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Curbing your clutter

In this new six-part series, Johannesburg life coach Kate Emmerson gives step-by-step advice on how to streamline your life. Here she shows us just **how to evaluate the price of clutter.**

Piles of paperwork, broken appliances, or clothes you'll never wear again.... Clutter can be easy to identify, but it also goes beyond what you can see. In fact, clutter comes in three forms – physical, emotional and psychological – all of which feed off your time, money, emotions and vital energy. Perhaps the most useful way to define clutter is 'anything that no longer serves you'. By holding onto these, we prevent ourselves from fulfilling our potential.

Take Barbara, 39, who lost someone very dear to her three years ago. She stopped working, became reclusive and created a junk room where she stashed her clutter. Over time, she realised that holding onto all this 'stuff' was causing her to die inside. After being trapped by her grief and clutter for years, Barbara is finally reclaiming her life. She's driving and writing again (she'd stopped both), and has started yoga.

If you're living with disorder, emotional baggage or a lack of energy, I urge you to start evaluating the cost in specific terms. Do you recognise yourself in any of the following 10 scenarios?

1. The missing file

You have to locate a document in your office or home but, because you can't place it (either physically or in your mental filing cabinet), you start racking your brain and wading through piles of stuff without knowing if you're even close.

Cost: Time and energy. You're also likely to feel unprofessional and rushed, beat yourself up and miss deadlines.

2. The amoeba effect

You know you have a little black top somewhere in your cupboard but, because you can't find it, you go out and buy another. Or perhaps you just don't know what's in your medicine, cosmetic or grocery cupboards, so you buy more night cream, toothpaste or chutney 'just in case'.

Cost: Money, time, energy. You feel disorganised, which affects your self-esteem and productivity.

3. The time vacuum

Lots of stuff requires lots of time to look after it. Clutter in the form of objects and possessions has to be dusted, cleaned, stored, moved and insured.

Cost: Time and money.

4. The unnecessary upgrade

Have you ever considered moving into a bigger home because you've run out of space to store all your stuff? Or what about the extreme case of not being able to park your car inside your garage because it is so filled with clutter?

Cost: Money, if you're tempted to commit to a bond or rental payment you can't really afford. This way of life also encourages you to devalue your possessions.

5. The late payment

Because your paperwork is scattered around the house in no particular order, you end up paying your bills and submitting your tax return late.

Cost: Apart from the emotional stress, there are real financial penalties, including bank and SARS fines and a bad credit rating.

6. The frozen assets

Your unused exercise equipment, clothing and books are blocking your cash flow. You know that if you decluttered, you could make money by selling the things you no longer use. Or you could donate them to charity and benefit from the feeling of having made a difference.

Cost: Low cash flow, cluttered space.

7. The bodysnatcher

If you are carrying pain, illness, toxins or excess body weight, these qualify as physiological clutter.

Cost: Lack of energy, reduced vitality and loss of earnings. Being sick or tired all the time negatively affects your ability to tackle daily pressures.

8. The distraction technique

Could you be using clutter as a strategy to distract yourself from what's really important to you – whether it's learning a new skill or spending quality time with your family? By hiding behind your clutter, you avoid having to come face to face with yourself and your relationships.

Cost: You let amazing opportunities pass you by.

9. The emotional albatross

Grudges, resentment, anger and hatred are types of clutter, too. Each piece of unfinished business carries a negative charge. Emotional clutter is like threads of fishing line with lead weights at the end – they all weigh you down.

Cost: Living in the past, feeling drained, miserable and 'dead' inside.

10. That sinking feeling

Every time you walk into your office, your clutter makes you feel unprofessional (and this directly affects how you go about your day). Think about walking in your front door: do you feel relieved to be home or dread facing the mess?

Cost: Depression, loss of energy and creativity, feeling you're not engaged with your own life. You may even stop inviting people into your home.



AUDIT YOUR CLUTTER

■ Using the 10 examples mentioned as triggers, try to evaluate how much time you waste every day – looking for things, oversleeping because your energy is low, waiting for your clogged email system to process information, doing things over again, shuffling piles, jumping from one task to the next, never completing anything....

■ Assign an approximate number of hours per day. This figure probably ranges from 30 minutes to several hours. Now let's translate that into money. Calculate your current earnings per hour and times that by the hours you estimate you waste. If you're earning R200 an hour, and you waste just half an hour per day, that's R700 per week or R36,400 per year!

The potential cost of your 'clutter monster' is huge. Just imagine the possibilities you could unlock by using that time, money and energy for more exhilarating pursuits, free from clutter!

In the next issue Kate will share her five-point plan for attacking clutter (starting with your bedside table).