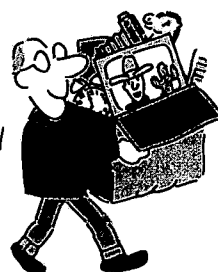


Rid Your House of Memory Clutter

Peter Walsh

Don't Let Stuff from the Past Mess Up the Present



Some people fill their homes with memories, packing room after room with objects that have some connection to their past but no purpose in the present.

There's nothing wrong with saving a few mementos that recall people we have loved or victories we have achieved. But too much "memory clutter" can interfere with the enjoyment of our lives and our homes.

Examples: Your guest bedroom is so full of boxes of children's clothes that your now-grown children can't sleep there when they visit...or you dislike your living room furniture but continue to use it because you inherited it from your grandmother.

Here's how to get rid of memory clutter...

POWER OF THE PAST

Objects have power, and those linked to important events and people from our past have more power than most. Some of us unconsciously fear that if we dispose of these possessions, we also will lose the memories that we associate with them. These could include memories of grown children...deceased relatives...or long-ago accomplishments.

Occasionally, we keep objects from our past not because they are linked to our memories but because they are linked to our dreams. Getting rid of such things can feel like we are surrendering these dreams.

Example: A man in his 50s still has all of his college textbooks and term papers. He studied English in college and hoped to become a novelist but instead ended up in real estate. The college coursework is all he has to connect

himself to the world of writing. Throwing it away would mean confronting the fact that he never will be a writer.

Objects inherited from people important to us often are saved even when these objects are unloved and unused. Heirs feel that they have been entrusted with inherited possessions and that disposing of them would represent a violation of this trust.

Example: A woman kept all of her departed grandmother's possessions in a storage unit for 26 years.

CLEAR YOUR THINKING

Attempts to remove memory clutter from a home often fail. Though home owners might resolve time and again to get rid of these things, the memories and emotions come flooding back as soon as the old boxes are opened. Faced with these strong feelings, they can't follow through.

We must adjust the way we think before attempting to clear away memory clutter. Rather than focus on the objects themselves, focus on the space that they occupy...

Stand outside the room in your home that is most filled with memory clutter.

Imagine the role that you would like this room to serve in your life.

Think of a few words that best ►

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►► describe what you want from the room. With a master bedroom, these words might include "peaceful" or "intimate." With a basement, they might include "exercise space" or "workshop."

□ Step into the room, and remove anything that does not help you achieve this vision. *Example:* If the boxes of mementos in your basement take up the space that you would like to use as a workshop, those boxes must go. If there's heavy furniture you want to get rid of, put a "stickie" on it and arrange for it to be removed from the room later.

□ Repeat this process with each room in your home.

PICK AND CHOOSE

Think about the person, event or accomplishment that these objects recall, then sort through the clutter in search of the one or two items that best represent this to you. The items that you select should put a smile on your face and make your heart sing. It could be an old chest that your father refinished or your mother's favorite china. If an object rekindles problems from the past, save something else instead.

If you have numerous small items, mount the ones that you have selected in a shadow box—a type of picture frame that is deep enough to hold objects, not just photos. Shadow boxes can be purchased almost anywhere that picture frames are sold. Hang the resulting display on a wall in your home where you will see it every day. If your memory clutter involves mementos from more than one person or event, repeat this process with a new shadow box for each.

Example: A woman's fondest memories of her grandmother were of the time they spent cooking together. From among the many possessions that she inherited, she chose a few recipe cards written in her grandmother's handwriting...and two kitchen tools that she could picture in her grandmother's hands. The woman mounted these objects together in a shadow box and hung it in her kitchen. It makes her smile each time she sees it.

Displaying one or two objects in a prominent place in your home honors and preserves your treasured memories far better than keeping a great number

of items in your basement or attic ever could. This can free you to get rid of the rest of your memory clutter without feeling that you are throwing away a treasured memory or dishonoring a departed loved one.

GIVING IT AWAY

For objects that you would like to give away, contact relatives and friends who might have fond memories of their own related to your memory clutter. Ask these people if they would like the mementos. It often is psychologically easier to give such things away to others who will value them than it is to dispose of them in some other way.

Examples: Your siblings or grown children might value objects that have been in your family for generations... old friends might want mementos related to the experiences that you shared with them.

When others express interest in taking some memory clutter, schedule a date when you will drop it off or they'll come to pick it up. Otherwise, you might be forced to hang on to this clutter for months on their behalf.

Offering family-related items to relatives before disposing of them frees you from any need to feel personally responsible for failing to preserve these things for future generations. Your relatives' decisions not to take these items into their own homes are tantamount to a family-wide agreement that they were not worth saving.

If your memory clutter includes antiques, collectibles or other objects that have monetary value but that you do not like, sell these things and spend the money on something that you will enjoy. Doing this does not dishonor the person or event associated with the original item—it actually preserves the memory. You will be reminded of the person or event whenever you use the new possession. Alternatively, you could spend the money on an experience that you will remember fondly.

Example: Two brothers sold the furniture they inherited from their mother and spent the proceeds on dinner at a fancy restaurant on the anniversary of her death. They shared stories about their mother all evening. The dinner is a memory that they still treasure. ■■