



The Clutter Control Rules - From our book *Clutter Control*

Rule 1: When in doubt, throw it out.

Absolutely nothing else we say in this book can have such a liberating effect on your life. We like testimonials, and here's one quoted in its entirety from a "Dear Abby" column (*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 11, 1991):

DEAR ABBY: I related to the letter about a husband who was a pack rat because I'm one too. After years of bachelorhood, I married a woman who'd throw out the newspaper while I was still reading it.

In the fourth year of our marriage I was sent overseas, leaving my wife, who was pregnant. When I completed the tour, I was reassigned to the Pentagon, and my wife had the thankless task of selling our home and packing and moving us to the Washington, D.C., area. She handled all of this like a real pro.

A year later we were entertaining guests, and I told the story of our move, bragging about how well my wife had handled everything alone. She casually remarked, "Yes, It gave me the opportunity to throw out all the junk Bill had been carrying around all these years." I was shocked to hear her say this, as she'd never mentioned it before, so I asked, "And just what did you throw out?" She calmly replied, "What are you missing?" Try as I did, I couldn't identify a single item I missed. Then she said, "You tell me what you're missing, and I'll tell you whether or not I threw it out."

Everyone (including me) had a good laugh at my expense, but it certainly proved her point.

So, all you pack rats, clean out your closets and drawers, put the junk in boxes, then take the whole lot to one of those storage lockers. After paying the storage bill for several years, you will be amazed at how much you can live without.

--BEEN THERE AND LEARNED

DEAR BEEN THERE AND LEARNED: As incredible as it may seem, public auctions are held to sell furniture, clothing, furs and valuable jewelry that were in storage for many years and never claimed. The owners either couldn't pay the storage bill, or they died having forgotten that their property had been stored.

--Abby

Taken from the *Dear Abby* column by Abigail Van Buren © 1991 Reprinted with permission of Universal Press Syndicate. All rights reserved.

It is encouraging to read about someone who has seen the light at the end of the (cluttered) tunnel. We would have advised him to skip the step

- How many square feet of each closet in your home are used to store things you don't use? It's not nice to remind you of all the clothes in those closets that no longer fit. Let's just say they're too large, shall we, and leave it at that. Or maybe you don't wear them because they've gone out of style. With luck, they'll come back in style in thirty years, but do you think you'll actually wear those musty antiques?
- What about under the beds? Gifts you've received that you're never going to use. Perfectly fine other things that are "too good to throw away." Broken things.
- Look in drawers, but don't count the things you use every day—or even once a year. What about the linen from your grandmother for a table that wouldn't even fit into your dining room? Linen with spots, linen with holes, linen you're saving for your kids. (They don't even like the brand-new things you get them for their birthday and Christmas. Lord knows what they'll want with things you don't even know what to do with.) And then there are the drawers bursting with unused blouses, T-shirts, socks, underwear, incomplete bed sheet sets, worn-out towels, photographs, calendars, college papers, postcards, ancient mail, maps, newspapers, matchbooks, and mystery items.
- Bookshelves filled with books you haven't looked at in years—if ever. Or with porcelain frogs. Or with liquor decanters. We're not opposed to collections per se; it's just that it's sometimes difficult to appreciate the beauty of a porcelain frog if there are thirty-seven of them.
- Don't forget books that are stored in places other than bookshelves, including unloved cookbooks, outgrown children's books, and unused reference books.
- Appliances and gadgets you never use. They're often in the kitchen drawers and cabinets, but don't forget the extra set of speakers or the foot massager, no matter where you have them stashed.
- The freezer. You have things in there that no one in the house knows about or can identify anymore—let alone would be willing to eat.
- The garage, carport, basement, or attic—junk heaven. Tires to cars you no longer own. Athletic equipment such as the exercise bike that started in the living room, migrated to the bedroom, and is now relegated to dusty solitude. Dead clothes that no longer fit in your bulging closets. Bed parts. Derelict lawn furniture or equipment. Pieces of lumber left over from a project half completed in 1976. If by chance you can no longer fit your car or cars into your garage or carport, don't forget to add the additional depreciation caused by storing it outside. And add the square footage of the garage to your total storage bill.

The point: You have junk stored in many places in your home, and it costs you really money to store it.

Here are some guidelines for deciding what should be tossed and what should be kept. (When we say "tossed," we are including giving it away or selling it, of course.)



Popular Excuses for Keeping Things Forever

If you aren't actually using something, why allow it to complicate your home? I have a section of my desk drawer that is reserved just for pens. It's always overflowing. The problem is, if my favorite



pen isn't there, I will turn the house upside down looking for it rather than use any of the pens that are stuffed into this drawer. Solution? Save the favorite pen plus three or four spares and toss the rest. Now there's room for adding something to the drawer should the occasion arise. And the drawer even closes easily, for the first time in years. If you have several pairs of eyeglasses with outdated prescriptions, give them away. (Several charities solicit them.) It's different if you use something occasionally. (Christmas ornaments are a good example.)

Give your grown kids' things back to them. If you do, maybe they'll learn to deal with clutter a couple of decades earlier than you did. The same goes for your friends, neighbors, or other relatives for whom you are storing things.

Please don't try the old excuse "It's too nice to throw away." Especially if it's so nice, give it to someone who will use it and appreciate it.

If it's broken, fix it or toss it. If it's ripped, have it mended. If it doesn't fit, have it altered. Don't put it anywhere just "for now" and keep it in a perpetual holding pattern.

If you find a screw or have one left over after a project, don't start saving them. It will drive you crazy. Usually when you buy something that needs a screw, it will have one included. If it doesn't, you can get the exact number of appropriate screws while you're at the store. That's much faster and easier than picking through all your saved screws (which over time have a way of starting to get nails mixed in with them, plus a few tacks, push-pins, washers, picture hangers, and other small, sharp, and rusty objects.) And even if you do search your collection and ultimately find three of the screws you need, the project will probably call for four of them.

Since most households do have a need of a nail or a screw occasionally, just remember that almost any method of acquiring and storing them is preferable to the one-at-a-time-whenever-you-happen-upon-one method and then adding it to the little box or mayonnaise jar full of them.

Save the stereo box for thirty days. If the stereo hasn't broken by then, discard the box. (If you bought it by mail order, save it for the full warranty period.) Unless you're planning on moving (have the date set, etc.) don't keep the box "because you'll need it when you move." That's true, but it may be years away. You or the moving company can use another box when the time comes.



Rule 1 still counts if you don't know what an item is. My mother will save something even though she's not at all sure what it is. She'll convince herself that it fell out of her refrigerator or something else vital and that if she throws it away, she will only then discover where it should have gone. If she weren't my mother, I would point out to her that she has lived for over sixty years. If she hasn't learned what something is by now, there is no particular likelihood she will do so in the next sixty years.

Rule 1: When in doubt, throw it out.

Rule 2: Use it or lose it.

Rule 3: Efficiency counts, so store things accordingly.

Rule 4: Handle something once.

Rule 5: Recycle it.

Rule 6: Pick a number and stick with it.

Rule 7: Use a file cabinet.

Rule 8: Do Something.

Rule 9: A place for everything, and everything in its place.

Rule 10: Items displayed in the house have to pass a test.

Rule 11: Don't do things "later."

Rule 12: Label things.

Rule 13: Call in a professional.