Live Simpler

"This year I'll get organized."

If you've ever declared this, you're far from alone. Every January 1 this resolution makes the top 10. But like a lot of resolutions, it's discarded by March and forgotten until next year.

By **Cindy Kalinoski**

So, really, what's wrong with being disorganized? For starters, on average Americans waste almost an hour every day looking for things we know we own but cannot find. We buy things we already have because it's easier than rooting through all of our stuff to see if we have any. About 25 percent of us can't park even a single car in our two-car garages. Equally important, clutter can discourage and derail us, slowing us down as we go through our day. To discover what's at the root of our possession obsession – and for tips on how to tackle the problem – we spoke with several professional organizers in the region.

Colleen McDonnell of Set Me Free! in Harrisburg says it's helpful to understand the difference between mess and clutter. "A messy house is a house where everything has a place, but it doesn't always get there," says McDonnell. "Clutter is a bunch of unmade decisions. With clutter you haven't assigned a place for it; you haven't made a decision."

If even thinking about those decisions makes you cringe, you might consider bringing in a pro. Vali Heist of The Clutter Crew, Mohnton, notes that emotional attachment makes it hard for people to part with their things, even if they know it's time. She doesn't tell people to get rid of their belongings – that's their choice – but says it's important to think through the reasons for keeping them. To help clients do this, Heist asks several questions: Where did you get it? Does it have meaning to you? When is the last time you used it? Having to justify keeping an item in front of a professional organizer just might give you the extra strength to let go of an item you no longer need.

Heist respects her clients' decisions but reminds them of the consequences of keeping things: "It's no big deal if you don't get rid of them, but you are going to have to dust them, clean them, wash them, store them. Whatever people choose to keep, I want them to honor that: keeping your grandmother's hand-painted china in the attic makes no sense. If it evokes a good memory, it should be out."

"Most people crave organization, but they don't know how to take it to the best level," observes Jeff Orr of Mechanicsburg's California Closets. "There has to be a plan. There's a huge difference between cleaning out a garage and organizing a garage. Often people get so frustrated and exhausted by the cleaning out that they never take the step to organize. Then the clutter creeps back in because there is no plan."

For "eBay worthy" items clients are ready to shed, The Clutter Crew will sell items online, handling the whole transaction, from pricing and photographs to shipping and feedback. This goes for anything of value, whether it's new clothes with the tags still on or antique lamps. One client was closing a floral store, another switching from traditional scrapbooking to digital scrapbooking. For these types of transitions, as well as for those who are downsizing, an eBay service can be ideal. "I send 15 checks a month to 15 clients for stuff they didn't want anyway," comments Heist.

If you hire help, such as organizers or services like Premier Garage, Dillsburg, you might try tackling a big challenge where your efforts will show immediately, such as that space where your car should go.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

Your New Front Door

Premier Garage's Mike Mincemoyer says the garage is often the most cluttered and underused room in the home. It's also your new front door. Mike points out, "Only the UPS and the Fed Ex guy go to your front door. Most of us come in through the garage. That's why redoing the garage can change the way you feel when you get home." He observes, "After we finish a garage, the homeowners don't get discouraged every time they pull back into their garage. Plus they don't mind having the garage door open."

When Mincemoyer talks about "finishing a garage" he's not talking about just organizing. A garage can be transformed into an extra, functional room. "It opens up a new venue," says Mincemoyer. "It really transforms what the

Most of us come in through the garage. That's why redoing the garage can change the way you feel when you get home.

garage is. It's not just about parking the cars; it's a space you use for special events." Also, like most improvements, it adds value when it's time to sell your home.

To keep your garage uncluttered, refrain from storing bulky or seasonal items around the perimeter. They limit your use of the space, so use the area above the garage door, where things will be out of the way – and out of sight. Removing visible clutter is the first step to streamlining, and maximizing the storage space you already have can make a huge difference. This goes for every room in your home, but especially for those that have closets.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

Say Goodbye to Denial, Regret and Guilt

If the only good thing about your closet is that you can close the door – or if you can't close the door – it's time to look at some new options. Expert Jeff Orr of California Closets says it's not about needing more space. "Most people's biggest problem is that they're not utilizing the space they have...often people think they need to tear down a wall, but if we get to them before they do that, we can make the solution meet their needs before they go to that time and expense."

"We should have 'happy closets' and not store denial, regret and guilt in them.

Another issue is that closets tend to accumulate items that don't belong in them. Orr recommends periodically purging closets of things that should not be stored there. For example, your linen closet may be catching the overflow from the medicine cabinet, or the growing collection of magazines in your closet might be crowding out your sweaters. It's important to think through how you're going to use a space and then stick to that use.

McDonnell says, "We should have 'happy closets' and not store denial, regret and guilt in them." Denial, she explains, is that pair of pants you last fit into before your (first) pregnancy, regret is the suit that looked good on you only in that expensive store, and guilt is the peach vest your aunt knit that makes you look pale and tired. "Is that the way you want to remember your aunt?" queries McDonnell.

As far as what belongs in which closet, it all depends on your lifestyle. The woman with 300 pairs of shoes will have a different set of needs than the guy with 100 golf shirts. Besides, lifestyles change. A new career, marriage, children, retirement...all of these developments can mean it's time to take a new look at how you use your closets. Similarly, if you decide to use a room in a different way – say, for a home office – you should first think through your plan.

Paper: Not Your New Best Friend

"Home offices are breeding grounds for papers," says McDonnell. "If you don't have a place for the papers, you can't find what you need, and that adds stress to your daily life." The answer, she says, is a

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

good filing system, with shredding and maintenance built in. Find a system that works for you and keep it current or hire someone to organize one for you.

Protect Your Prime Real Estate

When it comes to incoming papers, Heist urges, "If something takes less than 60 seconds, like going through your mail, do it now." She notes that most of what we get in the mail we never requested and advises, "Don't clutter up your house, your mind or your life with something people sent you that you never asked for."

Even if something is not officially clutter, being selective about what deserves to be out or easily accessible is key, especially in the kitchen. Classify items into those you need every day, those you use fairly often, and those you rarely use. "If you use your bread maker once a year, that's a huge piece of equipment," says McDonnell. "You have to keep these items out of the prime real estate."

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©

For non-refrigerated foods, small baskets or other organizers can work well. Use plastic containers that are see-through. Even better, use square, stackable containers, since they take up less room. Don't forget to check canned and boxed goods for dates: out with the expired, in with the fresh.

Empower Yourself

Once you have organized one area of your home, it can be invigorating. You'll find yourself itching to work on other rooms, making improvements that allow you to clean more easily, focus better, and be energized by your environment. And if you're concerned you might regret streamlining your belongings, Heist concludes, "I've never had anybody call and say 'I should never have gotten rid of that.' Never."

> Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.
>
> *-William Morris, 19th century designer*
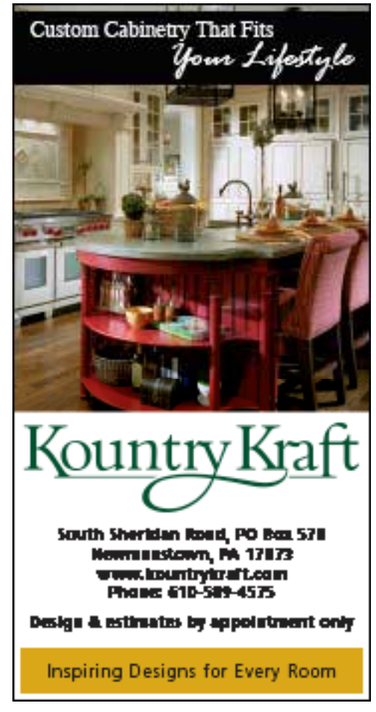
PHOTO COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA CLOSETS ©