

## **Clutter-Prevention Habits**



**Much of the clutter in your home will disappear if you follow the “Don’t do things later” rule.** It’s not much more than leaving a room the way you found it.

- Before you leave a room, spend a few minutes putting things back where they belong, and picking up items that need to be taken out of that room and back to their original location.
- Take everything out of the car that was added this trip, bring it inside and put it away.
- Soon after you return home from an event or trip, unpack (and put away the contents of) shopping bags, backpacks and suitcases.
- Close down your desk at the end of the day, placing everything in its proper “home.”
- Take things upstairs or downstairs if you are going there anyway.
- Pick up things when they drop.
- Wipe up spills when they happen. Vacuum up messes when they occur.
- Wash dirty dishes and wipe off counters before the food dries on them.
- Fold clothes when they emerge from the dryer.

Adapted from Clutter Control, by Jeff Campbell

**Organizer Peter Walsh recommends a similar clutter-prevention rule, and he calls this “finishing the cycle.”** He explains that all the tasks we need to do have cycles – and that clutter and other problems ensue when we don’t complete those cycles. He adds that when we just do things half-way today, trying to save time, we usually make things more difficult for tomorrow. Some examples he gives are: If you bring a dirty plate into the kitchen, don’t leave it on the counter - *put it in the dishwasher*. When you pull on sweatpants after work, don’t toss your skirt onto the bed - *hang it in your closet*. If you bring in the mail, don’t drop it on the table - *sort it* (and recycle the junk mail). **Each of these tasks requires about a minute, which is minimal compared with the time you’d waste later looking for things that are not in the “homes.”**

**I have been thinking about this advice and realizing how simple, yet wise and powerful, it is.** There are so many times in the day when we have the choice of either being mindful and completing the cycle - thus maintaining the organization we’ve worked hard to create - or not completing the cycle, and contributing to clutter.

## **Karen G. Kramer - Space to Breathe** *professional organizing services for your home and office*

**Of course . . . easier said than done, right?** There are so many cycles that need attention throughout the day in these crazy-busy times. But remembering this advice and completing as many cycles as you can, will go a long way toward managing your time well, getting things done, and creating peace in your life. **Also, in lieu of actually putting something away, it is good enough to put it “on a path” to its proper place.** At least you are keeping things moving in the right direction!

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**“To jumpstart the bringing of order into your home, here are four old-fashioned rules** that can change the quality of your daily life beginning today. Repeat this recipe for contentment out loud every morning and evening for twenty-one days. Let it become your personal mantra to maintain serenity. Write these instructions on index cards and post one in every room of your home. Teach these words of wisdom to your children, whisper them into your partner’s ear:

- If you take it out, put it back.
- If you open it, close it.
- If you throw it down, pick it up.
- If you take it off, hang it up.”

From Simple Abundance, by Sarah Ban Breathnach

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### **Other ways to prevent clutter:**

- Be very mindful of what you buy and about what you bring into the house. Do I love it, do I need it, do I have a place for it?
- Beware of bargains, impulse buying and freebies.
- Get off lists for junk mail, catalogs and magazines you no longer read.
- Create a “home” for everything.
- Keep flat surfaces clear. Place decorative items in open space that can attract clutter.
- Ask yourself: If I were moving, would I keep this?
- Discourage gift giving – or tell people what you need or would really like.
- Borrow, rent, trade, barter.
- Scheduling time to declutter. 5 – 10 min at the end of the day can make a big difference.
- Use the one-in, one-out rule.
- Create routines (for paper, laundry, dishes, etc). They spell out all the parts of a task that need to be done now (instead of later).
- Know your goals and values and updating them regularly. Let them inform your choices.
- Encourage yourself to “decide.” (Clutter is often described as postponed decisions.)
- Declutter! Clutter attracts more clutter, so any decluttering will interrupt that negative spiral.