The ART of Letting Go

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Hello from Marla Dee...

I want to begin by saying - I honor your willingness to reach out and seek help so you can let go of the clutter at last. As a Professional Organizer for many years, I have witnessed tremendous courage from my clients in their willingness to get real with the story their clutter tells; to let go of the past and welcome a new change. Letting go is never easy, but it can be made easier. Did you know that most of us are holding on only because of what the clutter represents?

Clutter has been described as:
• Delayed decision
• Holding on to the past
• Fear of the future
• Distracting oneself from the present

Clutter can also be:
• Possessions that you do not use or love - or even like
• Areas that are untidy or disorganized
• Items that have no home
• An excess of things in too small of a space
• Anything that feels heavy or drags you down
• Things that are unfinished, including projects
• Anything that doesn’t serve you in your life today.

In the spirit of simplicity, I define clutter as holding on to the past or delayed decision. Let me explain what I mean.

Holding on to the past -

Holding on to the stuff is how we hold on to our past. It is not just stuff; it is our story. The physical stuff in our homes, in our offices and in our daily life is our bygone story.

• It is our value or our pain. It is the picture of our lives until now and the only story we know.

• It is our children’s precious things when they were young, their teething rings and booties, their first finger paintings, their height charts and favorite bedtime books; all being saved in a bottom dresser drawer or the top shelf of our bedroom closet.

• It is the boxes of papers from all the years in school, especially the ones with the gold stars or the A + grades on them. It is the first and second drafts of a graduate thesis.

• It is the hundreds of books we keep because we tell ourselves that we are life long students of learning.

• It is the piles of pictures that have never been put into albums to enjoy due to a lack of time.
• It is the file cabinets stuffed with papers from our former employers or employees that might be needed someday.

• It is the piles of magazines waiting to be read.

• It is the closet full of clothes from old chapters in our lives from younger and smaller times.

• It is the boxes of memorabilia that are waiting to be put into order.

Yes, as human beings we hold on to our possessions as a way of holding to the past or because we are hoping to one day share them with others and thus honor their meaning.

I am going to encourage you to look at, read and honor your story so that you can gracefully let go of the things that are now blocking you from creating in the present and looking unencumbered toward a clear future.

Delayed decisions

Secondly, let’s take a look at clutter representing delayed decisions. Simply stated, most of us were never taught how to make conscious choices. And if we add this to the fact that we are living in a time where change is happening rapidly, where technology has opened our homes and offices to the world, it is no surprise that we are overwhelmed. I do not blame people for their inability to cope in this fast paced world; In fact, I honor their willingness to keep swimming in the fast river that used to be just a slow moving stream. It is simply time to develop new tools for navigating this technology driven, quickly changing world we are in.

The Clear & SIMPLE Systems described in Get Organized, the Clear & SIMPLE Way are some excellent tools for teaching you how to make empowering decisions. In this book, I will also share the three steps of The ART of Letting Go that will simplify the loaded toss step in the S.T.A.C.K.S. © process. I will end with sharing the best resources out there for individuals who are really stuck or who struggle with a lifetime of clutter.
Let’s explore the ART of Letting Go

Because the nature of clutter is heavy and dense, I wanted to simplify the process into three meaningful steps. I want you to hear that there are three stages we go through over and over again. Acknowledging that these three steps are the natural way will make the letting go easier. We will use the word ART to guide you through:

- Acceptance
- Release
- Trust

**ACCEPTANCE**

All of our clutter tells a story and everyone has their own form of it in some area of their life. Accepting this fact is the beginning. Accepting that your environment is simply a reflection of your life up until now, a reflection of what has happened to you and what is going on inside you is vital. There does not need to be shame or blame in looking at this picture. That would only keep you in the role of a victim. In order to step into the power of change and growth you must be willing to open your eyes and look at it. There is no purpose or healthy payoff in focusing on the clutter itself, on staying locked up in guilt - not for you or for others. However, there is great power in becoming accountable for the fact that you are the creator of your life and of your environment. Your old things, your old patterns, your old relationships reflect who you have been and what you have built or what you have avoided — it is YOUR PAST!

By accepting the full story in front of you, you can step into present time. There is a famous line in the Alcoholics Anonymous book that says “Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.” I believe this is true. Acceptance is the beginning of any change. Acceptance brings peace. Acceptance opens the door for support to come in.

Here are some simple exercises to support you in coming to a place of acceptance:

Answer the following questions:

- What am I having a hard time accepting?
- Why am I having a hard time accepting where I am today?
- What am I telling myself about why I am stuck?
- What is the story I want to get out before I can move on?
- Am I willing to accept what is in front of me?

Acknowledge your feelings:

- I accept that I am scared
- I accept that I feel hopeless
- I accept that I have created this situation
- What would acceptance feel like?

Then answer:

- Where can I begin my acceptance?
- If I accept what is in front of me, how will I be set free?
- By accepting my situation, what can I let go of that is dragging me down or holding me back?
- What would acceptance look like?
Another method to get out your old story and move into a place of acceptance is to speak your story. The key is to find a person you trust who is willing to listen to what you have to say. I have found many people hold on to the stuff because they feel they need it to share their life story with another human being.

One client I will never forget was a brilliant man, a doctor, who had traveled the world, who had written books of deep knowledge, who lived in a beautiful home in the mountains, and who was buried in clutter to the point that you couldn’t move through the space. Because of this, he was blocked from doing the simple daily activities that brought him joy. So he was always gone. As I sat in his space and listened to his story, we got down to the heart of the clutter. He was saving all this stuff to share with his soul mate when she came. He felt he needed the physical proof of his journeys and his learning. And yet it was the clutter that was now burying his life force and preventing him from being present so he could show up for love. He eventually revealed that his soul mate had shown up a decade earlier but had left because of the clutter.

If this is your story I would like to offer a simple truth. The most powerful place to SEE a person’s life story is in their eyes. The greatest gift you can give yourself or another human being is to be present, look into their eyes, open your heart and your ears to witness who they are right now. All of your past is inside your and shows up in the present time moment. If you share what is really going on inside of you today – you will be SEEN! It is a vulnerable feeling. But it is a truly rich experience.

RELEASE

The second step is Release. After I have accepted where I am in present time, I am free to let go of what is getting in my way of moving forward. Now it is time to release the old, the block, the struggle. Think of acceptance as breathing in and receiving air, new life, and oxygen. Think of release as the exhale, the letting go and giving back to the Universe what your body no longer needs. It can be this simple. Sometimes life is about surrender… Sometimes, holding on, trying harder, effort, pushing or struggle is not the answer. How long can you hold your breath before your body explodes? In the same way, our bodies and creative energies can explode after holding on to the stuff for too long. Sometimes it is just time to let go. Through the years, the biggest block I have seen in the Release stage is the belief that I have to put energy or effort into it. I am here to say – start with the willingness to surrender. Take a deep breath and exhale. What are you now ready to let go of right now?

It is natural after the surrender to be ready for action. I can hear all of you out there now screaming at me – but how do I do this? I’ve tried for years and it doesn’t work, I can’t get it right. It’s just too hard. I realize that many of you have the desire to let go but were never taught how. I can want to play the piano, but without some level of teaching, all I can do is plop out notes, a long way from playing a beautiful melody.

We use the Clear & SIMPLE Systems, starting with the Foundation System of SEE IT, MAP IT, DO IT. The first place we get stuck when we are clutter clearing is that we dive into doing it without laying the foundation for success.

SEE IT – Take a look at where you have been
MAP IT – Make a plan for where you want to go
DO IT – Take the steps to get there

*Use the Clear & SIMPLE Systems handy guide at the end of this book
SEE IT – Take a look at where you’ve been

You have already journeyed through the SEE IT step by doing the exercises for the acceptance stage. You have taken a good look at where you are.

MAP IT – Make a plan for where you want to go

After you have taken the time to see where you are in relation to the clutter, it is time to map out where you want to go. My favorite form of mapping is to create a vision for the change. I believe that we are most strongly motivated by a vision. There is a great old saying “I can choose to learn from joy or pain.”

Let me share a story about a client I worked with. She is a single person in her forties, two demanding careers, lots of travel, loves recreation and being on the go. I met her six years ago and we started working together because through the years of never being home, the clutter had piled up in all her rooms. The situation was complicated by the fact that it was a very small home with no closets or storage areas and she had a deeply set pattern of holding on to everything. We had slowly worked on the clearing process over the years as her life and willingness would allow. She had consistently let go and changed her old pattern. Finally this year, she came to the place inside where she was ready to really change and create the home space that she had always longed for. It was evident to both of us that her existing home did not work for her lifestyle and the things she genuinely wanted to keep. So she is selling her home and looking for a new beginning.

I met with her because it was time to begin the packing part of the job and put a lot of her things into storage for the sale of her home. She was incredibly tense and filled with anxiety over the whole prospect. So I brought her a binder with all the maps she would need for the job and sat down with her to write her vision. (See Organizing Your Move on our product page www.clearsimple.com) She was feeling what we all do – that high energy drive ready to just dive into the doing. I promised her that if she would take 5 minutes to MAP out her vision of the new home; it would save her untold time, energy and money. I gave her a colorful piece of paper with the question on top – “What I really want in my new home?” I sat by her side as she let loose. Once she got started she didn’t want to stop. As she filled up the page her whole body shifted from fear to excitement. It was magical. She continued to add to the Vision MAP throughout our time together as new ideas came one after another.

I suggested that as she went through the DO IT part of the packing, she should hold to her vision and anytime she got stuck, go back and reread it. Her primary guideline in her decision making process would be “Does this support my vision?” That is my all time favorite question for letting go.

As you begin your mapping, here are some great questions you might consider:

- What is your new vision – of your space, your paper, your time, your money, your relationships, your life? Let this be simple and FUN!
- What do you want to change and why?
- What is the one thing you would want to work on this year?
- If you could change only one thing in your space or life, what would it be?
- What do you want to create in your life now?
- Describe who you would be in the new pattern.
- What support/resources do you have?
- What kind of help do you want or need?
- And – What is the STUFF you know you are ready to release?
Keep in mind that this MAP can take any form – journaling, list making, drawing, making a collage or mind mapping (one of my favorites).

Mind Mapping – for more Google mind map

I hope you are inspired to create a Vision MAP of your own right now. Stop reading and choose the form that would be easiest and most joyful for you. GO FOR IT!

I hope now have a new vision in place for your clutter clearing project. I know it will make a difference.

Before I move onto DO IT, I want to mention that there are many other MAPS that can serve you in the process. The power of the mapping is to clear your brain and get a general idea down on paper. Many of the SEE IT exercises were maps. Depending on the size of the project, you might want to get help so that you have a clear idea of where you want to go and how to get there. As I mentioned with my client earlier, I brought a binder with maps of what packing supplies she needed, what areas were in her home and what order worked best for packing. Together we created a list for each room of the new home and what activities would happen there. I am also a big believer in having a container for your clutter clearing job. Whether it’s a file tub, a bulletin board, a folder, a binder, a banker’s box, or anything else you want – the purpose is to “contain” and give boundaries to your project so that you know where to find your maps.

DO IT® - Take the steps to get there

Well, you’ve seen it, you’ve mapped it …so it is now time to DO IT.

It is time for action because you are clear and you have a sense of the direction you want to go. Clutter clearing is like any other journey. You could just get in the car and take off, but the odds of you getting somewhere meaningful are greatly increased if you took the time to tune into where you want to go and lay out a simple plan to get there. When you’re ready…it is time to get in the car and drive!

Clear & SIMPLE has its own system for the DO IT Step of this work. The system is called S.T.A.C.K.S® This stands for SORT, TOSS, ASSIGN a home, CONTAIN, KEEP IT UP and SIMPLIFY. I strongly suggest that you try out these steps on a small project first so that you can practice and witness the power of the system!

The most important thing I can remind you of for S.T.A.C.K.S is that each of these steps are to be taken separately from one another and they build upon each other. If you take them in sequence, you will have a very different clutter clearing experience. The most common thing to do is mix them up. We have been told in many other organizing books to pick up each item and, as we start to sort, to make a decision about it. I strongly disagree with this approach. Remember, clutter is a delayed decision. If we could
make the decision easily, the clutter wouldn’t be there. So I promise you that you will feel a new sense of ease and freedom if you honor the natural process of my organizing steps.

Please note that I am going to keep this discussion simple for this book on Clutter Clearing. For an in-depth discussion on the S.T.A.C.K.S methodology and steps, refer to Get Organized, the Clear & SIMPLE Way.

I am going to step you through this process by telling you the story of a real client. Her name is Dianne and I loved working with her. She inspired me. When she first called me in she had attended one of my workshops where we went through the systems. She heard enough to give her hope. But when she got home to her space, it still felt overwhelming and she didn’t know where to begin. The whole house needed to be done. It was 20 years of buildup. We were standing at her kitchen counter and had set aside 2 hours. I asked her, “Dianne, if we could do one little project together, what would mean the most to you”? Her response was one I hear a lot – my purse. There it was, plopped heavily on the countertop next to her. I watched her whole body get heavy and tense by just looking at it. We began by taking 5 minutes to see and map the situation. Her vision was to clear out all the junk and be able to find what she needed quickly. It was time to dive into working the S.T.A.C.K.S on her handbag.

**SORT - What is it?**

All clutter clearing begins with sorting, whether it’s your day, your desk, the junk drawer or an entire room. We start this step just like we would with a puzzle, dump it all out on the table, haul it all out of the drawer, and just sort. The freedom is no decisions yet! Just sort the items, as though you’d like to discover what is there. Label the piles with brightly colored post it notes because your mind will forget what that pile was when you started it. For Dianne, it meant piles of makeup, change, office supplies, wallet and checkbook, photos, notes in many sizes and types, receipts, trash, toys, etc. The purse also contained a stuffed day timer that was like its own over-packed bag so we sorted out its contents also. Even in this small scenario, Dianne’s tendency was to make decisions but I held her focused on the sort. By the way, this is a great way we can help each other when clutter clearing. Support the other person by helping them stay present with this step.

If you are sorting for medium or large projects, I strongly suggest sorting into banker’s boxes with lids to contain and label the piles. The purpose and power of this is to keep the mind and body free of distractions.

Here’s a Treasure Tip – After sorting, take a break. Even if its 5 minutes, take the time to breathe deeply, exhale and release the “energy of the stuff” from your body. It is such a habit for me now after sorting my own things. I usually go for a walk through my neighborhood. This is my favorite way to clear my body. When I get home, I always find myself energized and compelled to perform some physical task such as sweeping dead leaves off my back porch or some other chore which I have put off for lack of energy. You will find that clutter clearing can be invigorating and contagious.

**TOSS – Do I keep it or let it go?**

Once you have it all sorted and can clearly see what you really have and how much you have, the toss becomes much easier. There is a wonderful quote in a book titled Love it or Lose it, by Barbara Hemphill and Maggie Bedrosian, “Clarity of purpose brings clarity about what to keep and what to throw away.” By having your vision firmly in place to guide your purpose and being able to see what now requires your decisions, the process takes on a whole new life.

I want you to know how much I respect the energy of the toss. This is the letting go. This step is such a big one that this entire book is dedicated to it! I would like to offer you some simple, strong guidelines for this step.
Let go only when you are ready. To force the TOSS step is abusive whether we are doing it to ourselves or to someone else. If you let go of even 5% of your things you will free space for the new to come in. I learned this from my meditation teacher Mary Nickle (www.timeoutassociates.net) who helped me see that I couldn’t clear a lifetime’s worth of buildup in my body in one 2 hour session or even in 3 months. I have been meditating for 18 years and I still need a clean out every day.

Let your vision support you. Ask the question, does this support my vision? If not, be willing to let it go.

Let go of the idea that you have to figure out where everything is going to go. Keep it simple and find one agency that is meaningful to you and donate your things to them.

If you have unique, valuable items, trust that there is a person or agency that would be willing to help you.

Believe in win-win. Look to the gift that you are passing on to others who will love what you no longer need or want. One of my favorite stories is about a client of mine who kept getting stuck on this step because all of her items were so valuable. They represented thousands of dollars of her life force and her past. But the stuff was paralyzing her. Finally, the day came when she had to let go. She called in sick, sat still, went deep inside and called out for inspiration and help. Within minutes, she jumped up and started hauling all the stuff outside to the front yard. She took it all out along with a big sign that said FREE. Then she sat in her living room all day and spied on the people finding treasures. She let herself witness their joy and delight. It set her free. It was a beautiful way to honor the “value” of what she was letting go. She was then able to start a meaningful new chapter of her life.

A simple exercise is to hold the object, close your eyes, take a deep breath and ask “should I keep this?” If your answer is yes, you will feel your body lift and expand. You will feel a YES. If your answer is no, your body will sink or get heavy or tired. This tells you that the object is draining your life force. It is time to let it go. This works well with clutter clearing tasks also.

Only take one box, one pile, or one type of item at a time. This will support you in staying present and keep you free of distraction. Keep the other piles hidden in covered banker’s boxes.

Ask the question – “Does this serve me in the current chapter of my life?” Remember all of our clutter tells a story. Is this clutter from a past chapter that you are ready to close so you can get on with the new?

Always do the TOSS step when you are fresh. Because this step takes so much energy, it is important to give yourself a chance of success by having as much energy as possible.

If you can’t let it go and don’t want to keep it, give yourself permission to have a temporary staging box or area.

Lastly, get help if you need it. I have a professional organizer come into my home seasonally and support me in letting go of what builds up. Because it is my stuff, it is very challenging for me. I will mention some great resources at the end of this book to support you in this.

Back to our story of Dianne’s purse, we had some laughs and amazement at all that was inside. She really got into the toss. I will never forget doing the toss on the day timer. It had last year’s daily pages in it, unused but taking up a lot of space. She felt guilty that she hadn’t used them so she was simply ignoring them. It was powerful for her to clear them out and only have the current year inside. She even ended up changing her system because in going through the process thoroughly she realized that the system was her old life. She was retired now and wanted to write. She no longer needed or wanted a complicated calendar to house a busy schedule. She was ready for a simpler life.

ASSIGN A HOME – Where does it go?

The beauty of the natural order of the steps is that after the sort and toss, you now have what you want to keep and are ready to assign a home to them. Because our topic is clutter clearing (rather than organizing), I want to keep this simple and share one idea to support this next step. Look to assign a home for the items where you are actually going to need it. In the case of Dianne’s purse, there are items...
she needs on a daily basis, so having these most accessible was important. Start with the things you use the most or care about the most.

Here is a treasure tip for assigning a home to things. If you are going to start with one room for your clutter clearing, make it your bedroom. Take everything that doesn’t support the purpose of your bedroom (rest, relaxation, intimacy and rejuvenation) out. Even if you don’t know where it will go yet, get it out of the space so your bedroom becomes a sanctuary.

CONTAIN – What does it go in?

Once you know what you are keeping and the general idea of where it is going, it is now time to contain it. Once again, this step is now much easier. For this step I want to speak about how containers give us and our stuff boundaries. Oftentimes physical clutter is an attempt to have boundaries, for protection or lack of structure. By placing our things in containers with physical boundaries, our bodies experience a sense ease and freedom. This allows us to have more energy for our daily life. One of my favorite examples is the junk drawer, a great small project to start with. Most people get into the junk drawer 3 times or more each day. If you open the drawer and everything is thrown in and mixed up together, your mind and body get frustrated. By simply getting a junk drawer organizer so that all the little stuff has a home, each time you open the drawer you can find what you need and experience freedom. Another common example of this is bills. If a person is experiencing financial clutter, it’s often because the bills are buried in piles of paper. I suggest getting a beautiful basket, file folder or other container just for the bills and always put them there. Then, when it is time to pay them, they are easy to find and the experience becomes freeing rather than stressful. The same could be said for taxes – just put all the tax related papers into one container. Let this step be a simple beginning even if you aren’t ready for a complicated system. Or, how about photos, just put them all in a big treasure trunk and let that be good enough. Lastly, if you have email clutter, how about setting up file folders as the containers for the different categories of emails. This will add instant clarity.

KEEP IT UP – How do I maintain this?

For the category I call “keep it up”, I offer my all time favorite yet simple strategy. I suggest choosing one hour a week, 1/2 day a month, one weekend a season and one month a year that is all about “keep it up.” What I mean is a time chosen to restore things to where they belong and when you are willing….. To let go of what is past time. Assign a box in your home a specific location and let this be the container for what you are ready to release. This makes it easier to let go. Since we are constantly bringing things in, the clutter always builds up and we need simple systems to keep it moving out. Have a paper recycling container near where you go through the mail. By just enacting this simple practice, you keep the stuff constantly moving.

One of my favorite times of the year is November, the month of my birthday. This is the most powerful time of the year to make change, to let go of the old and step into the new. Rather than worrying about it all year, I take the weekends of November to go through all the areas in my home and clutter clear. It is the nature of being human that our clutter builds up and I am no exception. I assign this month of the year the purpose of clutter clearing. Then I celebrate the holidays with a fresh, present time home….and believe me, It feels fabulous!

SIMPLIFY – How can I live with less

I love talking about simplifying! Every time I speak on clutter clearing or organizing, some one in the audience asks the question – “How do I know where to start when I get home? It all needs to be done. It is overwhelming.” Please take what I have to say to heart. It is said with much love and empathy for the sense of being overwhelmed that many of us experience. Choose one small project – meaning it can be completed in 2-3 hours (such as Dianne’s purse), one medium project where you can get through all the
steps in 4-8 hours and one large project (2-3 days) for the entire year! Let this be enough. Do the three projects and use the systems, enjoy yourself, get creative, experience freedom and remember this is enough. Remember, it took me three years to get through my entire home. I have found that we do ourselves a great injustice by always focusing on everything that needs to get done. Take the rest of your life to bring in a new creation and let this inspire you to let go of more next year. This is the best advice I can give you.

There is power and freedom in following the steps. Remember, the systems will transform your experience of clutter clearing from stressful and overwhelming to fun & freeing! The following piece is a special treat to inspire you and keep your humor alive in this dire seriousness of dealing with clutter.

**TRUST** – the last step on your journey of freedom from the clutter is Trust! This is the most important element in clutter clearing and, in my opinion, the doing of life.

I have five labels I use to describe the chaos of the accumulation and its effect. They are:

1. Clutter
2. Holding on
3. Stuck
4. Panic
5. Fear

However, there are five words to describe the experience of freeing oneself of the clutter. They are:

1. Clearing
2. Letting Go
3. Moving
4. Peace
5. Trust

Let me bring these together for you.

- Clutter is transformed by clearing.
- You can hold on or let go.
- Do you want to stay stuck or start moving?
- Is your body in a state of panic or peace?
- Are you coming from a place of fear or trust?

In reality, all our choices come down to choosing FEAR OR TRUST. I encourage you to take this journey from a place of Trust and when the fear comes up, acknowledge it and let it go. Just for now, be willing to explore your own story and step into change.

The ART of Letting go honors and implies the fact that letting go is not a simple skill that just anyone can do at any time. It is an art, an understanding, an interaction with the world. It is built on trust, on co-creating with the Universe; it opens us up to freedom – which means you must want freedom. I believe in focusing on the gift, that we are motivated by vision rather than shame. So I will share what I feel is the greatest gift that comes from letting go of the old - the gift is open space to create the new. My favorite line is “create the space for miracles”.
INSPIRATION

Here are some of my all time favorite inspirational thoughts to support you in Letting Go of the old and trusting the new (these are taken from www.clutterersanonymous.org. I encourage you to find one or your vision and let it be your guide on this journey of Letting Go. I hope you discover your “present time self” along the way.

Affirmations for a Simpler Life!

- I nurture my spirit by surrounding myself with beauty and harmony.
- I believe I am entitled to surroundings of serenity, order and joyous life.
- I put myself first in my day, remembering that my first priority is my well being.
- I let go from a place of trust and ease. I know all my needs will be met.
- I only schedule what I can do comfortably. I rest before I get tired.
- I do one thing at a time and let myself enjoy being present.
- When I feel overwhelmed, I stop and reconnect with my source and center.
- I simplify my life, believing that when I need a fact or item, it will be available to me.
- I consciously allocate space & time for anything new that I bring into my life or home.
- I affirm abundance and prosperity, thus I release the need to hoard.
- I schedule time for play and rest.
- I am gentle with my efforts, knowing that my new way of living requires much practice.
- I do not yield to pressure or attempt to pressure others.
- I realize that I am already where I will always be, in the here and now. I live each moment with serenity, joy and gratitude.
- I am enough. I have enough. I do enough.
RESOURCES – This is a list of my favorite, truly powerful and effective resources.

www.napo.net This is the National Association of Professional Organizers. Visit their website to find a professional organizer in your area.

www.nsgcd.org The mission of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization is to explore, develop, and disseminate to professional organizers and related professionals organizing methods, techniques, approaches, and solutions that will benefit chronically disorganized people.

www.clutterersanonymous.net a 12 step fellowship which offers practical tools, support and understanding for those who suffer from chronic clutter or who struggle with letting go. They are FREE and even offer telephone meetings if you are in an area that has no live meetings.

www.debtorsonymous.org a 12 step fellowship for those people who struggle with financial clutter.

www.flylady.net a wonderful website and resource that gives you free practical steps to take on a daily basis to change your environment. It is a very structured and wise support system.

www.onlineorganizing.com a great website packed with articles and all kinds of help.

“Love it or Lose it, Living Clutter-Free Forever” by Barbara Hemphill and Maggie Bedrosian, www.loveitorloseit.com this is the BEST book I have found that teaches you and outlines how to implement a clutter free campaign. Barbara Hemphill has been a professional organizer for over 20 years and has a vast well of knowledge and real life experience to offer.

“The Simple Life” by Marla Dee, www.clearsimple.com this is a free, inspiring and small book of Marla’s articles in the Catalyst Magazine on The Simple Life on topics such as Simply Create, Simple Play, Simple Celebrations. She will inspire to live today simply and joyfully.

“Making Peace with the Things in Your Life” by Cindy Glovinsky, This book is truly supportive of honoring the relationships that we have with the stuff.

“Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui” by Karen Kingston This small, wonderful book can be read in an evening. It was the one that inspired me to begin my 3 year journey of clutter clearing in my home and my life. It offers true depth of insight into our relationship with our environment.
### Take each step below in order to save time, energy and money

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PURPOSE</th>
<th>ACTION: Choose one</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEE IT</strong></td>
<td>Take a look at where you’ve been.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write the story your clutter tells.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draw the story.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Take pictures.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Answer questions:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is working?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is not working?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where are you stuck and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAP IT</strong></td>
<td>Make a plan for where you want to go.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do a mind map.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Make a list or create a chart</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draw a picture or create a collage.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write a description of your top three priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write your vision of what you really want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DO IT</strong></td>
<td>Take the actions to get there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work through the STACKS system on the opposite side.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Sort</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>T Toss</td>
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<tr>
<td>A Assign</td>
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<tr>
<td>C Contain</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>K Keep it up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Simplify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REWARD</strong></td>
<td>You have a clear picture of where you are now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have a map to guide, inspire, and move you forward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You have a system that will take you from start to finish.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The ART of Letting Go

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**S.T.A.C.K.S.®**

Our systems make organizing SIMPLE!

Take each step in order and make only one decision at a time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>TIP</th>
<th>REWARD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SORT</strong></td>
<td>What is it?</td>
<td>Sort into piles of like with like. <em>No other decisions yet!</em></td>
<td>Place items in banker’s boxes. Label each box with a post-it note for steps ahead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOSSED</strong></td>
<td>Do I need it?</td>
<td>Put it in the “keep” or “discard” pile. Tackle one pile/one box at a time.</td>
<td>Ask, “Does this serve me in my life today?” Only let go when you are ready.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ASSIGN A HOME</strong></td>
<td>Where does it go?</td>
<td>Identify how you use the item and create activity zones accordingly.</td>
<td>Place the items you use most often in the easy-to-access locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONTAIN</strong></td>
<td>What does it go in?</td>
<td>Measure the “stuff” and the storage area before shopping.</td>
<td>Choose containers that are both functional and fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KEEP IT UP</strong></td>
<td>How do I maintain it?</td>
<td>Create a simple plan for how you will maintain the area.</td>
<td>Choose a high energy time for upkeep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SIMPLIFY</strong></td>
<td>How can I live with less?</td>
<td>Decide whether any new items pass the test. &gt; Does it serve me? Do I love it? Will I use it? Do I have room for it?</td>
<td>You will feel free, energized, and abundant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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About Marla

Organizing your home, office, paper, space and time frees you to be available for the things that mean the most in your life. Providing the support, training and tools for this transformative process is Marla’s passion. Marla strongly believes that focusing on the gifts of clutter clearing and organizing can be empowering to the individual or business and positively motivate change.

Marla is a well known speaker and trainer. She has incredible enthusiasm for organizing and is passionate about making it FUN & SIMPLE! Marla believes organizing is a skill that many people have never been taught. Therefore, she teaches the Clear & Simple™ Systems that identify where to start, what to do and how to keep it up.

Marla is a Certified Professional Organizer, Golden Circle member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, and President of the Utah NAPO Chapter. She is a Certified Feng Shui Practitioner and member of the International Feng Shui Guild. Marla has appeared on KIQ and KSL talk radio, KUTV Channel 2, KSL Channel 5, Channel 2 “Good Things Utah”, Salt Lake Tribune “Fall” and “Spring” Home Shows, Barnes & Noble, Wild Oats and others. She is a popular key note speaker, trainer and consultant. Marla is the creator of The Professional Organizer Training Program and is the author of “Get Organized, The Clear & SIMPLE Way” and “The Simple Life, along with numerous other publications. Marla is a master messenger of the Clear & SIMPLE Way!

“Organizing your space and the aspects of your life is the greatest gift of all. Every day I see individuals and businesses overwhelmed by chaos and disorder. The lack of time, training and systems makes ‘getting organized’ seem impossible. I am here to tell you organizing can be simple, fun and freeing. Embrace it now.”

Marla Dee, President
Clear & SIMPLE, LLC
For additional Clear & SIMPLE Way Products

www.clearsimple.com

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