that. De-cluttering your home is a key step in de-cluttering your mind. It makes your whole living streamlined.

Types Of Clutter

Trash

This sort of clutter is pretty simple to deal with. It's rubbish, it can go straight into the bin. It includes stuff like old receipts, scraps of paper and sweet wrappers, and can go straight into the bin.

Reference

This includes stuff like bills and manuals which may or may not be useful in the future but you are obliged to keep them because they contain important and/or useful information. Create a filing system and store your reference material there. That way it takes up minimal room and allows for easy access in an organized manner.

Broken/Out Of Date

You'd think we would do something with an item when it breaks but it is surprising how often we just keep them lying around, perhaps for the day when we might actually get round to fixing it. Well, you are de-cluttering now so take that broken item to be fixed right away or get rid of it if you really have no intention of using it anymore.

Do the same with out of date items. By that I don't mean stuff like food, I would hope you don't need to be told to throw away your rotting vegetables. What I mean is, for instance, if you buy a DVD player, get rid of/sell on your old VHS player, don't dump it in the cupboard where it will never get used.

Collectables/Antiques

If you have a collection of antique plates, old comic books, etc, find a good place to store them neatly, don't dump them in with the rest of your clutter. If you have collectables for future investment, consider taking them in for valuation. Your intention is to sell them at some point so it makes sense to have some idea of the sort of values you may be expecting.

Nostalgia

With this sort of clutter you need to decide your own acceptable level for clearing out nostalgic items because it can be more personal to some than others which can override your normal decisions regarding clutter. I know people who refuse to even throw away birthday cards from years ago, while others get rid of any gifts that have not been used within 6 months.

Recyclable/Saleable

If you are getting rid of your clutter and it is not trash, it may sometimes be easier to recycle the items or sell them on if there is any value to it. Once I have read a book I will either sell it on Amazon if it has maintained its value or give it away to friends/family.

Undecided

With all the best intentions in the world to de-clutter our homes, sometimes we just can't decide whether to get rid of something or not. There are two options for dealing with this. Firstly you can box away all these undecided items and revisit them a few months down the line, or you can treat the clutter as though you are going to be keeping it, store it appropriately and revisit it as you do your regular de-clutters.

Essential

For the sake of completeness I have included this as a clutter category. As the name suggests, this is the stuff we need and use on a regular basis and should be organized appropriately.

How To De-Clutter

For the purposes of this section I am going to assume you are doing a big de-clutter of your entire environment. As such you will be dealing with a rather large project so it's wise to break it down. Take one room at a time and within each room decide the key points that need a de-clutter. For instance the bedroom could have the wardrobe, drawers and under the bed itself to deal with. Take each of these sections and do them fully and do all the sections in that one room before moving onto the next. De-cluttering sometimes means making more mess initially as you dig everything out so its wise to only have one room in this state at a time.

Make sure you don't choose too long a timescale to complete your de-clutter as stuff will continue to come into your life; by the time you complete one area, you may have to work on previous areas again. If your environment isn't ready and organized enough to receive it then your de-clutter problem will not get resolved.

Make sure you have the special de-clutter tools in place. Have large rubbish bags next to you, have a sweeping brush and dust cloths and any other washing tools you might think you will need; things will be dirty and dusty. If you are sat on the floor surrounded by boxes, papers and various other junk, the last thing you need to do is go get yourself a plastic bag.

Now you have to just jump in. Don't be cautious, pessimistic or afraid to make a mess of your rooms with this. Relish being in at the deep end. Seeing those rubbish/recycle bags fill up is very satisfying. Remember, you are working on individual sections of each room so things won't get overwhelming.

Take everything out of the area you are working on and start again, with a clean slate. Take each item at a time and decide quickly what you intend to do with it. Its almost a natural approach to keep stuff so make the decision before that thought process takes over. Recap the reasons we keep clutter:

- It was a gift/present
- It's expensive/it cost me a lot of money
- I might be able to sell it on someday
- It might come in useful one day
- I would feel guilty throwing away so much stuff
- I don't have time
- I can't be bothered

If you don't need it, bin it in those plastic bags you have handy, or put it in a separate pile for recycling/giving away. Otherwise return it back to where it came from *neatly* or put it in new places (having cleaned these areas first) if you have found new/more efficient areas to store things. De-cluttering isn't just about the clutter, it's about managing what's left over more effectively and very often with a big de-cluttering exercise like this you will find that you have created so much extra space you can afford to rethink where you were originally storing everything. A prime example was how I was able to break down all the clutter in a chest of drawers to 2 drawers (from 5). I binned the chest and placed the two drawers at the bottom of the wardrobe. I created more space and used existing space more efficiently.

Remember to designate a place for everything and have everything in its place (and note, items can share the same space). Without this you will buy/receive something and then wonder where to put it. More often than not, you will end up dumping it somewhere. Then you will do the same with the next item to come in and before you know it you have this big dumping ground.

However, to avoid the temptation of taking things too literally and end up buying hundreds of storage devices and name each one for every possible item you could ever own, it's quite likely that you will get stuff that doesn't have places for it. This is where I have specially defined miscellaneous drawers. If an item doesn't seem to fit anywhere and you are sure you will need it

then place it in these. Do not think of it as a dumping area however. In a ed-clutter environment there is no such thing! Treat them like you would other areas and regularly work through them.

Magazines, papers, bills etc; I tend to find that this is what mostly gets binned. All those receipts dumped at the bottom of pockets, the spam mail that comes through the letter boxes etc. relevantIf you think it could be interesting for a later date create a reference folder/file and store the bare minimum part you need (tear the page out or rip the relevant chunk from the rest of the content). As much as its useful to have such reference materials stored efficiently, generally we will rarely refer to them so it makes sense to store the bare minimum. There is a small thing called the internet which you can refer to instead :)

Bills and other financial papers are tricky. There is no real consensus on how long you should hold onto them. Either way, you should have a well organized system for storing these too, rather like with reference material. That way they take up less space and they are more managable. Nowadays a lot of companies offer online bills. If you want to cut down the amount of stuff that comes through your letter box or you want to limit how much you have to file away this can be a useful option.

Anything financially tied to you or papers that contain your name, address, etc should be shredded or destroyed if you don't need them. Shredders are very cheap and almost essential with all the fraud there is nowadays.

After all that effort stick with it! Remember the benefits of having a more relaxing environment where you can find everything, having more space and knowing what you actually own. After you have de-cluttered and organized everything neatly, the first thing to go will be that neatness if you don't stick with it. All it takes is one lazy afternoon where you just throw your clothes into the cupboard, leave some papers on the table rather than shredding them or knock over some toiletries in the bathroom and not pick them up. A drawer here, a box there, it all makes a big difference.

Remember, you've done the hard part. Any mini de-cluttering you do from now on will be easy. As you do your usual cleaning each day/week choose one of those individual areas and have a quick check for anything you can get rid of. And, as stuff comes in put it away neatly! View it as though you are optimizing your environment. How can you best manage the stuff you own so that there is less of it, it uses space better and it's out of the way?