



News Column for Week of February 4, 2019

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### Dealing With Our Stuff

We Americans accumulate assets – ‘stuff.’ For some of us, it has been a lifetime spent in the accumulation process. No matter if we have collected on our own, joined households, or have incorporated things from other family members, our ‘stuff’ can get out of hand.

Have no fear, February is ‘Declutter for a Cause’ month. Yes, it may sound a little cheesy. Yet, when you think about it, what better month to do an intentional deep-down house cleaning? Christmas is past and the company stream may be slowed to a trickle. The weather hasn’t been conducive for early Spring activity outside, or for much of anything for that matter. So let’s get to it!

If the closets and drawers are brimming, or piles of papers and things are creeping in on the pathways of your normal living areas, that’s a good sign it’s time to take control. If you frequently hear the phrase “I can’t find it” ringing through your house, there’s good cause to start some downsizing.

Finding a ‘cause’ such as a charity might not be incentive enough to kick-off the declutter process. However, if you consider the wasted time looking for something, or more importantly, clearing out areas to reduce the chances for a fall should be cause enough to get started.

How do we begin the declutter process? Start small – a cabinet, some drawers, that pile in the corner, or a closet. We may have some lofty goals to dig in and work through a whole section of the house at one time. However, that can be overwhelming and discouraging when we can’t complete the process in a timely manner and interruptions come along.

Starting small allows the opportunity to see a small job to its completion. We can take a breather, celebrate that task being done, and then move on to the next area with a little more motivation.

Have some boxes handy to help in the sorting process – a ‘keep’ box, a ‘storage’ box, a ‘give away/sell’ box and a ‘throw away’ box. Items used regularly go in the ‘keep’ box. Seasonal items may be stored away. Items that are broken, ripped, or stained go in the ‘throw away’ box.

As you proceed, you will probably run across duplicates. Ask yourself how many duplicates do I really need? Items that still have value and are in good shape could be good contenders for the ‘give away/sell’ box. Be careful with this box. It’s important to have in mind an outlet such as a charity or consignment shop that will take these items. Otherwise, they may remain as clutter in the house.

Have a purposeful thought process as you go through the declutter process. Thoughts such as ‘Just in case,’ ‘Someone may want that someday,’ or ‘I don’t know what to do with it,’ may have gotten you to the state where you are today with your clutter. However, time is on your side. If you have saved it for quite a while and not used it, then maybe it’s time for it to find a new home.

Things that mean something to us may not hold the same meaning to others. Encourage family members to help in the sorting process. They may see what part they have played in the accumulation. It could be fun. Some old memories may be rekindled. Along the way, you may learn what among your things are important to them and may give clarity on what really needs to be kept.

If there are items you don’t know what to do with, then consider adding a ‘maybe’ box. Those items can temporarily go in this box. Go through this box one more time at the end of your sorting process and place them in the other boxes.

Once finished with an area, consider if some reorganization needs to be done before replacing items. Could there be some baskets, shelves or hooks installed that would make better use of the space?

While this article has primarily focused on areas within the house, this same approach can be applied to those outer areas such as garages, shops and larger storage areas. Typically, those areas store our larger ‘stuff’. Just because it’s larger doesn’t mean it’s place within our possessions shouldn’t be revisited from time to time.

More information on clutter control is available through K-State Research and Extension Southwind offices, and by contacting Barbara at 620-625-8620 or by email to [bstockeb@ksu.edu](mailto:bstockeb@ksu.edu)