

Letting Go: De-Cluttering Your Life

By Kathy Paauw

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Paauperfully Organized <http://orgcoach.net>

"One cannot collect all the beautiful shells on the beach.
One can collect only a few, and they are more beautiful if
they are few. "

--Anne Morrow Lindbergh

While our family was vacationing in Hawaii over Christmas, my daughter and I did some beachcombing in search of the perfect seashell. From a distance, everything brought in by the tide looked like debris. But an occasional unbroken shell appeared amidst the driftwood, seaweed, and shell particles that washed ashore. We both found ourselves awestruck by the beauty of each single shell we found.

Sometimes our lives are like that. We have so many beautiful things around us, and their beauty can get lost amidst all of the debris surrounding them. Too much of a good thing becomes clutter. The challenge is to identify the keepers and let go of the rest.

My mother -- who will be 70 years old this year -- has lived in Phoenix since 1963 and has decided to move to Seattle to be closer to her children and grandchildren. As I write this article, she is in Phoenix preparing for her big move. It's not easy for her. She'll be moving into a lovely but small condo, and she knows that she cannot bring everything with her.

This move represents much more to my mother than simply moving her possessions across the country. It represents 39 years of experiences, friendships and familiar comforts that she is preparing to leave behind. Moving under such circumstances makes it even more difficult to let go of some of her possessions. And yet, she is doing just that. She feels burdened by all that she has collected over the years, and she's ready to lighten the load and let go.

Several years ago I was struck by how much letting go one of my elderly clients (I'll call her Katherine) was faced with when she moved from Florida to Seattle to be closer to family. Katherine was grieving many losses: the loss of her husband of more than 50 years (he had died the previous year), the lack of sunshine (we have the liquid kind in Seattle), the loss of friends and familiar places, and the loss of the home where she had raised her children.

Although she had already let go of many of her possessions, Katherine had brought more with her than she could possibly fit into her small condo. As we unpacked her things, it was apparent to me that Katherine was not ready to let go of one more thing in her life. So I suggested that we unpack what she could not do without and store the rest to revisit in one year. A year later, Katherine called me back to help her sort through the things she had placed in storage. She was in a much better frame of mind to decide what she wanted to keep and what she was ready to let go of.

DROWNING IN CLUTTER?

Three Rules of Work: Out of clutter find simplicity;
From discord find harmony; In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.

--Albert Einstein

Here's my definition of clutter: anything you own, possess, or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis. If you agree with my definition, then you acknowledge that clutter goes far beyond things in our physical environment. Although the focus of this article is on physical clutter, remember that clutter can also include activities, thoughts, or even people in your present life something to think about!

As an organizing and productivity consultant, I frequently get calls from individuals who are drowning in clutter. They have no idea where to begin or how to dig out. I begin by asking some questions to clarify what is most important to them. Although my clients recognize that clutter creates a huge drain on their time, energy, and budget, the de-cluttering process still looms as a formidable task. There are two parts to de-cluttering: letting go of the clutter, and containing what's left so you can find what you need when you need it.

Complicating the de-cluttering process is all the emotional baggage attached to a person's stuff. I've found some common causes of emotional baggage in working with serious packrats:

1. The individual is old enough to have lived through the Great Depression. Having experienced a time when they had to make do with very little, many learned not to throw anything away. Although keeping everything may have served them well many years ago, their circumstances have changed and the mindset of let's keep it all in case I need it no longer serves them.

2. The individual has experienced a severe loss in his/her life, and their possessions are filling a hole in their heart. Once they begin to see this correlation and work through the pain of that loss, they are better able to let go of some things in their environment. This type of packrat is more able to let go of something if they can give it to someone who needs it more than they do.

3. The individual is a highly creative and energetic person. All of their stuff represents an opportunity. What makes them very successful at what they do (creative, right-brained activities) also makes them very lousy at organizing their surroundings (analytical, left-brained activity). Their internal dialogue often says, I better not throw that away, because I might do something with it someday. Of course, if they cannot lay their hands on it, it will never be of use to them, anyway. This type of individual needs to partner with someone who has the organizing skills that they lack, so they can let go of what they truly don't need and have a system in place so they can find what they need when they need it.

4. The individual has struggled with depression or physical illness/injury. Sometimes these struggles can derail people and they lose the desire to care for themselves and their environment. Their internal dialogue says, What does it matter? So what, who cares!

If you identify with any of these types of emotional baggage, and if you are tired of the clutter, contact me at orgcoach@gte.net. We can schedule a complimentary coaching session to discuss your path to a less cluttered life.

Do you question the value of investing the time and resources necessary to de-clutter your life? Consider the costs of not doing so:

1. How much time and money are you spending NOW to maintain what you have? Are you spending money to store things you never or rarely use? Have you moved into a larger home or office, only to fill the extra space with more stuff, thus requiring a move to yet a larger space? Imagine what it costs in time and money to do this! Is it worth the investment?

2. How much does your clutter cost in peace of mind or missed opportunities? Imagine what it would be like to reduce your stress level. Imagine what you could do with the time, energy, and space your clutter is currently taking up!
3. If your home or office burned to the ground, what contents would you want to replace? If you would not miss it, perhaps it's not worth keeping in the first place.
4. Who says you have to keep all those things? Is it something that enhances your life? Do you like it? Does it bring you joy? Is it useful to you now? Note that what is useful may change as your life circumstances change. For example, if you've moved from a home to a condo, all of that lawn & garden equipment may no longer be useful to you.
5. Do you want to be remembered for the possessions in your life, or for who you are? You can't take it with you! Those who will someday inherit your possessions will thank you for de-cluttering your environment rather than passing it on for them to deal with after you die.

LETTING GO OF PAPER

These before and after photos represent 3 days of work with this client. We filled a large dumpster and converted what was left into the Paper Tiger filing system for easy retrieval.

HIDDEN URL: [">http://www.orgcoach.net/find5sec.html](http://www.orgcoach.net/find5sec.html)

- In every productivity survey taken over the last 20 years, managing paperwork always falls in the top ten time-wasting activities of managers. Paper management serves as one of the biggest drains on productivity, both in the office and at home. To calculate what disorganization costs you or your company, visit [">http://www.orgcoach.net/whatitcosts.html](http://www.orgcoach.net/whatitcosts.html).

- Here are some startling statistics that support the value of investing time and resources to get organized:

- The average U.S. executive wastes six weeks per year retrieving misplaced information on desks or in files. At a salary of \$75,000 per year, this would translate to 12.3 percent of total earnings, or \$9225.

Visit <http://www.orgcoach.net/trimthefat.html> for free tips on managing paper flow. This includes instructions for creating an outstanding tickler file system, as well as the

Paper Tiger filing system endorsed by Kiplinger Washington Editors, Inc. that guarantees you'll be able to find anything you file in 5 seconds or less.

Hidden URLs above:

TICKLER:

[">http://www.orgcoach.net/companystore/tickler_file.html](http://www.orgcoach.net/companystore/tickler_file.html)

FIND ANYTHING: [">http://www.orgcoach.net/find5sec.html](http://www.orgcoach.net/find5sec.html)

- Office workers spend 40 - 60% of their time working with paper. Despite visions of a paperless office, most experts believe that 95% of all information is still transmitted using paper.

- The average American gets 49,060 pieces of mail in a lifetime, one-third of it junk.

The Direct Marketing Association Mail Preference Service is designed to assist in decreasing the amount of unwanted national non-profit or commercial mail you receive. If you'd like to receive less advertising mail at home, visit

[">http://www.the-dma.org/consumers/consumerassistance.html.](http://www.the-dma.org/consumers/consumerassistance.html)

- 80% of filed papers are never referenced again; 50% of all filed materials are duplicates or expired information.

- 60% of materials going to storage have no retention value and should have been destroyed at the office level. In case you missed National Clear Off Your Desk Day on January 14, you have another crack at it! February is National Archive Your Files Month. Contact me at orgcoach@gte.net if you'd like assistance.

LETTING GO OF CLOTHES

We wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time.

Recently I had a conversation with a client about letting go of old clothes. She had decided to get rid of everything that no longer fit her. Once she got started, she also decided to get rid of old shoes, handbags, and accessories that she never wore. Although it was difficult to let go of things she had paid so much money for -- especially if they were in good condition -- she began to feel relief as she cleared from her closet the things she had not made use of in years.

Hanging onto clothes we no longer use can have hidden costs. For example, keeping clothes that are too small can become a subtle form of punishment for not losing that last few pounds. Keeping clothes because you paid so much for them

can be another form of punishment. And hanging onto clothes that have sentimental value can keep your energy stuck in the past instead of making that energy available for you to use in the present. In addition, it's difficult to see the things we like when the closet is stuffed with things we don't like or can no longer wear. I always chuckle when someone opens a closet teeming with an overabundance of clothing, and exclaims, I just don't have anything to wear!

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you go through your closet:

- Does it fit? If not, what are the chances you'll wear it?
- Does it need to be repaired or cleaned before you can wear it? If so, either do it or get rid of it!
- If it requires something to go with it (a skirt, shirt, pants, etc.), do you have something that matches? If not, either buy what you need to wear with it, or get rid of it!
- Do you feel good about yourself when you wear this?
- Is it comfortable?
- Does this clothing represent who you are at this time in your life?
- If you have not worn it in the past year, what is the benefit of keeping it? If you decide to keep something for sentimental reasons and you don't plan to wear it, consider storing it somewhere else.

As you consider these questions, challenge yourself to begin letting go of the clothes that no longer serve you. If you're concerned about what it cost and it's still in good condition and in style, sell it through a consignment shop. Another alternative is to donate your clothing to a non-profit organization and take the tax deduction for the in-kind contribution. There are plenty of men and women in who could use the clothing you no longer need. Visit <http://www.orgcoach.net/taxdeduction.html> to find links to a number of non-profit organizations that take such donations.

A friend told me about a group of women who get together once a year in a friend's home for a boutique party. They go through their closets, bring their unwanted clothes to the party host's house, and make piles of shirts, skirts, dresses, pants, jackets, accessories, etc. They spend the first hour trying on the clothing and socializing. Then they draw numbers. The person who draws #1 gets first pick, #2 gets second pick, etc. Once everyone has picked the clothes they like, the leftover clothing is donated to a women's shelter. It's a great way to connect with friends, get new clothes without spending any money, and donate to others in need.

What's cluttering up your life? Whatever it is, it's

zapping your precious time, energy, thoughts, and space and it doesn't have to. There's no time like the present to let go of those things that no longer serve you to hold on to.

CERTIFICATES NOW AVAILABLE! Do you have a friend, colleague, or loved one who would like help to de-clutter their life? I offer gift certificates that can be redeemed for products and services. Visit my Company Store for some ideas, or contact me at orgcoach@gte.net to ask about special package prices for combined products and services. Mention that you read this newsletter and you'll get a 10% discount on each gift certificate you purchase between now and Valentine's Day.

SETTLE FOR MORE -- WORK WITH A COACH! Here are some of the benefits:

- Clarify your priorities
- Review of what is working and what is not so you can make adjustments
- Create weekly action plans to keep you "on purpose" and moving forward with intention
- Hear yourself think (through reflective listening) and gain clarity about what you choose
- Get encouragement and support when you feel discouraged
- Sort out your options when you feel stuck or not at choice
- Brainstorm and bounce ideas off of someone who is not attached to the outcome
- Build in accountability, without judgment, for following through with your intentions

My connections with the coaching community provide me with knowledge about areas of expertise held by many trained coaches. If my coaching style or areas of expertise are not a good fit for you, I can provide names of other certified coaches for you to talk with. We get what we settle for. It's never too late -- or too early -- to settle for more. When you are ready to settle for more -- professionally or personally -- [click here](#) to request your complimentary sample coaching session.

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN HELP

- Create a system to manage paper-based and electronic information so you can find it in 5 seconds or less -- guaranteed!
- Create a tickler file system to help you remember what requires action and when
- Time management -- learn how to better manage your time to focus on what matters most

[Click here](#) to view Q&A about coaching.
[Click here](#) to read client feedback about coaching with me.
Read the December 2000 Working Woman magazine article about Kathy and her client.

Our web site has received the Internet Clinic Award, based on the following criteria:
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[Click below](#) to read more about this award.

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Calculate what disorganization costs you or your company.

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Read about our Paper Tiger Productivity Quick Start program.

Consider donating items you no longer need -- an old

computer, cell phone,

children's shoes and coats, clothing and household items, or

even a car -- and get a

valuable tax deduction in the process. Click here for more

information.

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To help busy executives, professionals and entrepreneurs

de-clutter their schedules, spaces, and minds

so they can focus on what is most important.

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Kathy Paaug, a certified business/personal coach and

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E-mail your comments, questions, and suggestions for future

newsletter content to me. I'd love to hear your

thoughts! Warm regards,

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