

Getting clutter out can pull peace and prosperity in

Consultant's tips aid those suffering from the tyranny of things

By Triveni Sheshadri
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Piles of mail. Lost keys. Missing clothes. Late library books.

Think of these as mere annoyances in your daily life?

Living amid clutter can put a dent in your bank balance, affect physical well-being and strain family relationships, said Jana Hartwell, an organizing expert with clients all over San Diego County.

"People are afraid of making the wrong decisions, and delaying the decision builds up clutter," she said.

Hartwell has retrieved money and checks buried under piles of junk mail. She has seen people stuck with late fees because of misplaced bills.

But the toll is not limited to finances.

"It contributes to family tension. It blocks energy, creativity and opportunity," Hartwell said.

Experts say clutter can also affect health in a variety of ways. It can interfere with healthy eating, result in missed medications and make a person more sedentary. Those who live in disorganized spaces may become socially isolated because of a fear of inviting friends and family to their homes.

Hartwell, owner of Sensible Organizing Solutions, is in the business of helping people restore order in their lives. She has counseled people who have come into inheritances and men and women grieving over the loss of spouses. She has consulted with squabbling spouses who had differing attitudes toward organization.

"Opposites tend to attract. An organized person will often end up with someone who is not quite as neat," she said.

Before you head out to shop for bins, files and folders, here are Hartwell's tips on how to work toward a clutter-free new year:



Professional organizers say clutter builds up — causing stress and fatigue — because people can't make timely decisions on what they need to throw away. photos.com

The first step is to do an honest analysis of what is causing the delay of decisions. It could be divorce or grief over the loss of a spouse or a parent.

Find a friend, relative or a professional organizer to help you get focused and started. Most people find it impossible to do it on their own, she said.

Analyze space and determine the function of the room. A room can't hold everything. Be realistic about the space you have and what you want.

Break the project down into pieces. Make a schedule and block out chunks of time spread over several days. Pace yourself. Becoming hyper-focused on the effort will overwhelm you.

Get the family involved. "Everyone needs to be involved at some level," Hartwell said. "If everyone owns a piece of the project, in the decision making and creativity, the higher the likelihood that they will stick with it."

Once the project is accomplished, develop a system of ongoing maintenance. Devote some time at the end of each day to clean up and start fresh.

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Jana Hartwell's book picks

• "Making Peace With the Things in Your Life: Why Your Papers, Books, Clothes and Other Possessions Keep Overwhelming You and What to Do About It," by Cindy Glovinsky

• "Conquering Chronic Disorganization," by Judith Kolberg

• "Organize for Disaster: Prepare Your Family and Your Home for Any Natural or Unnatural Disaster," by Judith Kolberg

• "Organizing From the Inside Out: The Foolproof System for Organizing Your Home, Your Office and Your Life," by Julie Morgenstern

• "Time Management From the Inside Out: The Foolproof System for Taking Control of Your Schedule and Your Life," by Julie Morgenstern

• "Lighten Up! Free Yourself From Clutter," by Michelle Passoff

• "Organizing From the Right Side of the Brain: A Creative Approach to Getting Organized," by Lee Silber

• "Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving and Hoarding," by David Tolin, Randy Frost and Gail Steketee

• "The Organizing Sourcebook: Nine Strategies for Simplifying Your Life," by Kathy Waddill

• "It's All Too Much: An Easy Plan for Living a Richer Life With Less Stuff," by Peter Walsh