

CLUTTER REHAB



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*Tips and Tricks to Become
an Organization Junkie
and Love It!*

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Clutter Rehab

LET ME START RIGHT OFF by admitting my little secret: I'm an organization addict. Yes, it's true! But this doesn't mean I have all my soup cans lined up in pretty little rows with their labels facing out, my spices alphabetized, or perfectly color-coordinated bins and baskets. My sheets aren't folded and stacked pristinely, and I don't make my kids sort their Legos by color!

What's important to me is being organized just enough (notice I didn't say perfectly) so that I can enjoy the rewards of organization without complicating life more than I need to. I avoid stress and chaos as much as possible with strategies that help me eliminate clutter, prepare for life's little mishaps, save money, and maximize my time so that I can run my household efficiently. This is the freedom that comes from a simplified, organized way of life. Sound impossible?

It isn't! Over the past five years, I have taken a journey toward simplicity and organization and learned some valuable and practical lessons along the way. What started me on my journey? A new baby, a job loss, and a transition to becoming a work-from-home mom, all at the same time. It was overwhelming, to say the least, but it was also what opened my eyes to how out of control my life had become. I just

didn't stop to think about how stressed I was. It wasn't until I slowly started the transition to a simpler lifestyle and began introducing some of the changes outlined in this book that I realized how chaotic my life had actually been before. My husband and I made adjustments to how we did things: got the kids involved around the house, scheduled fewer activities, developed simple organizing processes and systems, and, most of all, we reduced our clutter. Believe me, it certainly didn't all happen overnight. Rather, it was a gradual process that continues to this day.

I document my ongoing journey on my blog, *I'm an Organizing Junkie* (www.orgjunkie.com), which I started in 2006 as a way to share this passion of mine with others. As my blog has grown, I've realized I'm not alone in my desire to live an organized life, and nothing makes me happier than the thrill of watching others experience this high of organizing and the life-changing benefits that go along with it. Yet what we all have to remember is that organizing isn't a means to an end, *it's an ongoing process*. Just when you think you've got things all figured out at the top of the ride, the roller coaster of life dips down and spins you in another direction. However, with consistent practice and a good seat belt, you'll learn to expect those dips and turns and be ready for them. You'll have strategies and systems in place, not necessarily to prevent life's curveballs, but to keep you securely fastened so you can go with the flow and maintain your sanity along the way. Organizing is a fun addiction with amazing results and, hopefully, after reading this book, you'll be well on your way to becoming an organizing junkie as well. **ENJOY THE RIDE!**

Let's Talk Clutter

Throughout this book we're going to be talking about clutter.

Clutter = Anything you don't love or use or have the space to store

What is it about our stuff that seems to cause it to multiply in the night? Too much stuff and too little space results in clutter. You can either get rid of some stuff or find more space. In my opinion, getting rid of stuff is a lot less expensive and a lot less work than finding more space, especially if that space comes in the form of a storage unit or a bigger house. These are choices we all have to make and, truthfully, clutter is so much more than just the storage solutions needed to contain it. Dealing with clutter requires making some tough decisions on a regular basis.

Clutter = Procrastinated decisions

It's not easy making these decisions because we get attached to our stuff. We fear the consequences of getting rid of something and we wonder if we'll regret it later, if we'll lose the memory associated with it, or if we'll hurt someone's feelings. But the truth is this: Clutter is immobilizing. It stifles our freedom to enjoy the spaces we do have, it takes up mental space whether we know it or not, and it can be a

huge source of stress and frustration, which then plays itself out in so many other areas of our lives. Making decisions with potential consequences is always hard, but choosing to make no decision at all or putting it off until later when you think the decision-making process is going to be easier isn't going to help you. Stuff doesn't go away on its own; it just continues to pile up.

Luckily, the skills required to deal with our clutter and organize it all are skills anyone can learn. Yes, some of us may be more adept at it, but like anything else, with regular practice, the process gets faster and easier each time. Remember to keep in mind that the goal here is not perfection. The goal is simply to make life easier and more efficient, and to reduce stress (not add to it) by using easily maintained systems that allow for an uncluttered space, an uncluttered mind, and an uncluttered life.

The benefits of letting go of clutter far outweigh the anxiety you feel in the moment.

Believe it can be done! Consider this your clutter rehab, and I'm going to teach you how!

Where to start?

I think so many of us look around our spaces and get simply overwhelmed. You know you want to make a change, but aren't sure where to start or how to move forward. That feeling can be paralyzing and often leads to procrastination. The straightforward answer to this question is to *start small*. If you have a whole room needing attention, break the job down into manageable bits. Perhaps you start with just one

drawer or the closet. Start with what frustrates you the most. Follow my organizing process below and the tips in this book and you'll be well on your way to organizing success. With each accomplishment, revel in what you've achieved! It's a big deal, so be proud and use that as motivation to continue on.

The Organizing **PROCESS**

Organizing is an ongoing *process* and not a destination. Just when you think you've got a handle on things, it's time to do it all over again. Life happens. Kids outgrow their toys and clothes, your responsibilities and needs change, you have another child, get married, start a new job, and on and on. With the right techniques, however, you can stay on top of these things. You can control your space rather than have your space control you. Being organized allows you to quickly restore the situation when the ride gets a little bumpy.

PROCESS is an easy acronym I've created to allow you to break down any organizing project into simple, straightforward steps. Using it will help you stick to a plan and achieve optimal organizing results. In fact, by following the PROCESS steps below, anyone can conquer any space of any size. Do one step at a time or all at once, depending on the time you have available for the task.

Here are the **PROCESS** steps:

Plan of attack: Plan your project before you start. First, evaluate your present system. You need to know what isn't working for you to help you determine how you'd like the space to function. Next, set a budget and make a time line. Get clear about how much money and time you're willing to

invest before you get started. Definitely don't just jump in blind; you'll set yourself up for failure if you do.

Remove items: Empty the space completely so you can start from a clean slate. I know this sounds like more work, but it's so much more effective than just shuffling everything around. Removing items from where they've been stored will give you a fresh perspective on the space you want organized. It will enable you to re-evaluate how you want the space to look. You can't do this when the area is cluttered up with stuff.

Organize into piles: One each to donate/toss/sell/keep/relocate. Sort like with like; this will result in many piles around you, but don't stop to deal with them until your sort is complete. Then tackle each pile one by one. Purge excess: The more you purge, the less you have to find a home for. Your goal is to bring back into your space only what you love and use and can fit into the space you have available.

Containerize: Containers and other storage solutions establish limits and boundaries; they designate a space for items being kept. Consolidate where possible.

Evaluate your plan: How is your system working for you? Are you able to work your system? What needs to be modified? A good system should be easy to maintain.

Solve and Simplify any remaining issues: Address anything that isn't working for you and revise accordingly.

The 101 organizing tips you'll find in this book, along with the PROCESS steps I just outlined, are designed to take you on a journey toward clutter-free, simplified living. The tips are in no particular order, so feel free to work your way through them as is or to jump around as you see fit. I've

intermingled simple clutter-control techniques that you'll be able to implement right away, along with some more involved tactics that might require additional time and a few adjustments in order to make them work for *your* family. Take it one tip at a time, and before you know it, you'll be on the other side of the chaos mountain.

SMILE, RELAX, AND ENJOY YOUR HARD WORK!



1

Ask clutter questions

As you face each clutter decision, ask yourself the questions below. You can do this in two ways. One is to evaluate each item by asking all the questions about it at once. If the thought of that seems too overwhelming, you can ask them in stages. For example, evaluate each item by going through and only asking the first question. Then take that same pile and go through the items again asking the second question, and so on. By the time you answer all five questions, your pile should be considerably smaller (if you've been honest, that is!).

- 1 Do I love it?
- 2 Do I use it? How long ago did I last use it? (More than a year? Toss it!)
- 3 Do I have the room to store it without it affecting my efficiency and stress levels?
- 4 Am I willing to give up something else in order to make room for it?
- 5 Can I imagine myself or anyone else in my family ever loving it or using it in the foreseeable future?

2

Banish clutter excuses

Once you have your plan in place and your stuff removed, grab yourself three big bins or boxes to help you with the organize/sort part of PROCESS. Alternatively, you could use different colored garbage bags. Label one for *keep*, one for *donate/sell*, and one for *relocate* to another area of the house. You'll also need a garbage bag for trash. As you're doing your

sort, quickly make decisions about where each item you handle should go. If the decision is a really tough one, you may choose to pass and continue on. Limit yourself to three passes for the duration of your project. Those decisions will get easier for you as you start to feel the “high” of purging. Address each item and the excuses that pop into your head about why an item should stay. Is your excuse reasonable? Only you can be the judge of that.



Here's how you can combat some of those excuses in order to fight your desire to hold on to something:

I might need it one day.

That may be true, but if you haven't used it in a year, chances are you won't need it anytime soon. You have to weigh the cost between the prime real estate space it takes up and the cost to replace it if you do need to purchase it again in the future.

I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings by getting rid of it.

Fair enough, but I would assume the person you don't want to hurt is close to you or otherwise you wouldn't be so concerned about their feelings. If that's the case, then how much worse do you think this person would feel knowing the additional stress they've put you under? If you're keeping something to avoid hurting someone's feelings, you're essentially being a storage house for them. You are giving up storage space in *your* own home to make *them* happy. I'm sure you can think of many different ways to effectively use your space. Do not be burdened by stuff you're keeping for someone else.

I don't want to seem ungrateful.

It's all about heart: If your heart is in the right place, the giver will hopefully understand. You need to do what's right for you and your family. You don't always have to tell the giver that you and the item are parting ways. Re-gifting is a popular choice for new items, as is donating items to thrift stores. Take it to the thrift store in the next town if you're really worried about it! And don't forget places like Craigslist, eBay,

or Freecycle. Whatever you do, don't hang on to something out of a sense of obligation—it just creates resentment.

It was so expensive.

Ah yes, the big-ticket item we just had to have—and there it sits collecting dust. It happens to all of us. You know you'll never get back what you paid for it, but remember, that item is taking up space in your house that could be better used for something else, which makes THAT piece of real estate more expensive than the item you are hanging on to!

The item could be valuable.

It's not worth anything if it's just sitting in a box that you don't have the room to store. If it isn't something you love or use regularly, get rid of it and make some money on it now.

It brings back so many memories.

Oh, emotional attachment. This one is probably the biggest culprit that holds people back. Our memories are often so wrapped up in physical material possessions that it becomes unbearable to part with something. I can understand that and I'm not opposed to keeping those things as long as you have the space available to store them. If you don't, try taking a picture of the item and allow the picture to conjure up the memory for you instead (see Tip 10).

3

Consolidate...everything!

I absolutely adore containers of all shapes and sizes because of how useful they are for consolidating.

Anytime I can consolidate many things into one thing, thereby

taking up less space, it makes me a very happy girl. This tip works particularly well in the kitchen, where we can often find multiples of the same product open at the same time.

Whenever I see this happening in my cupboard, I know my family is trying to mess with me because they know it drives me crazy. Empty smaller sizes of similar packages out into one bigger container. For instance, keep a snack basket handy in your pantry to house granola bars, fruit leathers, etc. You'll notice that once you eliminate bulky packaging, you end up with a lot more space in your cupboard. In addition, if we don't store "like with like," we forget what we have and

QUICK NOTE:

Clutter results when we have more of something than space to store it.

purchase more, which adds up to more money spent at the store.

**CONSOLIDATING
IS ADDICTIVE!**



About the Author



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LAURA WITTMANN is a professional organizer and founder of the popular blog *I'm an Organizing Junkie* (www.orgjunkie.com), a website dedicated to providing encouragement and education for organized living with a good dose of

fun. She is addicted to the “high” that comes from living a life of simplicity and order and is always on the lookout for her next “fix.” She lives in Alberta, Canada, with her husband and three kids.