



12 Reasons to Unclutter Your Space

See the surprising benefits of getting organized

By [Denise Schipani](#) Posted July 30, 2009 from [Woman's Day](#); September 1, 2009

A few months back, sick and tired of the state of my files, which were bulging from my cabinet and literally spilling over onto the floor, I [dove](#) into a sorting, recycling and shredding free-for-all.

I knew purging and neatening would make the space look better, but what surprised me was how it made me *feel*. Clearing out stuff was like sweeping away mental cobwebs, giving me space for new ideas.

Turns out that decluttering and organizing delivers unexpected benefits, says organizing maven Julie Morgenstern, author of five books, including *SHED Your Stuff, Change Your Life*. Beyond mere neatness, here are three compelling reasons to finally get everything in order.

Surprise! Save Money

Professional organizers tell tales of unearthing uncashed checks from among a client's piles of files, and everyone's had the experience of finding ten bucks in a jeans pocket. But being organized doesn't just help you find money, it helps you save it. Says Morgenstern, if you don't know where your bills and statements are, you may miss deadlines (hello, late fees!).

A good old clutter purge can net you cash when you sell unused items (like your treadmill-turned-towel-rack), and organizing the closet can stop you from buying that fourth black cardigan. To start saving more money:

1. Streamline Bill Paying

"Many of us pay at least some bills online and the rest the regular way, which can get confusing," says Tracy McCubbin, owner of the Los Angeles-based [dClutterfly](#). Instead, set up a separate e-mail account only for banking and bills. Then schedule a twice-monthly bill-paying session in your calendar to check



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that e-mail, and pay the rest of your bills with your checkbook.

2. Use, Don't Lose, Gift Cards

How often have you “lost” a gift card in your wallet or purse, and thus needlessly spent cash? “Keep gift cards in a little box on your desk,” says McCubbin. “Before you go shopping, check the box.”

3. Organize Your Kitchen

It's easier to just toss new items into the fridge or cabinets, but after you shop, take a minute to reshuffle what's there. “Move the yogurts from last week up front, and put the newer ones behind,” says McCubbin, so you won't end up tossing the stuff that gets lost in the back and expires.

4. Return Unwanted Stuff

As soon as you realize a purchase was a mistake, “put it back in the bag with the receipt, and stick it in your car,” says McCubbin. The longer it sits in the house, the more likely you'll lose the receipt—and the money.

Surprise! Be More Efficient

According to a recent survey by the National Association of Professional Organizers, 65% of respondents said their household was moderately disorganized. Fact is, “piles of things chip away at productivity, because they're a distraction,” says Erin Rooney Doland, author of the upcoming *Unclutter Your Life in One Week*. To be more efficient:

5. Tidy Your Computer

“Treat your computer desktop just as you would your desk, keeping only active files and shortcuts visible,” says Lorie Marrero, author of *The Clutter Diet: The Skinny on Organizing Your Home and Taking Control of Your Life*. A “cluttered” computer screen is harder to look at, making you feel jumbled. Go through folders and delete what you no longer need. Archive older stuff you want to save to backup storage (a [CD](#) or external hard drive).

6. Clean Up Your E-mail Act

“Saving every e-mail is like keeping every piece of paper that comes into your house!” says Marrero. Try the A.R.T. system: All incoming e-mails are either Action (things you need to answer right away); Reference (things you need to save); or Trash (junk, forwards, things you already took care of and don't need). Move big attachments to a CD or DVD, or upload them to free online storage like [Windows Live SkyDrive](#).

7. Start Filing

No one loves filing—but doing it pays off later, when you can put your hands on what you need when you need it. Plus, it boosts efficiency in a less obvious way: “Because a task like filing is mindless, it can serve as a break from high-mental-energy tasks,” says Doland.

8. Book It

Create a “family bible.” In one single binder or expanding file, keep your most important information: home, health and car insurance policies; will info; emergency contacts; even a list of plumbers and painters you like. You can put together a file yourself with different sections, or buy one at [See Jane Work](#).

Surprise! Boost Your Mood

“Decluttering is a way to identify what's obsolete in your life,” says Morgenstern. “Getting rid of stuff creates a sense of energy, giving you room to think, which frees you to do more with your life.” How about trying new recipes and becoming a healthier cook in your streamlined kitchen, or starting a long-dreamed-of home-based business in a cleared out spare room? The difficulty lies in getting rid of things we're emotionally connected to. To clear what's blocking you:

9. Severely Edit Souvenirs

Do you really need the ticket stubs and seashells to remind you of the good times? Probably not. "Only keep what you can use or display," says Doland. Try putting a few shells and a photograph from your island vacation in a shadowbox, and tossing the rest. "What you end up saving becomes more valuable."

10. Scan Letters

Save sentimental letters and postcards digitally (on your hard drive and an external drive or CD) or in scrapbooks.

11. Jettison Old Intentions

"So many of the things that create clutter are things you meant to do, but never got around to," Morgenstern says. "We tend to keep that stuff to stave off disappointment in ourselves." Better: Admit that you dropped the ball, toss the old stuff and move on.

12. Get Rid of Giveaways

Starting a pile or bag of "get it out of here" stuff in the basement is fine to a point—but if it piles up, it defeats the purpose. First, it's just more clutter. And second, "If you leave things sitting for too long, you start to feel that you're 'abandoning' your memories," says Doland. Best bet: Bag up unusable stuff on garbage day so it's gone, and [donate](#) usable stuff ASAP. Some charities will schedule pickups (try Vietnam Veterans of America; go to [ScheduleAPickUp.com](#)).

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