

Homes & Real Estate

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Decluttering benefits our homes and ourselves

Because decluttering is so difficult for many of us, personal organization has become a thriving industry, with professional coaches and countless books and websites. But here are some things that you can do now.

By Tom Watson

Special to NWhomes

Organizing and decluttering our home rewards us with a storage locker full of mental and environmental benefits.

Because it's so difficult for many of us, however, personal organization has become a thriving industry, replete with professional coaches and countless books and websites.

Without hiring someone to do it, what would it take for us to really go for it this spring — to get rid of what we don't need and organize what we want to keep?

First, we need to find our motivation. Then we need to start somewhere, anywhere.

Reasons to purge

Overconsumption greatly contributes to climate change. Our collective carbon footprint, which includes those unneeded items in our homes, has an impact on extreme weather, drought, rising seas and ocean acidification.

While it may seem daunting, taking individual action to organize and reduce is one of the easiest first steps we can take to help the environment. The personal benefits go hand in hand.

In her inspiring 2013 book, "Living Simple, Free & Happy," waste-reduction expert Cristin Frank describes how simplifying your life directly correlates to greater personal fulfillment and self-confidence.

"Clutter is evidence of excess," Frank writes. "By reducing clutter in our homes, we eliminate drains on our time, health and emotions."

If money gets your attention, consider this: The average home contains "\$5,000 worth of unused and unwanted stuff," according to Frank's estimate, based on her own experience and research. That's your household's potential revenue from selling what you don't need.

Picking your battles

Your quest for organization will go more smoothly if you get early buy-in and support from everyone in your home. Convincing your partner, children or housemates works best if you set an

example yourself.

Start with the easiest chore that satisfies your main reason for action. For example, if you've wanted to get rid of those countless boxes of old paper files, find a community shredding event near you.

The state Attorney General's Office lists more than 30 free upcoming shredding events in Western Washington at atg.wa.gov/shredathon.aspx. Put a nearby event on your calendar, and start purging your files today.

If quick money is a goal, gather up large items you haven't used in more than a year, such as bicycles and exercise equipment. Do you really need a backup sewing machine when you barely use your primary one? Drag it out of the basement and let someone else use it.

As a money-saving strategy, choose a decluttering project that doesn't require spending money. For some projects, you may need to invest in new storage containers, but can avoid that by simply reusing existing containers that are now empty from your purging.

Moving it out

To get the most money for excess stuff of value, Frank suggests using Craigslist, eBay or specialized websites. For selling a wedding dress, for example, try oncewed.com or woreitonce.com.

Reach an additional audience with free online newspaper classified ads at The Seattle Times and elsewhere.

When selling books, CDs, DVDs and video games, Frank recommends using Half.com and Amazon.com. Check out the many consignment stores in the Seattle area if you're not comfortable selling online, or for larger items such as furniture.

Donating to nonprofits that operate or partner with thrift stores is a convenient, rewarding way to support organizations that you care about.

Paper, metal and most types of plastic and glass containers should be recycled in your home recycling cart. Check your recycling program's online or printed information for details. Some recyclables such as large plastic bottles and containers can be creatively reused as storage containers.

Organizing will never be our No. 1 priority, and it shouldn't be. But we can't just ignore it, either. If you can start an organizational project this week and then develop a plan to make decluttering a regular part of your life, you won't regret it.

Tom Watson is project manager for King County's Recycling and Environmental Services, and EcoConsumer is his biweekly column. He can be reached at tom.watson@kingcounty.gov, 206-477-4481 or via KCecoconsumer.com.



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