

Reducing Clutter Saves Time; Reduces Stress

It is all too easy to accumulate clutter. Clothing, magazines, books or gadgets can contribute to clutter if you don't use them or don't have a place to store them. Are you spending more and more time sorting through the odds and ends just to find the essentials? If so, it may be time to reduce a little of your clutter. Use these

tips to get started toward your clutter-free lifestyle.

Why We Have Clutter

If you have anything that is not used or has no immediate purpose, you have clutter. There are many reasons why a person accumulates clutter:

- Acquiring goods may fill a void in a person's life or material goods maybe seen as a sign of success, wealth, and status;
- There are emotional ties to some objects;

- There's not an effective organization system in place.

Reducing Clutter

There are many advantages to reducing clutter:

- General cleanliness and a clutter-free environment can reduce stress;
- Saving time overall because you no longer spend time maintaining the clutter or sorting through clutter for important items;
- You can utilize space more effectively or make money by selling unwanted items;

- Reducing clutter can have a therapeutic or cleansing effect on your personal life.

Before you start to tackle your entire house at once, here are a few tips to remember to keep the project in perspective:

- Develop a system. An organizing system will give you parameters on what to keep, what to toss and where to take action.
- Start gradually. If you start with too much too soon, you might end up with different piles of clutter rather than a neater, cleaner space.
- Choose one project at a time and focus on it. It's very easy to get sidetracked by the mess in the basement when you are really cleaning the bedroom closet.

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New OEAP Training Option for State of Ohio Employees

The Power of Humor

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

1 to 3 p.m.

Rhodes Tower (Columbus)

It is important that you learn to balance stressors in one's life. This workshop looks at humor in the workplace and how it contributes to creativity, problem solving, healthy relationships and communications. Seating is limited.

To register for State of Ohio training, visit: das.ohio.gov/learning. For information, contact the Office of Learning and Professional Development at 1.888.577.6276.

- Start when you are well rested and fresh. You are likely to make better decisions when you are rested and you are less likely to become frustrated and give up on the project.
- Ask (for) the help of family members. If everyone uses the room you are organizing, get their input on how to organize and what things to toss. Be sure to ask permission if you are cleaning another family member's space.
- Give yourself a reward. For some, a cleaner space is motivation enough, but you may need an extra incentive. Plan something fun and relaxing for when you have completed the project.
- Be positive. By reducing clutter, you may be thinking about all the things that you have to get rid of. Instead, focus on what you will keep. It seems like a small change, but overall it can help your attitude.

Four Steps to Being Clutter-Free

Though there are many different strategies for cleaning and organizing, the following steps are good starting points.

1. Identify an area to organize

As mentioned previously, this is both necessary and time-consuming, so you need to stay focused. It is probably best to choose a room or a space that you use daily and needs the most work. Using this as a starting point, you can determine what area needs attention next. Here are some questions (from an organization expert) to help you get started:

- What causes clutter in this room?
- What items end up here that should be somewhere else?
- What things should be in this room that are not here now?
- What kind of storage could I use here?

2. Clean and sort

This may at first appear to be the opposite of reducing clutter, but in order to determine what stays and what goes, you have to see it all. For example, if you are cleaning a bookshelf, take everything off and sort into three piles:

- Save;
- Store;
- Give away or throw away.

For many, it is the "give away" part that is the hardest. Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- When is the last time that I used this?
- Why don't I use this more often?
- Does it have sentimental value?
- Do I love it? Or have my tastes or values changed since I made the original purchase?
- What is the worst possible thing that could happen if I just threw it away?
- Could I get another if I needed to?
- If I keep it, where should it go?
- How many of these do I need?
- Does it have any other use? For example, can it be used to organize something or to clean something?



If you have difficulty throwing away the contents of your "throw away" pile, you may need a little more convincing. Pack up the pile and keep it in a box or bag for six months. If you need an item, go get it, but if after six months you haven't used it, it's likely that you won't in the future. After six months, take your remaining items to a donation center or set them aside for a garage sale.

3. Sort again

Once you have identified what you want and don't want – or what you need and don't need – it is time to re-sort into like categories. This is basic common sense and specific to how you use and access your stuff. Be sure to move items that don't belong in the right room or space.

4. Organize and put away

Now that you can see everything that you are keeping, it is time to find the best containers or organizing systems. There are entire stores filled with empty containers for

this purpose. With the right containers, you can reduce clutter and maximize space.

The most popular containers are the clear plastic variety because they are cheap, durable, waterproof and allow contents to be visible. Other characteristics to look for:

- Stackable;
- Have more than one use;
- Match your style or the style of the room;
- Appropriately fit what they are meant to store – a storage container that is too big just encourages more junk.

Of course, you don't have to spend a lot of money on containers. If you are proactive in your first stages of cleaning, you probably found many empty containers already:

- Hat, shoe or check boxes;
- Margarine or other plastic tubs;
- Mint or candy tins.

Maintaining Your Space

You may have tried all of these cleaning and sorting techniques before but weren't able to remain clutter-free. Organization is a process, not a state achieved in one day. Don't just think about "getting organized," encourage long-term success by thinking about "being organized" or "staying organized." Although you can set up your organizing system in a day, the challenge is to continuously maintain and improve it.

To stay clutter free, you may need to adopt a different attitude and change the habits that allow you to accumulate stuff in the first place.

Want vs. need – Wants are typically the impulse buys that end up in the closet. Instead of responding to the want impulse, ask yourself "Do I need this?" In many cases, the answer is no, and you are one step closer to staying clutter-free. Also, ask yourself the question, "Will I use this in six months? Where will I put it?"

Put things away – If your major source of clutter is really procrastination, break the habit. When you

come home, put away the mail, the groceries, etc. immediately. Another option is to make a habit of taking 10 minutes every night before bed to put away the odds and ends. You'll go to sleep easier knowing that there is less work to do in the morning.

Extra Help

The trend to living a simpler life is gaining in popularity, and there is a wealth of information available, including books written to help people organize. Check out your local library or book store for more inspiration, tips and suggestions. If you need more help, consider hiring a professional organizer. The National Association of Professional Organizer's website, <http://www.napo.net>, features a national database of members, searchable by location.

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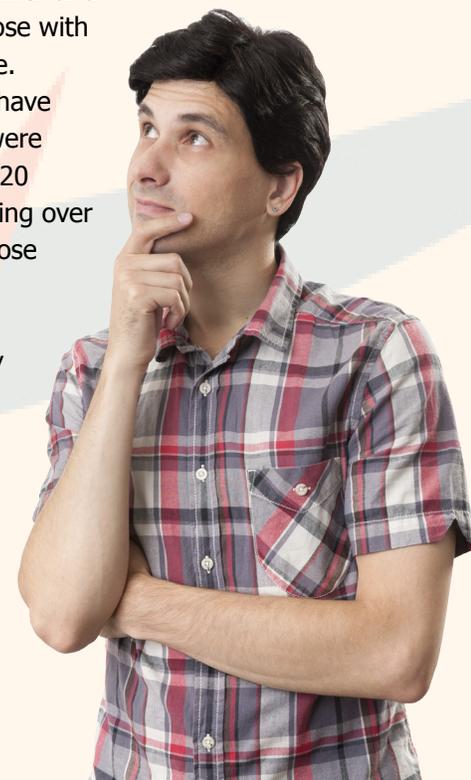
The Power of Positive Thinking: Improving Your Mood, Your Health and Your Life

Everyone talks about "the power of positive thinking." It seems like just a saying, but what's amazing is that it's true!

Research by psychologist Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania revealed that optimistic people are happier, healthier and more successful than those with a negative outlook on life. Conversely, researchers have found that people who were pessimistic had a nearly 20 percent higher risk of dying over a 30-year period than those who were optimistic.

When we think positively about ourselves, we work harder and make a better impression on others. We build stronger and more

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productive relationships. Thinking positively doesn't mean that we deny the challenging aspects of our lives. Instead, it means that we focus on the positive.

Keep a Gratitude Journal

When we think about gratitude every day, it makes us aware of the aspects of life that are good and can give us a more positive outlook. In fact, research shows that people who kept track of their gratitude once a week were more upbeat and had fewer physical complaints than others.

Get a blank book and keep it close at hand. During the day look for things that you're grateful for, then write about them before bedtime. It can be the basics, like good health, a safe home or a sunny day, or more dramatic like getting hired for a great new job, having a touching moment with your spouse or completing a difficult project at work.

Create a Daily Affirmation

Affirmations can change the way we think for the better. If we focus on something and believe we can do it, we're more likely to achieve it. Every morning, set a goal or focus for the day. This can be personal or work-related. By writing your affirmations down, you may think more positively about what you're working to accomplish.

Keep affirmations short, so they're easy to remember during the day. And make them a bit of a stretch, so you're expanding yourself. As you write them, envision yourself successfully achieving them.

Meditate or Practice Relaxation Techniques

Meditation involves spending time reflecting on just one thought. Most people do it best at a quiet time and in a quiet place, and get their bodies comfortable first. Then they focus on a positive or peaceful thought, or simply on breathing. Meditation may

take time to learn, but if you're patient, you can stay focused.

Relaxation is similar to meditation and helps relieve tension in the body. It's best to be in a quiet place and time, then close your eyes. As you let go of tension in your body and focus on breathing, you'll feel more calm, relaxed and positive.

Positive thinking can help you become happier, and it may make you more productive too. But if you're not feeling positive, you don't have to go it alone. (OEAP and liveandworkwell.com can be of help.)

The Physical Benefits of Positive Thinking

Not only does positive thinking help us become more content and more productive. It may also make us feel better by:

- Lowering blood pressure;
- Lowering risk of heart disease;
- Eliminating tense muscle aches and pains;
- Helping with weight loss (or gain, depending on each person's reaction to stress);
- Calming the stomach;
- Increasing self-esteem;
- Reducing headaches;
- Improving overall wellness.

Physicians have found that a positive attitude can result in faster recovery from surgery and burns, more resistance to arthritis and cancer, and improved immune function. That's because of neuropeptides produced in our brain. These chemicals transmit messages that direct the immune system. And when we think positively, the messages are stronger.

Eight Tips for Thinking Positive

- 1. Create a positive wakeup scenario.** Use a clock radio that plays soft music, rather than harsh talk, and allow plenty of time to get ready for your day. Eat a healthy breakfast and not too much caffeine!



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- 1. Give yourself praise.** At the end of the day, take a minute to focus on what you accomplished. You probably have more successes than failures each day if you stop to think about the day.
- 2. Avoid perfectionism.** Give yourself credit for your accomplishments without beating yourself up for falling short of perfection. Very few things in this world are perfect.
- 3. Help others.** When we invest ourselves in a community activity that helps others, it helps us put our own challenges in perspective. It's rewarding and can help us feel more positive.
- 4. Get strength from family and friends.** Most all of us have friends or family members who help us feel worthwhile. Keep in close touch with these positive people and share your feelings.
- 5. Look for the silver lining.** When you've overcome a difficult situation, think about how the challenge helped you grow as a person, developing new skills and building stronger relationships.
- 6. Take time for activities you enjoy.** Divert yourself with what you like to do, whether it's a hobby, going to the movies, singing, dancing or taking a walk.
- 7. Stop and smell the roses.** Take a break to enjoy the smaller things in life that give you pleasure – the taste of certain foods, the smell of flowers, the look of a beautiful sunset.

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Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line: Never wonder if your concern is suitable of the OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.



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