

Gain Back Time,
Money & Your Sanity
this
SUMMER

THE COST OF CLUTTER

By Rowena List

Summer — are you dreaming of a carefree season spent doing what you want when you want? Or does the easy-breezy part of summer escape you? Do you somehow still feel weighed down and stressed and time-pressed? You're not alone if clutter has got the best of you. The fact is your clutter is costing you on many fronts.

TIME: On average, people in cluttered and disorganized environments waste up to 90 minutes a day looking for things. Whether it's time spent looking for a wrinkle-free outfit, trying to find the kids' homework or a document for an important work project, if you can't find what you're looking for in

20 seconds or less, your clutter is costing you your most valuable commodity — time.

We all have the same 24 hours in a day. The only way we can feel like we have more time is by maximizing it — putting systems in place so time isn't wasted looking for things. Simple systems so they're easy to remember and use:

- "A place for everything and everything in its place" (example, the kitchen scissors)
- If you take it out, put it back
- If you take it off, hang it up
- The 60 second rule: if it can be done in 60 seconds or less, do it right away; don't

table it for another time (example: go through your mail and put to-do items in their proper place*)

- A designated homework zone, with storage for books and supplies

Being organized with simple systems in place can help you gain back those 90 minutes a day. How will you spend them?

** Try as we might to be paper-free, many households are still overrun with paper. You might find something like my 1-to-31 binder system helpful. I know many women who can't live without it!*

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MONEY: There is no question clutter definitely costs us money. How many times have you bought something only to come home and find it three months later? How much food and how many bottles of supplements and toiletry products do you throw out only partially used? Do you have any outstanding interest on forgotten bills?

While there are ways to gain back some of that cash, the bigger issue is how we solve the root problem. Why not embark on a “get back to basics” initiative? Begin with a serious purge, de-clutter and organize effort so you know what you have and what you need — what you really need, and then buy just that.

And if you want to “get back to basics” on an even deeper level, explore your purchasing habits. Are you consuming consciously or is retail your therapy? Try a “purchase nothing day” once or twice a week. You may be surprised at how rich you can feel without spending a penny.

STRESS: Clutter can become invisible to those

who live with it, however it’s not invisible to the subconscious mind. Our environments have a significant impact on our psyche, whether we realize it or not. A side effect such as not being able to find things is on the “lighter” side of the scale. On the more serious side of the scale is the inability to focus, anxiety, depression and isolation. Or maybe your clutter is even costing you a relationship.

Certainly a “get back to basics” initiative as mentioned above is needed, but when you’re feeling mental stress, I recommend first clearing out mental clutter. This may sound easier said than done, but start slow with some deep breathing. Next create a mind dump. Simply take a piece of paper and write down everything in your head — whether you’re planning a vacation, thinking about work or have sizable matters to deal with, such as aging parents or a health issue. Let the paper or computer hold all your thoughts and feelings. Keep writing things down as you think of them. Once everything is

down on paper, you’ll be able to see the “to-dos” and you can begin to prioritize. What can you delegate or ask for support from friends and family? It’s important to keep breathing and stay present. Know that you’ve written it down already, so you don’t need to expend more energy thinking about it.

Eventually you will feel like a “get back to basics” initiative can take place without being overwhelmed and you’ll reap the benefits of having less physical clutter: less mind clutter, better sleep, less worry and more energy.

Watch how much more joyful you and your family become as you release stuff no longer serving you. Enjoy your clutter-free summer! ■



Rowena List is a coach, professional organizer and speaker based in British Columbia. Learn more at www.gettingittogether.ca.