

PAPERDIEM'S 14 STEP GUIDE TO

Ruthless Decluttering



Thank you for downloading this guide and for being willing to give “less” a try! The earth thanks you, future generations thank you, and your stress hormone receptors thank you!

Be warned, this style of decluttering is not for the faint of heart! You need to be in the proper mindset each time you start a project, so make sure your belly is full and you’ve slept well. Conclude all arguments with your spouse (not that we ever argue in this house, our marriage is perfect in all ways), and take a deep breath.

Before I dive in, I want to clarify something. When I say, “toss it,” at any point below, what I really mean is give ‘it’ a new *home*. If you can avoid throwing things in the trash, please do! Donate, Sell, Recycle and, in special circumstances, Repurpose anything that is safe and sanitary.

This guide is divided into three phases: Decluttering, Organizing, and Maintenance. Done right, 70% of your time and effort will be spent in the decluttering phase, 20% in the organizing phase, and then you can breeze through life applying 10% of your usual cleaning efforts towards maintenance. It’s intense in the beginning and requires you to be very *intentional* about what you surround yourself with, but you’ll quickly find that you’re cleaning less and getting to places on time because you know exactly where your keys are.

Less talking, more tossing! Let’s get to it!

PHASE ONE



1. STOP!

First and foremost: **stop buying things!** Decluttering is a lot like paying off a credit card. Why bother paying down the balance if you keep swiping the card? The average American is *subjected* to anywhere from 4,000 to 10,000 ads a day! Spending money is a compulsion at this point, for all of us. It's hard to resist the relentless assault of BUY THIS NOW signaling. The solution to this problem, once again, is **less**. Watch less TV, listen to less radio, shorten your commute. Do not buy items to help you organize. Do not buy boxes to collect items to donate. Do not buy a book about decluttering. Don't do it.

2. JUST SAY NO.

This, again, is meant to stop the flow of items coming into your house. If you're a wedding and they're handing out party favors, just say, "No." You're really not going to use that umbrella with the couple's face on it. If you're at a career fair and they're giving out free pens and fidget spinners and rubix cubes, just say, "No." Cheap plastic is fodder for the junk drawer. If you're throwing a party and people might bring gifts, its ok to ask them not to. (Sidenote: If your love language is "Receiving Gifts" then by all means, say "Yes." The point of this is not to make anyone miserable).

3. PRIORITIZE HEAVY LIFTERS.

We love to buy things that do double or triple duty, especially in our kitchen where we have limited surface area. Instead of a basic air fryer, for example, we have a toaster oven that bakes, broils, toasts, fries, defrosts, roasts, dehydrates, and warms. Our baking dishes are all oven-to-freezer capable and come with their own lids. Even our spiralizer has five different attachments. Of course, some things can only serve one purpose, like cutlery. A fork is a fork and a spoon is a spoon. *Please* don't buy a spork. What even are those things? :shudder:

4. SET A REPLACEMENT THRESHOLD.

If there is an item that you are hesitating to get rid of, determine what it would cost to replace it. If it falls below your threshold, toss it. Let's say you set a \$30 threshold and come across a knife sharpener that you haven't used in 5 years. If ever the spirit moves you to sharpen your knives in the future, you can buy a sharpener at IKEA for \$8.

5. STOP LYING TO YOURSELF.

If you have to create a story where an item will be useful, toss it. For example, we have an air mattress that was last used in 2013. It's been hanging around because it just seems so useful. I'll **need** it if all of MisterE's siblings come to visit at the same time with their wives and children, *and* my mother-in-law is here too, *and* every hotel around us is booked *and* our tent has a hole in it.

6. DIGITIZE IT.

One thing we all struggle with is paper clutter. We used to have drawers full of IKEA assembly instructions, restaurant menus, appliance manuals, blank warranty cards, recipes and bills. All of these things are available in digital format! Sign up for paperless billing. Download instruction manuals from manufacturers. Bookmark your favorite restaurant's menus. *Actually* complete the warranty cards and mail them back. Are you holding on to birthday cards from as far back as 1999? (Guilty!) Scan them onto your drive and toss them. I guarantee you that once you start the process you'll realize how pointless it is and just toss the cards anyway.

And while we're on the topic of scanning: scan (or photograph) your kids' school art projects while you're at it and toss the physical copies. Do it. Toss them. Throw them away. And if you're still holding on to your collection of CDs and DVDs in 2021, here is where I smack you over the nose with a rolled up newspaper. Streaming is the new black. Get with the times.

7. DELETE IT.

Ok, so there is such a thing as digital clutter, and it's just as stressful as real clutter. Delete duplicate downloads. Delete apps you don't use. Delete those screenshots. Scroll through your address book and delete any contact you don't. I just went through all the As in my phone and deleted 'Amy', 'Andy M.', 'Aniya from Game Night', 'Anita Yellow Pod', 'Aunty D', and 'AAB'. I honestly don't know who these people are and I will never call them. I don't even call the people I *do* know.



PHASE TWO



8. KEEP WHAT YOU LOVE.

Yes, I do let you keep things on this plan. A *completely* empty house would be non-functional. The most basic rule of all is “keep only what you love.” And I mean really *really* love. Would you pick that one shirt over five other shirts in your closet? If the answer is no, toss it! And if the answer is yes, **toss the other five shirts!** If there is any doubt about an item, there is no doubt. Toss it. You’ll be surprised at how quickly you’ll forget it ever existed. Of course, please, keep what you need. For the love of sense please don’t throw out your CPAP machine because you don’t love it. If you need something, make a home for it.

9. COMPLETE ONE ROOM AT A TIME.

The idea here is to get a room looking *exactly* the way you want it. If you’re working on a bedroom, for example, clear your surface area. Empty your bedside drawers. Toss worn or mismatched beddings. Wipe down your lamps and decor. Hang your bathrobe exactly where it should be. Now take a picture of your room - *that* is the gold standard. Any time something comes into your room

it should look so drastically out of place that you have no choice but to address it right away.

10. GIVE IT A HOME.

Sometimes clutter isn't really about having a bunch of stuff you don't need. It might simply be a matter of not knowing where to store things. If mail does not have a dropbox, it *will* end up on your kitchen island, your dining table, the passenger seat of your car, etc. Everything from your toothbrush to your remote control must have a home. If something does not belong anywhere, toss it. Look, you wouldn't park your car on the lawn or the roof, would you? Why would you put your keys on the dining table?

11. STORE LIKE WITH LIKE.

Create categories for all your possessions and keep them all in a shared space. We have, for example, a closet under the stairs where we store ALL our travel accessories. Suitcases, neck pillows, compact strollers, packing cubes, shoe bags, document holders, toiletry bags and even travel sized bath and body products are all stored next to each other. As a bonus, these travel accessories are adjacent to "outdoor" items like sunscreen, bug spray, sun hats, sunglasses, hiking boots etc, because vacations and the outdoors often go hand-in-hand for us.

12. ONE IN, ONE OUT.

Now that you have your home pared down to the things you need and the things you love, think of future purchases as an opportunity to replace or upgrade what you have, not an excuse to build on your collection.



PHASE THREE



13. Create Systems.

Look, you're going to need to leave Pinterest alone. If you DIY a gold-leaf, 13 tier, French-restoration, lucite shoe rack and make it a feature in your entryway, but your family comes in through the garage and piles all their shoes and bags on the floor leading up to your kitchen, you have failed. If you've bought all the pretty plastic storage canisters you could find at The Container Store, but you have two little ~~tyrants~~ children always underfoot and you never get the chance to decant all your groceries, you have failed. Make a plan that works for your family!

14. Teach the Children.

Children as young as one love to follow instructions. It makes them feel really smart and capable. So give them chores! Let them know that at the end of the day they have to put all the shoes left out back in the shoe cabinet. They absolutely should be putting their toys away every evening. Let them help you empty the dishwasher. Teach them what is trash and what is recycling. All of this will serve as a daily reinforcement that everything has a "home," and that "home" is rarely the living room floor.

So that's it, in a nutshell! That's the method we're using to pare our house down to just the essentials. I think you should give it a try; it's oddly therapeutic to let things go.

If you do try our method, be sure to tag us on social media so we can see what a great job you've done!

As always, have fun!

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