

Notebook - Nobody Wants Your Sh*t: The Art of Decluttering Before You Die

Condo, Messie

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They say clutter is nothing but delayed decisions. Delay long enough, and someone else will have to make those decisions.

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I maintain that, first and foremost, your home should be your happy place. Everything in it should light you up. Death cleaning invites you to go one step further. It makes you ask yourself not only “Does this make me happy?” but also “What happens to it when I’m gone?”

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The bottom line is, your house isn’t a fucking storage unit, and you’re not just waiting around to die. You’re living. In your home. So why not make the most of the time and the space you have while you have it?

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I gave him fair warning: deal with it yourself, or else the minute you’re gone, I open the doors and put up a “free to good home” sign.

Note:

This is what Amanda (and possibly Cindy) need to prepare to say to someone...

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In American culture, our worth as human beings often gets tied up in how busy and productive we are. So we pack our schedules to the brim until our default setting becomes “I don’t have time for that.” Talk about bullshit. First of all, we don’t have to do a damn thing to be of value. And second, we find time for the things that are important to us. If you’ve picked up this book, getting your shit together is somewhere on that list. Time to move it to the top. Don’t get me wrong—you are absolutely entitled to sit on your ass, eating Goldfish crackers and watching Real Housewives. This world is a lot, and it’d be a hell of a lot better if we all took the time we need to decompress. But if you have time to watch the live creation of internet memes, you have time to declutter. And between the two, a clutter-free space is probably better for your mental health in the long run.

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How much stuff are you holding onto because you feel too guilty to get rid of it? The answer is too fucking much.

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you need a house that isn’t bursting at the seams with stuff that makes you say “ugh” or makes

| your heirs want to spit on your grave.

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| Ever look at something you know you don't actually want, need, or use that's taking up perfectly good space in your house and immediately think, but I spent good money on that? Me too. And I'm here to tell you, that's not a reason to keep it.

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| Study after study shows that a clean, clutter-free space pays dividends for your mental health.

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| A thing is not a memory. It's just a thing. If you can remember the joy of driving your first car without the damn thing rusting in your garage, you can remember the way your baby daughter looked in her pink gingham dress without keeping it in mothballs in your attic.

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| If you really need the visual, take a quick pic with your phone before decluttering something sentimental. Create a "memories" folder on your phone and get nostalgic whenever the mood strikes. Or whenever your photos app decides to trigger you with surprise slideshows. That's always fun.

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| We collect stuff for every stage of our lives, but we don't declutter at the same pace.

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| We hold onto things that reflect who we are, even long after we've outgrown them physically and emotionally.

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It helps that you don't have room for two dining-room tables. (If you get new stuff and put the old stuff in storage, that's a whole other problem.)

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There are a lot of reasons we hold onto shit we don't need, but one of the most pernicious is the comfort we get from being surrounded by all of it.

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Stop holding onto shit that no longer serves you.

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At some point, you have to face the fact that the anxiety your clutter is causing you vastly outweighs any comfort you derive from it.

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Rock that elegant minimalism. Or go full HGTV with the quirky finishes and cowhide rugs. Whatever floats your stylishly decorated boat. The point is to take control of the situation. This is your home. You get to decide what it looks like. But that means actually being intentional about what stays and what goes until it feels homey to you. And staying the hell away from the shops in the meantime. You do not need one more fucking candle.

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We want the easy solution, the quick fix. But there's no quick fix for decluttering a lifetime's worth of furniture, clothing, memories, and miscellaneous crap.

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The percentage of things you'll regret tossing is absolutely dwarfed by the relief you'll feel every time you unload something you don't need and free up space in your home.

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Every item needs to earn its keep. Does it make you happy? Do you use it? Does it fit into your life? If you're on the fence, it's out the door.

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Getting rid of shit you don't want, need, or use isn't wasteful. Letting it take up space in your home or keeping it when someone else could be using it is.

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Your color-coordinated storage bins are bullshit Organizing your clutter is not the same thing as decluttering. And throwing shit in bins isn't either. Sure, it looks nicer. But the relief you feel at seeing all that stuff neatly hidden away is just another clue that it's irking you and needs to be dealt with.

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Decluttering comes first. Organization, second. Don't organize a damn thing until you decide what items have earned a place in your home.

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That's why you need to check in with your loved ones regularly and make sure you're on the same page about anything you're thinking of bequeathing to them.

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The idea of leaving something that's important to you behind for the next generation is sweet but woefully misguided. That thing is important to you. There's no guarantee that it's going to be important to your family. They certainly don't want to be guilted into keeping it because you left it to them on your deathbed. Instead of willing things away like a mysterious great-uncle, talk to your family now.

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YOU WON'T MISS WHAT YOU HAVEN'T LAID EYES ON IN YEARS This one's actually kind of a lie.

When you open up a box full of stuff you haven't seen in two years, what's the first thing you do? You exclaim, "Oh, I forgot about this!" Suddenly you can't live without it—even though you put it in that box because you decided you could live without it, and you have successfully lived without it for two years. When it comes to our crap, we seem to adhere to two contrasting clichés simultaneously: "out of sight, out of mind" and "absence makes the heart grow fonder." When you open the box, you suddenly miss what you didn't remember existed five minutes ago. It's new and nostalgic all at once. That box is the Schrödinger's cat of personal belongings. It's both wanted and unwanted, junk and prized possession. When you filled it, you were sure everything in it was bound for the thrift store. But you didn't take it to the thrift store, did you? You threw it in the basement or drove around with it in the trunk of your car, just in case.

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As you investigate each object, you'll find yourself feeling more and more grateful for a life well lived. You don't need to hold onto your stuff to hold onto that feeling. By decluttering from a place of appreciation, you free yourself from the hold your stuff has over you. Now, living firmly in the present, you start to create your happy place. (Hint: It probably doesn't include Grandpa's sad clown art. Your kids will thank you to throw that shit out.)

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Fully committing to getting your shit together once and for all is the only way to get the job done.

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you have to stop and ask yourself whether the things you've bought and surrounded yourself with are actually making you happy.

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you don't need to surround yourself with stuff to be happy. You could have a three-story mansion with room for the contents of an entire fucking Target and still be miserable. Creating your happy place requires being more selective with your stuff. In other words—you guessed it—decluttering. And by the time you hit happy, you'll probably have nixed a lot of the crap you'd have passed down to unsuspecting successors.

if you do this death-cleaning thing right, you're probably watching hundreds of dollars' worth of your stuff walk out the door. And some of it's good stuff. So why not sell it? Because it's an annoying time suck, that's why not. And it probably isn't worth as much as you think it is.

Some lucky people get less sentimental as the years pass. That's great for them, and it's good for you if you find yourself able to nonchalantly toss treasured possessions later in life.

Note:

Yay for me!

If it brings a smile to my face when I see it or use it, it's a keeper. That's a purposely lofty metric, though, meant to help you create your happy place. When you're death cleaning, you're trying to create an intentional space. Happy, yes. But also purposeful. Your criteria need to be a little more rigorous. A few to consider: Have you used the item in the last six months? (This is a yes-or-no question, and the nos get tossed.) Will you use it in the next six months? (If you think "maybe" is an acceptable answer, you haven't been paying attention. Maybes get tossed.) Are you keeping it to make someone else happy? (Sweet, but no.) Are you saving it for someone? (They get it now, or they don't get it at all. And no guilting them into it.) I saved the best for last: Would I keep this if I were moving and couldn't hire help?

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If you like your criteria to have a little more kick, this one's for you: use it or lose it. You've got to have pretty big "fuck it" muscles for this one, but it applies to every object in your house, skips right over emotional attachment, and makes quick work of decluttering decisions. It also works a treat on stagnant hobbies. We prioritize what's important to us. Put another way: if you wanted to, you would have.

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Imagine you win a remote island villa (the grown-up version of being stranded on a desert island) and can only take your favorite things. What just popped into your head? Because something definitely did. Make a quick list of things like that—the things that you can't live without. Do not spend more than three minutes on your list. The more you think about it, the more shit you'll add to the list. This is about learning to listen to your gut.

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Maybe you're hanging onto Grandma's dishes out of obligation. And you're lining your bookshelves with crap you don't want to read to impress people whose opinions don't matter. (They really don't, so you can ditch the Tolstoy.)

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your kids will be far more interested in the things that made you happy than in the things you felt obligated to keep.

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MEMORY LANE IS A DEAD-END STREET When you're just getting started and still building that momentum, you want to avoid sentimental landmines. Those fuckers can blow up all your decluttering progress. Not only are nostalgic items a time suck, they also destroy all your decision-making mojo. Next thing you know, four hours have gone by, and all you've accomplished is giving yourself secondhand embarrassment by flipping through photos and journals from your angsty teenage years.*

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Mementos can bring up a lot of emotions, not all of them happy. It's OK to take breaks or circle

back to things you're not ready to deal with.

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Photos are some of the worst offenders here. At least in the old days, when you had to pay for film, you were a lot less likely to take hundreds of pictures of your sleeping cat. (Guilty.) So the photos you have to sort through probably hold some pretty great memories and frameable moments. But what fucking good are they doing stuffed in plastic storage bins? Time to dig them out and make some sense of that mess.

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You can't stop time by clinging to all your crap.

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So, you're looking forward to the day you can pass down your collection of Revolutionary War miniatures to your kids. Do they know that? Do they seem excited by the prospect? Or do they avoid eye contact? Never assume that someone is cool with being on the receiving end of your death-cleaning spree.

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Accept where you are in life. Appreciate your body for putting up with your shit.* Wear clothes that celebrate it, and ditch the stuff that doesn't. Opening your dresser drawers every day and seeing jeans that make you feel bad about yourself is not a worthwhile use of your energy or space.

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DECOR You shouldn't need a storage unit for seasonal decor If you're the type of person who goes all out for every season and holiday, with interior touches and exterior displays, then I applaud you. You're a far less lazy person than I am. But how many seasonal decorations do you fucking need? I say this with love because my mom is one of those people. She has an incredible knack for making everything beautiful and homey, adding seasonal touches to every room until the house looks like something out of a Hallmark movie. The woman could have her own HGTV show. And it's something she loves to do. It also takes time, energy, and a shit-ton of space. I'm talking bins and

bins and bins of seasonal decorations.

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The goal for seasonal decor is the same as the goal for everything else: to have a curated collection of the things you love.

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STORAGE AREAS If you can't fit a car in your garage, you have missed the point. Attics, basements, garages, and storage units are prime locations for lazy clutter—the kind you allow to take up space because it's not in your direct eyeline, nagging you. Just because you have the space to store something doesn't mean you should. If it's in a box and it's not holiday decorations, you probably haven't laid eyes on it in years. "Out of sight, out of mind" is not an effective mantra for death cleaning.

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Decluttering means taking stock of every object in your house and deciding whether it's earning its keep.

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Attics and basements are for ghosts and pool tables, not seventh-grade participation trophies. Declutter accordingly. Storage units are an expensive cry for help. Storage units are the new drugstores—they're on every corner.

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Storage units should never be a permanent solution. Instead, they should be a way station on your decluttering journey.

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Doom boxes are some of the most befuddling bits of clutter because they're often the result of decluttering. They contain the leftover bits and bobs that defy organization, plus the crap you just

didn't feel like dealing with. But the time has come to face your clutter demons. Start by putting away anything that actually does have a home and ended up in the box out of sheer laziness. Then throw out anything that doesn't work,

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You shouldn't be able to supply an Office Depot from your home office. The older you are, the more likely you are to have a treasure trove of office supplies in the form of printer cables, disks, and mouse pads you haven't needed since the dawn of the twenty-first century.

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According to experts, that bottle of ibuprofen is good for a few years after its expiration date. But some meds, especially those in liquid form, lose their effectiveness more quickly. When you're barking like a dog whose owner fell down a well, do you really want to take half-assed cough syrup? No. You want the good shit. So take a few minutes every six months or so to update your medicine cabinet.

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Do not flush pharmaceuticals of any kind down the toilet—they can pollute lakes and streams and even end up in our drinking water. We're decluttering mindfully, remember?

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How many fucking screwdrivers do you need? Being handy is great, especially when you own a home. But handy people tend to collect tools. And supplies. And lumber. Next thing you know, you have to build onto your garage to store it all. (Because that's the sort of thing handy people do.) News flash: you're not opening a fucking hardware store. You don't need every tool Ryobi makes or every type of nut, bolt, and screw in existence. Keep what you need for current projects and cull the rest.

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DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT HAVING A YARD SALE Have you ever tried to sell . . . anything? Even when you sell stuff online, you end up spending weeks weeding through all the lowballs and trade offers until you find a buyer willing to pay anything close to your price. You have to play the long

game to get the goods. But more often than not, you compromise just to get the damn thing out the door. Sound like fun? Well, yard sales are worse.

Note:

*I feel this in my dark soul.
I'll never willingly do a yard
Sale again.*

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Unless you have something for the collectors in the crowd (power tools, vintage dishware, luxury bags), your ass is waking up at 6 a.m.* and working all damn day to make pennies on the dollar for each of your beloved items.

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The good news is that you can put literally anything out on the curb, and it'll be gone by sunup.

Had no idea "rage rooms" were a thing, lol.

This is going to take me far more time than physically decluttering