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Clutter: set the mood

BY ALISON ROBERTS, MA

It's 5:47pm and all the seats on the bus are taken. Your stomach is grumbling and you need to get home, now! With a groan you remember the state of your apartment. Just the thought of it causes your energy to drop a few levels on the energy metre. You briefly consider staying on the bus and going along for the ride but without a seat you decide to get off at your stop as usual. Sound familiar?

The state of our physical environment contributes significantly to our energy levels, clarity of thought and resiliency. Clutter actually comes from the middle English word "clotter" or clot, which is about as stuck as you can get! People who live in chaos complain of being irritable, depressed, lethargic; they waste time searching for lost items and end up buying duplicates because they can't remember where they put something. Clutter can also keep us stuck and prevent us from moving on with our lives.

Take a look around your space. Are you surrounded by unfinished projects, reminders of failed relationships

or gifts that you are hanging onto out of guilt or obligation? If so, they are contributing to stale, tired energy. No wonder you can't get motivated or meet your soul mate! When we are surrounded by stacks of old newspapers and piles of clothes that never seem to make it to the dresser, we actually prevent what we really want from coming into our lives.

Don't despair; you can create an environment that supports you, and it doesn't have to cost a penny. First of all, grab a pen and paper and do a walk-about throughout your space. Make note of the cluttered areas that are causing you the most grief and also start a list of to-do items that require action. Most people are overwhelmed by the state of their surroundings so when trying to decide where to start choose a small project that is manageable and doesn't have too strong an emotional attachment. If, for

example, you love your books, start with a sock drawer, the medicine cabinet or a kitchen cupboard, not your book collection.

By starting small you set yourself up for success. Experience what it is like to complete a project; the sense of accomplishment will boost your self-esteem and by starting small, you are much more likely to continue. A single shelf, drawer or cupboard is what I'm talking about. Removing items that you no longer want will also serve to rejuvenate your energy. This shift will make it much more likely that you will continue. Perhaps you resolve to let go of five pieces of clothing, take out all the recycling or clear off the top of the kitchen table. Start with what is visible; if you have years of photos jumbled together in a plastic tote, leave them there. Embarking on that project will be time consuming and chances are you will get bored or tired before you finish. Look for horizontal space that could be cleared. Once you are finished, you will have created more space as opposed to creating more of a mess.

understanding

Before you begin sorting, gather several sturdy cardboard boxes and label them “donate,” “sell,” “garbage,” “recycle,” and “return to rightful owner.” The idea is to sort directly into these boxes so that you don’t end up with more piles on the floor or on your bed. Set a timer so that you can pace yourself. You might aim for 30 minutes or try playing your favourite CD for extra motivation. If you know when you have the most energy (i.e., you are a morning person), schedule your clutter-busting session to coincide with this peak energy period.

When the time is up re-evaluate your energy. Clearing out clutter is physically demanding work as we are often stooping, bending and lifting. Emotionally, it is like taking a trip down memory lane. Perhaps you need to do some journaling, take a stretch break, or place a quick call to your friend for support. Sometimes people actually get a “clutter buddy” so that they have an extra pair of hands and an objective pair of eyes. Four hands sort faster than two and people report that it helps to have permission to let things go.

Doubtful? Don’t think you will dent the disarray? Take heart: letting go of clutter is an energizing process with a strong positive reinforcement. As you clear out the hall closet, you shift the energy of your space. In addition, you feel better for having accomplished something. Both of these factors, in conjunction with the positive feelings that come from releasing objects back into the community (via a thrift store) will increase the chances of

you continuing the process.

Another important reminder: be kind to yourself! Clutter often accumulates from the pressure we feel and the messages we receive to consume. Too often, people use shopping as a form of retail therapy only to end up with escalating credit card bills and items that they don’t really like. As you sort through your belongings and let go of items you no longer use, need or love, eventually you will find that you are surrounded by your favourites. Items that make you feel good and more importantly, reflect who you are now. Remember, just because you own something doesn’t mean you have to keep it forever.

Finally, clutter does not accumulate overnight so don’t expect one weekend blitz to remove the mountains of clutter. As Confucius said, “it does not matter how slowly you go, as long as you do not stop.” Gradually make your way through the list of cluttered areas and reward yourself when projects are completed. Give yourself the night off, meet a friend for coffee or enjoy a meal at your favourite restaurant.

Maintain your clutter free space by putting things away when you are finished with them and dealing with items as they come up. Establish routines that support being organized such as doing the day’s dishes before you go to bed. That way, you wake up to a clean kitchen and get your day off to a positive start.

In the next issue we will explore ways to stay on top of paperwork and organize a home office. Until then, if you have any questions or comments, feel free to email info@moodsmag.com.

*Alison Roberts has a Master’s degree in Psychology and has been helping people to dig their way out of clutter for the past five years. She began de-cluttering her own life in 1998 when she left a career in Toronto and relocated to Langley, British Columbia. She currently lives in Comox and is writing her first book, *Clutter’s Dirty Secret*.*

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