

# Taming our Stuff: The Challenge of Down-sizing and De-cluttering

## Getting started -

- **Use a kitchen timer** - turn it to 15 minutes and start sorting things - you can do anything for 15 minutes! If you want to go further, that's fine - but don't go overboard
- **Place paper bags/boxes in strategic places** - bedroom for clothing that doesn't fit or you don't like; near the basement door; in your "den" for books you've finished. Once a bag is full, take it to the garage right away and plan how you will dispense with it.
- **If you're not sure about an item** - or several - put them in a box out of the way somewhere. See if you really think of it - if you yearn for anything, keep it!
- **Put like items with like** - if everything is scattered around, it is harder to know what you have. During this process, designate areas for each category - books, crafts, clothes, kitchen items, etc... Once you see things grouped together, it might be easy to see what to get rid of -
- **If you don't have a space to do your organizing at all, create a space** by packing everything from a small area into boxes or putting it one top of other things - just so you can have room to maneuver.

## Tackling big projects

- **Make a list of people to give things to** - family members, friends who've expressed interest in a painting or something. Then ask them if they would like a particular item - don't just give it to them. Once you have given it away and it has been accepted, **do not** ask that person if they really like it, or what they did with it.
- **Other people's belongings** (like your children's) - give them a reasonable deadline to retrieve it - after that it is yours to toss! (Reasonable might be 1-4 months - if where you live has "always" been their house.)
- **Hire someone** if you can afford it! There are people in our church who do this kind of work - and there are lots of pros out there.
- **Find a chore-exchange friend** - one week you spend an afternoon at his/her place, the next week yours. This works for any kind of chores, not just de-cluttering...
- **Start small**, even if you have plenty of time -. Choose one type of thing - books, for instance, and go through the house looking for them. Or, choose a room, or part of a room - even a drawer.
- Be tough but gentle with yourself and realistic about your situation. If you know you have a lot of stuff to sort, just keep reminding yourself of that and keep going.

## Hanging on to your motivation

- **Reward yourself** - once you have set a goal and accomplished it, go to a movie, have a good hot soak in the tub, post it on Facebook. Do whatever you can to reinforce your positive actions.
- **Nurture your sense of accomplishment.** Look at the stuff you've put in the outgoing piles, not the remaining things to go through.

## Getting rid of it - where can you take it?

- **Superfluity!!!**
- **Clothing – that is in good shape** (i.e. **you** would buy it in this condition): consignment stores; shelters like Mary’s Place - check their websites or call first; All wearable clothing can go to Goodwill and Value Village.
- Old towels and blankets - animal shelters
- Everything else: <http://www.seattle.gov/util/MyServices/Recycling/index.htm> - a wonderfully organized website - especially for Seattle folk.

## Resources for Motivation, Methods, Tips and Tricks

### Books

For methods of de-cluttering and for organizing tips, go to Goodwill or a used bookstore and browse for something that looks promising to you. (Just buy one) Most are reasonably helpful and pretty similar. You will find them mainly in self-help sections.

### Magazines

Oprah and other lifestyle magazines often have articles with tips and tricks - especially with “spring cleaning” time nearly here. Again-buy only one, and when you get home, tear the article out and recycle the rest of the magazine.

### Television

Watching part or all of an episode of *Hoarding, Buried Alive* – it’s one of the best motivations to de-clutter I’ve experienced.

### Online

<http://professionalorganizersonline.com>. Or, search on decluttering, organizing, downsizing, recycling or junk - you’ll find plenty to read.

Nextdoor.com – website that connects neighbors – you can advertise stuff here

Freecycle – website to give away and get free stuff. Just google “freecycle”

### Philosophy, Education

**Garbology, by Edward Humes** - about how our society came to acquire over 100 tons of garbage.

And if you just want to learn to live with your stuff: *A Perfect Mess*, by Eric Abrahamson and David H. Freedman - about why having stuff and being disorganized isn’t necessarily a bad thing...

### Record keeping:

This article is a bit old, but still valid...

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2010/03/conquer-the-paper-piles/index.html>

<http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Money/Personal-Finance/Managing-Household-Records.shtml>