Ask an Expert: Spring Clean Your Life – Less Is More

Spring is a time of rebirth, baby animals, green grass, flowers and budding trees. It is a season of renewal. Historically, spring was the time homemakers cleaned the winter coal soot off the wall coverings and fixtures of their homes. A deep clean on the inside of the home, no doubt, reflected the freshness of the season outside. Though times have changed, there is still the desire for cleaning and renewal in our homes. One place to begin is to remove the clutter.

Clutter is all around us; our lives are cluttered with words, images, data, sounds and stuff. Big stuff, little stuff, stuff we don’t even remember we have because it is buried under other stuff or stuffed into boxes of stuff. Clutter is our generation’s “coal soot.” We bring it into our lives to fill a need, be it emotional or physical. But for some reason, we let it stay long after the need has been filled. Here are three tips to clear the clutter and spring clean your life.

1. Create a baseline. Just like in budgeting, weight loss or any habit change, it’s difficult to make changes unless you have a good idea of what’s happening to begin with. For example, assess your clutter. Is it mostly clothes, toys, papers, tools or books? Start by bringing all of the same types of items together in one place. Start small, say, with shirts and get them all in one pile.

2. Assess the value. Go through one item at a time, and evaluate whether or not it is still useful and brings you joy.

3. Keep, trash, donate or sell. Your number one goal is to keep only the items that bring you the most joy. You can send the rest away, and it’s okay! There will be many items that have good use left in them. But if you’re not using them, do what you can to get the items into the hands of someone who will.

Less truly is more. Consider the tiny house movement. When we own less, we have less to clean, less to trip over and the potential to bring harmony into a home. Can you imagine a weekend without nagging the kids to clean their bedrooms? Fewer items to put away paired with habits of giving every item a “home” creates an opportunity for neatness.

Now, a few words of caution:

1. Beware of the temptation to buy more storage bins. While the storage industry has made leaps and bounds in developing items that are fashionable and attractive, that doesn’t necessarily mean you need them. After you’ve decreased the number of belongings, you might just realize you don’t need so many bins and pockets and cubbies to hide things in so your home has the appearance of tidiness. Tidiness is a natural result of owning less.
2. Evaluate your buying habits and motivations. As you are letting go of things you no longer need, think about why you purchased or acquired the items to begin with. If there are habits you need to change, apply those habits to future purchases and learn from the experience.
3. Be kind to yourself. You’ll no doubt have some misgivings about the items you’re letting go. The money spent on those items is gone, and guilt over making a purchase you didn’t necessarily use responsibly or no longer need isn’t worth it.

The feeling of clearing things out is a lifted burden and is invigorating and refreshing…kind of like spring!


By: Rebecca Mills, Utah State University Extension assistant professor, family and consumer sciences