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A Confused Collection

The other day I came across a 1939 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary and looked up the word clutter. It stated that clutter is "a confused collection". The definition of clutter in a 1973 Webster's Twentieth Century Dictionary is "a heap, pile, or assemblage of things lying in confusion". To me, that is a more accurate depiction of clutter today. Author and professional organizer Don Aslett defines clutter as postponed decisions.

We all have clutter in our lives. It could be the front hall closet, our bedrooms, our computer desk top, our kitchen pantry, our garage, or our car (the list goes on). So what's wrong with clutter? Clutter makes it hard to find things, causing stress, wasting time and sometimes money. As another professional organizer put it, "clutter is stuff that occupies physical and mental space that makes NO POSITIVE contribution to your life". We all have our own level of tolerance for clutter (some more extreme than others). It is up to each individual or each home to decide how much clutter they can allow before it becomes detrimental to how they live and work.

So how do you go about dealing with the clutter? Keep it simple.

- Find a designated place for everything. If there is no place for stuff to go, then it will end up in a heap or pile.
- Try to eliminate the items you aren't using from your space. Find a place to store your sweaters, winter pants and shirts before you try to add your summer clothes to the mix. Purge all of the piles of magazines and newspapers and only keep the ones that you are actually going to read.
- Store like items together. What are your clutter zones? What parts of your home tend to hold piles of catalogs or paper stacks? In which closet do you waste time looking for something to wear? Do you know what is in your car trunk? Creating categorized containers in these zones for your activities and items can help not only in putting them away, but you will know where to look for them when they are needed.
- Use labels. If you put stuff that has been sorted into storage boxes, drawers, etc. and they aren't labeled, chances are no one in the family will know where items go or where to find them. A file folder full of papers with no label is a confused collection. Don't let one problem create another.
- Obtain the proper tools. You are only as good as the tools you have to work with, so make sure you have the proper storage containers, bins, baskets, folders, or dividers to keep your stuff categorized and together. Consider what you need before you buy. Avoid the mistake of getting all fired up, buying an assortment of bins and cute dividers and getting home only to find that what you wanted to put into the container doesn't fit...
- Continually reevaluate and maintain your system. What works for one person may not work for another. One kid may be a piler and need a system to keep the piles categorized. Another family member may be neat but not be very

organized. They will need help in creating simple systems and help learning how they work.

- Involve everyone in the household. Delegate clutter busters to each member of the family and when they routinely need to be done. A helpful hint: periodically rotate the jobs so they know it is “fair”

As you start talking about the traditional, spring cleaning endeavors and garage sales, you can begin your campaign against clutter. Zero in on the clutter that annoys you the most and what part of your home is the most important to you. Get rid of the things that are “piled in confusion”. Stop putting it off and start deciding what you really need to have out, what you can use, store away, or get rid of. Quite honestly, this summer, wouldn't you rather have your umbrella, pool bag, sun hat and sandals in the front hall closet instead of your winter coats and hats?