



Spring Clean Your Life: Five Ways to Clear the Clutter!

The flowers and trees are blooming and everyone is sneezing. It must be spring. Spring is a season of rebirth and change – and also lots of scrubbing, dusting and washing, otherwise known as spring cleaning. If you are feeling overwhelmed by stacks of who knows what - the stuff clogging your closet, or the mess you try to sweep under the rug – it may be time to look at your level of clutter – in your home and in your mind.

The clutter we're retaining in our life can be stifling our motivation and inspiration. Removing the useless junk surrounding us can actually improve our outlook and reduce stress and anxiety. The physical exercise can bring with it mental and physical health benefits as well.

The toughest part is finding where to begin. I suggest first defining your "clutter" and then start the attack. Is clutter a stack of useless magazines, out of fashion shoes, inherited furniture or old and broken toys? What does this clutter represent? Is it self-doubt, shame or a giant barrier to achieving your goals? Clutter can actually cause a suffocating feeling. Not only does it cause embarrassment and keep us from socializing at home, it can rob us of our dreams. Therefore, anything that does not add value to our life is clutter.

Here are five true or false questions to help assess your clutter control:

1 True or False: I have at least one broken item lying around.

Tip: Fix it or chuck it

You know that broken lamp, the lawn mower that still needs a part, or that old dust buster that is obviously busted? These are all little nuisances that, when not addressed, cause more clutter to our lives and homes. We often hold on to broken items in hopes they will simply become workable on their own. This can be true of bad relationships and environments as well. We don't want to toss them because they have value – when they work. Broken things do not fix themselves. If it's not honestly fixable and it is not adding value, allow yourself to remove it from your life.

2 True or False: I can get organized if I absolutely HAVE to.

Tip: Pretend you are planning for a party

Remember the last time you were getting ready to move, or important guests were coming over? You really got in gear to clean up the house because you knew you *had* to. Why not attack your de-cluttering exercise as if you were opening your

home for an important party? Get into gear and make it shine. Doing so is a “mind choice,” not a “mood choice,” and you have the ability to control this. In the end, you will have a clutter-free home to enjoy just for yourself and your family! You are your most important dignitary and you deserve it.

3 True or False: Wealthy people accumulate more things.

Tip: Think Green - Eliminate the excess and replace with real rewards

You do not have to be wealthy to collect more stuff than you need. And, having more stuff does not mean you are more successful. Our happiest times, times of pure glee or total fulfillment, are not comprised of days collecting items that eventually turn into clutter. They are those important life events when we are surrounded by the people we love. Be involved in your relationships and collect memories, not meaningless stuff. Try moving from an emphasis on materialism and consumption to a focus on personal needs and personal relationships that truly matter.

4 True or False: My closet is like my diary.

Tip: Separate your story from your stuff

When you separate your story from your stuff, it allows you the emotional and literal space to let go and grow. Accept that things do not define you and that items are things, not memories. Some people are hesitant to clear out a closet, or garage or even their house because they feel their stuff represents who they are as a person. Look in your closet. Is it full of unworn pieces that have some emotional or historical meaning? If you still have a paisley vest given by a college boyfriend and you are far from graduation or you have furniture left to you that doesn't fit in your home, you may need to set it free. Give them to someone who can truly use them.

#5 True or False: My to-do list keeps me up at night

Tip: Let your bedroom be a tranquil and peaceful retreat. Remove any work-related items from your sleeping space.

De-cluttering is especially important in your bedroom. It is estimated that over 70 million Americans suffer from insomnia or other sleep disorders. Stress is a major contributing factor to these disorders so eliminating clutter around your bed can help to remove the reminders of things you need to do.

If you find you are unable to tackle your clutter or other things that are keeping you from attaining your life goals, it may be because of other underlying issues. Depression and addictions, for example, can keep people locked in a life of immobility and separation from reality. Speaking with a professional can help you tear down the barriers to good emotional health. Centerstone can help.

About Centerstone

Centerstone, a not-for-profit organization, has provided a wide range of mental health and addiction services to people of all ages for more than 50 years. Through more than 60 facilities and 170 partnership locations across Middle Tennessee, Centerstone serves more than 50,000 children, adolescents, adults and seniors each year. Centerstone is accredited by The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). For more information about Centerstone, please call 888-291-4357 or visit www.centerstone.org.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.