

Tough To Toss: Conquering the Hurdles to Clearing Clutter



One of the biggest hurdles to getting organized is a looming anxiety about getting rid of belongings. We want to clear out our space, but struggle when it comes time to move the clutter out the door. Typically, one of four barriers impedes the process. Here is an overview of the most common hurdles, along with some thoughts on how to overcome them.

Barriers to De-Cluttering

#1 FEAR

This is when we think, *"I can't get rid of it because I might need it someday."* We often feel this way about financial paperwork or a specialized item, but this anxiety can nag at us over a variety of possessions.

Solution: Establish Criteria for What You Will Keep

While there are some items that should be kept, it is useful to remember that holding onto items costs space, time and energy. A vague, potential future need is not enough to justify its "rent." Decide only to keep belongings that:

- You might need to produce for legal reasons (such as tax filing paperwork, mortgage documents, car ownership paperwork, living will, etc.) If you aren't sure what you need to hold onto, consult an accountant who can provide specifics for your situation. There are also some very helpful articles online, just be sure you are referring to a reputable source.
- You use. Don't keep a piece of furniture or set of dishes that you hope your children will someday want. Prioritize what you need for your life *today*.
- Fits your current taste. Don't keep an item you never really liked, even if it might fit a future need. For example, do not keep old/ill fitting/out of style professional clothes "in case you go back to work."

#2: GUILT

Items we feel guilty getting rid of commonly include things such as gifts/inherited items, expensive items, bargains,



greeting cards and kids artwork.

Solution: Keep What Brings You Joy

“Should” is a bad reason to keep something. As you look at these items, remind yourself:

- No relative or friend intended for you to cringe every time you look at an item he/she gave you. It was intended to make you happy. If it doesn't, get rid of it.
- Just because an item has been in your family a long time doesn't mean it needs to stay. If you love it, keep it. If not, pass it on.
- The amount of money you spent on an item is irrelevant. The money is gone, and keeping the item won't bring it back. Evaluate an item based on its *current value* in your life.
- Greeting cards, unless they are filled with a beloved, handwritten note, can go. Cards are meant to convey a sentiment in the moment, not take up valuable storage space.
- Throwing away children's artwork doesn't mean you don't love them. Hang up current creations and then move your favorites either into digital form (try the Artkive app) or a memory box. Art that is made of food, painted on giant sheets of paper, or is simply scribbles on a pre-printed page isn't worth keeping.

#3: DON'T KNOW HOW

This is where we run into items that are hard to dispose of, such as old paint, used electronics, air conditioners, old/unused medication, heavy mattresses, etc.

Solution: Identify Disposal Options

To move forward, you need to do a little research. If you lack the time/desire to do this on your own, contact a professional organizer in your area for assistance (you can search by zip code at www.napo.net/publicdirectory/). Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Old Paint: add kitty litter and leave container open until the paint hardens. (latex only) Or, contact a paint store in your area. Many will now collect and recycle old paint.
- Phones/Computers: first, see if any retailers have recycling programs in your area (Staples, Best Buy often do). Otherwise, remove/destroy private information and pitch the rest. Check with your town to see if they have an electronics collection site.
- Unwanted Medication: do NOT put it in the trash, flush, or run down the drain as this can be harmful to the environment. Instead investigate if your county has a “drug give back” program. Many police departments now collect unused medicines, as well as some pharmacies.
- Batteries/used motor oil/oil-based paint/chemicals: check for the nearest/soonest hazardous waste collection day and put it on your calendar so you don't forget!

PROBLEM #4: HATE TO WASTE

Many of us have items that we have decided to get rid of, but hate to simply throw in the landfill. Sometimes they are in good shape, and we think we can sell them. Other times, we simply want to pass them on to someone who can use them.

Solution: Sell or Donate

- If you have items in good shape, AND there is a market, you may be able to sell. Remember, *selling always requires work*. You can try selling online (via ebay, Craigslist, Facebook Group), have a garage sale, or consign items.
- For belongings that are in good shape, but for which there is no longer a market, the best option is to donate. If you have a lot, consider scheduling a home pick-up from the Salvation Army, Big Brother/Big Sister, or Vietnam Veterans. If you have only a few items, drop them off yourself at Goodwill or another local charity.
- If the items are stained, worn, or broken, they are trash. More and more, companies are offering recycling options to keep items out of landfills. If this is important to you, do a little research to identify alternatives. For



example, Staples gives store credit for used ink cartridges.

Shedding unwanted possessions may not seem as fun as acquiring new ones, but the process is well worth the effort. Clearing space and restoring order brings freedom, control, and lightness... none of which you can buy in a store!

[Watch or listen to Seana's podcast](#) on Getting Rid of Stuff.

Seana Turner

Seana Turner founded The Seana Method in 2010 because she wanted to help people. Since the launch Seana has found great joy in helping others realize the freedom that organization can bring to life. She now lives in the New York metro area with her husband and two daughters. Learn more about Seana at www.TheSeanaMethod.com.

