

Clear the Clutter, Clear the Mind

Organize your way to a well-lived life

BY » Bek Mitchell-Kidd

Do you have too much stuff? Too many clothes, old bills, a tiny spoon collection, tickets to things you don't remember attending—or has the junk drawer become truly impossible to open? Do you just need to get organized or is it time to declutter?

Joanna Clausen, owner of NEST Organizing, says, “Stuff’ itself isn’t inherently bad.” The difference is when the items around you start to dictate how you live your life. If you’re always late because you can’t find what you need, or if you feel stressed by the things around you—that’s when you need to act.

Set a goal and timeline

Clausen recommends not setting a goal that’s too big at first. Don’t tell yourself you’re

going to get the entire house organized in one sitting. Give yourself small, attainable goals, such as organizing a junk drawer one day, so you feel successful and confident throughout the process.

Duplication is clutter

Kim Wilhelm, owner of File the Pile, has three steps to begin the decluttering process: sort, declutter, and find a home.

Start with a manageable task. “First, sort similar items together, putting ‘like with like.’ Using pens as an example, collect all the pens in your house and group them together. Then, toss the ones that don’t work or don’t bring you joy,” says Wilhelm.

Save, shred and recycle

There are categories within how to declutter,

and the scariest one for many people is paper.

Wilhelm’s approach to sorting papers is similar to organizing any item, she recommends starting with grouping alike documents into piles of save, shred and recycle.

“There are standard guidelines for how long to keep various financial documents,” says Wilhelm. She also brings an additional level of expertise to tackling this job—not only does she hail from a financial background, but she is a member of the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals, which has its own code of ethics ensuring her clients’ privacy and confidentiality.

Once you have a methodology in place like an ‘action box,’ it becomes easier to make decisions and avoid a pile up; put folders

in an “action box” labeled “keep” (irreplaceable/ hard to replace documents), “long-term and short-term” papers (tax returns), and immediate action-required (current bills).

Voice the value

It’s hard to say goodbye. But sometimes taking a minute to reflect on what the item represented will give you the freedom to let it go.

Wilhelm provides clients with questions to help guide decisions on items such as memories and memorabilia. An example question is, “Would I want to burden my family with this item in my absence?” If the answer is ‘no,’ then it is an easier decision to donate the item. ■

To learn more, visit nestorganizing.com and filethepile.org.

