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Getting Rid of It!

The Step-by-Step Guide for Eliminating the Clutter in Your Life

The shortest path to freedom is an uncluttered one. With this book and our online multimedia course, [Declutter Clinic](#), we have helped thousands of people get rid of what is standing in the way of their dreams.

If it's not working for you – and by "it" we mean possessions, relationships, or habits – then it is working against the life you say you really want to live.

You're about to turn the page and discover the plan that helped us clear the clutter and achieve the freedom to sell our over-sized house, move across the country for better jobs and a more affordable home, and eventually get rid of it all to travel the world together.

It didn't happen overnight, but it did happen. And you, too, can change your life by simply getting rid of what no longer serves you to make room for something that will.

If you find that you need a little bit more hand-holding and ongoing support in your decluttering project, check out Declutter Clinic for audio lessons, how-to videos, and real-world experience from two people who have used decluttering to open up a whole new life.



In fact, we'll show you how to make back the price of the course (at least!) by selling what you no longer need for top dollar.

Now let's get to it. We've got a lot of opportunity to uncover!

Betsy + Warren

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Introduction

Step away from your dusty knick-knacks. Back off from the towering stack of boxes in your garage. Don't try to cram another piece of clothing into that overflowing closet.

We hate to break it to you, but you have too much stuff. Your home is overflowing with things you cannot even remember owning, and your junk drawer has spawned offspring. You need a month's notice for anyone to come visit you, and you can't remember the last time you were able to park your car in the garage. Your makeup drawer has mascara from 5 years ago and you own 17 pairs of black shoes, 11 of which look remarkably similar.

We haven't been spying on you, but we know exactly what you're doing. It is an epidemic, and not too many years ago we were in the exact same position.

How You Got into this Mess

We get conned into buying things for the life we want to have. Commercials and ads tell you that if you buy these clothes you'll look like the model wearing them, and if you buy this exercise equipment you'll have the perfect body, and if you have this kind of home / car / watch / purse / television / computer / jewelry you'll live happily ever after.

We're going to let you in on a little secret. Marketers get paid to sell you stuff, sometimes even stuff you actually need. But if you only buy what you need, advertisers won't make enough money to stay in business. You don't have to be convinced to buy food, shelter, clothing, and

other necessities; but you do have to be sold on the "need" for a blanket with sleeves, a S'more maker, or a belt that magically works to give you six-pack abs while you sit on your bum and watch television.

In fact, think of all the money spent on treadmills every year when we could all just get outside and, you know, WALK. Advertisers depend on selling you more stuff to stay in business.

And when you aren't dealing with the advertisers preying on your wallet, you have friends and family and the threat of sentimentality to deal with. We think if we get rid of great-great grandpa's rocking chair, even if we never use it, we are disrespecting our family's heritage. We think we have to keep everything ever given to us by a lover, a friend, or a family member. We have been taught to show gratitude for gifts, even if we don't really want them anymore.

"What will Aunt Susie think if I don't wear that ugly Christmas sweater with reindeer on it that she gave me?"

Aunt Susie will get over it. And the bonus is that she'll probably stop buying you ugly sweaters because you don't appreciate her good taste anyway. That's a win no matter how you look at it.

Sentimentality and guilt account for a lot of our possessions, and we often harbor the mistaken belief that we have to keep these mementos to keep the memory or relationship alive. This is simply not true, and we're

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going to show you how to stop projecting your relationships and memories onto inanimate objects.

Finally, we're going to address the guilt - the guilt you have for spending so much money at IKEA or Bed Bath & Beyond or wherever your favorite Consumer Cult Outlet happens to be. You don't want to get rid of those things because you paid good money, dammit! (Or, conversely, you got such a screaming deal!)

This is a case of being penny-wise and pound-foolish. You will almost never make back what you spent on an item, especially when you consider the storage and maintenance costs for all these years. And it isn't a bargain if you don't actually need it anyway.

Get over it. Stop with the guilt. Move on.

How your clutter at home affects your life

There is a reason you feel claustrophobic in your own home. There is a reason you can't ever seem to get anything done. There is a reason you feel tired all the time. There is a reason you are not living the good life.

You are snuffing out your life with a mountain of stuff, and we're here to help you reclaim it. By getting rid of stuff you don't need you'll have more time to spend with your family and friends, to relax after a hard day at work, and to feel energized when you wake up in the morning.

You will be able to park your car in the garage to keep it cool in the summer and defrosted in the winter, starting your day off on a less stressful note. You will spend less

time cleaning your house. You will stop making excuses to yourself and everyone else about why you can't do things.

You may feel overwhelmed right now at the idea of going through your stuff, thinking you just don't have the energy to start such a huge project or that you won't be able to part with your things. We're not your sister/mother/father/brother/best friends. We aren't going to throw any guilt your way, and we're certainly not going to judge you for the weird crap in your closets (when you hear what we found in an old dresser, you'll see there is *nothing* for you to be ashamed of!).

What we will do is show you there is a difference between accumulating stuff and creating a life.

You are going to feel 10 pounds lighter and hundreds or thousands of dollars richer very soon (you will be surprised which number is figurative and which is literal). You are going to see opportunities where right now you only see junk. You are going to have energy like you haven't had in years. In fact, you are going to be overwhelmed by what this very straightforward and simple act will do for every area of your life.

Are you ready for that?

Why You Should Listen to Us

Our names are Warren and Betsy Talbot, and in 2010 we sold everything we owned and left on an open-ended trip around the world. We've seen the wonders of Antarctica, explored the mountains of South America, cruised the

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Atlantic from south to north, dined on every good thing in Europe, and traveled by train across all of Asia.

It's a pretty good life for two 40-somethings who were members of the Cult of Consumption just a few short years ago. We had a big home in a great neighborhood. We filled it with nice furniture, artwork, clothes, cars, and even the damn treadmill we spoke about earlier (like you, we didn't actually use it for anything more than a clothes rack).

We woke up to the realization that we were profoundly unhappy with our lives and no amount of stuff was going to solve that. We set about making some changes in our lives right then, getting rid of the things that weren't core to the life we really wanted to live. Those things included material possessions – up to and including our house, a car, long commutes for our jobs, and living in an area that was not a good fit for us (childless-by-choice couples in their 30s should probably not choose to live in family-centric suburban neighborhoods).

We moved to a new city, changed our jobs, bought a small townhouse, and continued our plan of decluttering. We gradually stopped accumulating all the things that didn't fit into the life vision we had for ourselves. We learned to say no. We learned the huge difference between acquiring an experience versus a possession (one of those lasts forever and requires no upkeep or physical space). The less we had, the richer we felt.

Then in April of 2007 one of our close family members had a heart attack in his 30s. The next year a good friend suffered a brain aneurysm, also in her 30s. At the time we

were both 37 and waking up to the stark reality that we weren't guaranteed a comfy retirement in good health with which to travel the world. At the same time the US economy was tanking, and we watched our retirement accounts bleed money after month.

Ready for a Change

It was both the most depressing and the most optimistic times of our lives. (*Wait a second; did they just say "optimistic?"*) Yes, you heard us right. Because we had already spent years downsizing and decluttering to only having the essentials to our dream life – things that were beautiful, useful, or truly meaningful – it took only a brief conversation to realize we could sell everything to travel around the world. And the very next day we started acting on that dream.

You may not want to sell everything you own to travel the world, but we didn't either a few years ago. What letting go of the junk in your life will do is open up possibilities you can't even comprehend right now, *opportunities and experiences that just can't and won't happen while you are grounded by so much stuff.*

It will happen in small ways every single day as you get to spend more time in a comfortable space with your kids, your mate, or your friends. It will happen in large ways in the form of opportunities and ideas that you just don't have the mental energy to see right now, much less consider.

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Find out much more about how we made our big dream of world travel happen – financially, mentally, and emotionally – in our step-by-step guide, Dream Save Do: Stop Dreaming and Start Living (www.dreamsavedo.com.)

How to Use this Book

This book documents the system we used to get rid of all of our stuff in 25 months, how we made some serious cash doing it, and then set off to live the life of our dreams. Whether you want to streamline for a move, a big trip, a new relationship, or just to stop feeling so weighed down by all your possessions, this guide will show you how to get out from under all your stuff so you can start living the good life.

This book provides practical advice on getting rid of your stuff. However, we all know that a step-by-step guide isn't always enough. We also address the emotional and societal pressures of decluttering, and it will pay for you to analyze this as you strive to prevent a relapse in the future.

If you know why you tend to accumulate things, you'll see the warning signs earlier next time.

We'll be sharing a bit of our story as we go so you can see what it was like to get rid of those things at the time (two very different perspectives), as well as how it has impacted our present lives. To do that well, you first need to know a little bit about individually.

About Betsy

She is a recovering pack rat who was facing both the biggest challenge and greatest opportunity of her life when we started planning for this adventure in 2008. She likes to nest, things comfort her, and she doesn't easily let them go. She comes from a long line of pack rats – you could say it is even genetic! If you had told her at the start of our downsizing she would eventually be giving up everything she owned she would have probably thrown up on your shoes.

About Warren

He escaped Corporate America in 2010 after an 18-year career in the software industry. He has never met a piece of paper or item that he did not want to file or throw out. He absolutely loves to plan and could spend hours researching a new project or idea. He jumped headfirst into the process of getting rid of our stuff the day after we made the decision to travel. Needless to say this was not fully embraced by Betsy.

Getting Started

At the end of each chapter you'll find Weekend Challenges to help you reinforce your decluttering and downsizing efforts. Remember, the goal is to take decisive action on a regular basis, even if that action is 15 minutes a day. You'll be amazed at how much you can change your life with that kind of effort and impressed at what a focused push will accomplish.

Ready? Let's get started!

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Chapter 1: Mental Prep

Before you start throwing things away willy-nilly, we should first explore a few schools of thought on the simplification process. It pays to know which system will work best for you both for this purge and for keeping yourself on track afterward.

Five Styles of Decluttering

None of these methods are “more right” than the others. In fact, the right one is the one that is easiest for you to do. The easier it is, the more likely you’ll do it, and keep doing it.

We always advocate the easiest method because if it is too hard you simply won’t do it. We aren’t going to fight human nature; we’re going to work with it to get the best results.

One thing in, one thing out

Are you happy with your space and number of possessions? Then this is the method for you. The vast majority of people are not here yet, but this is a good practice to put into play even now.

For example, say you recently bought 3 shirts to replace some old ones in your closet. Following this rule, you would immediately donate/recycle/trash 3 old shirts as soon as the new ones come into your house.

It may sound like a small thing, but this practice will keep you from accumulating more unnecessary stuff as you begin the work to declutter the rest of your house and set you up for good habits going forward. By adopting this process now you can stem the flow of things into your life.

Now that we carry everything we own in two (2) backpacks this is the method we live by every day. While it was certainly not always this way, we love this approach whether you own 25 pounds (12kg) of possessions like we do or enough to fill a large home. Now we spent time thinking about every purchase and trying to determine what we need to throw away in order to make the acquisition. More times than not we end up passing on the new purchase and saving the money as well as the additional stuff.

Relieve yourself of a thing a day

Can you part with just one thing every day until you hit your simplification “sweet spot?” There are groups online documenting their decluttering efforts, and each post is usually a list of what was taken in as well as “relieved” that day. (It can make for some really funny reading, until you run across items you actually own.)

When you relieve yourself of just one thing a day you have to keep in mind what you are taking in as well, so if you bring in a new book then 2 other things have to go to keep the number of possessions at a net -1 from the previous day. This method can be amped up based on your level of motivation on any given day.

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The key to this method is to define a total number of possessions you want to get rid of or number days you want to do this. The nice thing is you can start off at 30 days and see big progress and get yourself used to the decluttering process.

Small is the new significant

Decluttering does not have to be a huge ordeal that takes entire weekends for a year.

The Japanese principle of Kaizen states that numerous small improvements done continuously are more effective than big improvements done sporadically.

Do you have 15 minutes a day to clean out a drawer, recycle old magazines, or combine your duplicate cleaning products? This is progress, and every day you can easily build on it by making another small continuous improvement. Remember, small is the new significant.

Getting started is often the hardest part of decluttering, and by promising yourself 15 minutes of daily effort, you'll often find yourself sticking with it for an hour or more. Once you get over the hump of starting, you'll be motivated to keep going.

One complete project at a time

It can be overwhelming to think of decluttering your entire home and office, especially if you are the only one who wants to do it. By breaking the job down into smaller complete projects, it will be easier to reach your goal.

If you have one day a month to devote to decluttering, think about a project you can actually finish. And by finish we mean completely decluttered, trash taken out, donations made, things sold or moved to the staging area (more on this later), and recyclables in bins.

If you leave any little piece of this undone, it will only add to your clutter and frustration. Better to completely declutter one closet than to attempt three (3) and have bags of clothes to donate in your garage for the next year.

Cash for clutter

You've probably seen those shows on TV: *Clean House*, *Clean Sweep* and the like. Part of the entire decluttering/organizing process in the show is a yard sale to raise money for redecorating. In each episode it seems the people are surprised at how much money can be made.

You can sell your items through a yard sale, online at Craigslist or eBay, or through consignment shops or specialty stores.

One key to this method is to have a "staging area" in your home. By removing the items from your daily life, you can continue your decluttering process until the item is sold.

Keep your staging area relatively small because the goal is to move it out fast, like inventory at a store. If you make it big, like the entire garage, you'll just end up with another permanent storage area.

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One rule is to have a sell-by date - a yard sale on the calendar, a schedule for listing items online, or a date to deliver items to consignment and specialty shops. Otherwise, your staging area will turn into a huge clutter zone before you know it.

This is the area where Warren excels. He turned our house into a Craigslist shopping mall. Each week for 2 years he would put items on sale by taking pictures, posting them, and moving them down to our staging area (aka the Den). Every single time he did it we were one step closer to living our dream life, and the pileup of cash made it easier for Betsy to let go of her packrat tendencies.

What Style Works For You?

During our years of paring down we experimented with all of these methods and used each to different degrees. The one that proved the most fun (in Warren's words) was the cash for clutter system with Craigslist and our shared focus on small is the new significant.

The key is to dive in and start trying one out today. See how you feel after living with the new model for a couple weeks. Then you can try another until you find a fit with your goals and comfort level. In the end, focusing long-term on the one that fits you best will help you stay on track.

With a firm strategy in place, you will be able to easily dispose of your unwanted items and have a little extra

cash in your pocket to celebrate your newfound simplicity.

Did this sample get you excited about making more room in your life for living?

You can get the entire action plan in our book, [Getting Rid of It](#).

Do you need extra support in getting your clutter under control? Check out our online course, [Declutter Clinic](#). It's made for people who want **big results fast!**

Wishing you much success as make room for the kind of live you've always wanted to live.

Betsy and Warren

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