

It's time to make space for a better way of life

Getting to grips with the clutter in your home could be good for your health as psychology graduate Laura Feinberg explains

Much has been written in the popular press on the benefits of de-cluttering – sorting through ones possessions with a view to ‘disposing’ of those which are no longer needed or valued.

From hoarding to those living a minimalist existence, we all have a relationship of sorts with our possessions, and fit somewhere on this scale.

In a consumerist society we are encouraged to buy more and more. The culture of ‘built to break’ has developed over the ‘built to last’ culture from the not-too-distant past.

Your kettle breaks and you’ve had it 12 months. Younger generations may not even question replacing their kitchen utensils regularly, for example, unlike older people.

Companies rub their hands together as the money rolls in – and do we even question any more their competence at having created a poor product in the first instance?

Seductive advertising cleverly convinces us we need more to be happy. In the meantime the limited resources of the earth are plundered further to feed the growing and voracious appetite for stuff, stuff and more stuff.

Changing the way we relate to our stuff and understanding that happiness will not be found in articles could give the earth the breather it needs and deserves.

Another way we can relate unhealthily to our stuff is through attachment to what we already have. Granted we do need an amount of possessions to live comfortably – I, for one, have no desire to live in a cave at the moment.

However, many of us keep hold of clothes we can no longer fit into, travel memorabilia, things which



Four out of five people admit to having a drawer full of clutter and, right, Laura Feinberg



get in our way both physically and emotionally. We feel weighed down and stuck (think TV’s ‘Britain’s Biggest Hoarders’ or ‘Hoarder Next Door’ as extreme examples) and may not even know why or what to do about it.

But we are not powerless. Of course, there are many factors in life, some of which are out of our control, which impact on our happiness, but it has been scientifically proven that those who feel they have some control over their lives are better placed to feel happier.

Psychologists refer to this as ‘locus of control’. Those who, for whatever reason, feel that the control in their lives is outside of themselves (‘I passed the exam because the questions were easy’) are likely to have less confidence than those who believe that they themselves have some control over their lives (‘I passed the exam because I worked hard’).

The good news is these positions are not necessarily

What do you think?



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fixed throughout life. Making small, meaningful decisions which impact on your immediate surroundings repeatedly over time could be one way to start to regain a sense of control over your life.

How do I do it? De-cluttering can be contextualised in time and space.

For example, an item may hold sentimental value one day, but six months down the road the emotional pull may not be so strong. For this reason it is not a process which should be rushed, and items should be disposed of only if and when the owner is ready to part with them.

However, equally, it should awarded its true

value and not be avoided if the process appeals. Sorting through possessions and deciding how to process them can bring up difficult feelings, but the therapeutic benefits of deciding how a particular item is handled (torn up? sold? given away?) should not be underrated.

It can be a lengthy process, but with time and the support needed it can be a valuable tool to bringing us to live more powerfully in the present.

There are many decluttering tips out there, such as taking photographs of bulky memorabilia to preserve the memory before taking the item itself to a charity shop. Marie Kondo’s ‘Spark Joy’ can advise on the process. Essentially, items divide into those we need and those we don’t. Keep what is needed, and for the rest ask yourself how you feel when looking at/thinking of the item.

If the answer is heavy and weighed down it needs to go. If light and cheerful, it’s

a keeper! Mindfully decluttering can create an environment where we have less, but what we have we value more. Some benefits of decluttering include:

- Gaining a small yet significant sense of control over your immediate environment;
- Keeping what lifts you up, feeling your spirits raised, and enjoying a greater sense of lightness;
- Learning to let go emotionally of ties which no longer serve you and moving on from the past;
- Financial profit through selling items;
- Environmental benefits of reusing and recycling;
- Benefitting others and getting the positive energy moving through taking your

unwanted possessions to a charity shop/ homeless centre or by giving items to people who will appreciate them;

- Creating space for the life you want;
- Appreciating and being happier with what you have.

Imagine in two years’ time looking around your home, with space created so you move easily, and wherever your eyes fall you feel lifted by what you see. Then if we have the space we need perhaps we don’t need to move... and if we don’t need to move then perhaps we don’t need to work so hard to save... and if we don’t need to work so hard then perhaps we can spend a bit more time doing activities which really mean something to us... and if we have not much ‘stuff’ but nice ‘stuff’ then could this be the catalyst to a wider shift away from the consumer culture to one where experiences, health and deeper meaning increases in value?

Engaging with small, fun and enjoyable changes now by embracing decluttering in a meaningful way could help steer us to a happier more sustainable path in the future.

238 toys owned by average 10-year-old but plays with just 12 daily

3,680 hours spent during a lifetime searching for misplaced items

Author

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