

Clearing your clutter a great way to start the year

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If they say a man's home is his castle, it seems many people these days feel their surroundings are less than royal. They just have too much stuff and don't know what to do with it.

Increasingly, people are turning to professional organizers to help them clear their clutter. Professional Organizers in Canada is a non-profit association of organizers throughout the country. Its membership has doubled in each of the last two years and stands at 320 members.

Janet Barclay started Organized Assistant in Hamilton almost three years ago.

She had the idea after working as a career and employment counsellor.

"I noticed some people have more trouble managing personal business and getting everything done and other people I look at in amazement. They work part-time, full-time, have kids, volunteer," Ms. Barclay said. "I tend toward that side and I started to think about how I could share it with other people."

Ms. Barclay helps put systems in place for organizing, filing and time management for small and home-based business and some residential clients.

She said one of the most important things to remember when putting a system in place is to pay attention to your personality type. For example, if you are a visual person, it wouldn't make sense to file everything away alphabetically.

Instead, you might try clear, labelled bins or open trays on your desk. Clearing clutter has become a hot issue, as can be seen by TV shows like *Neat or Clean Sweep*.

"Our generation has so much stuff. Our parent's generation just had the necessities. We have so many things. And along with the fact we have more stuff, we are also busier. So all this stuff doesn't end up being put away," she said. "So this has become a necessity. If we're going to continue living like this, we need a way to manage or we'll all go crazy."

In her new book, *Clutter-Free Forever!*, Stephanie Roberts points to the emotional aspects of clutter.

She writes, "For every piece of clutter that has piled up because we've been too busy or too distracted to deal with it, there's probably at least one piece that you have avoided dealing with for emotional reasons."

For example, getting rid of clothes we'll never fit into means accepting our weight getting rid of an item we never use means admitting we made a poor decision to buy it, getting rid of magazines we haven't read means accepting we will never have enough time to explore every interest. Also, if you grew up with frugal parents, getting rid of items that are still useful may trigger feelings of guilt.

If you lack confidence in pursuing a long-held dream, keeping your clutter can keep you from having to go out and actually do it.

"People who are able to live without clutter trust themselves to make good choices. As you become more conscious of what you allow into and keep in your home, you will develop a higher level of trust your own decisions," Ms. Roberts writes.

And clearing clutter will make you more productive, said Ms. Barclay.

If you do want to get started on your own, Ms. Barclay has a few tips:

- Don't try to do it all once, you will get discouraged
- Start with 15-30 minutes a day
- Don't buy containers until you know what you are left with to store
- Sort stuff into different groups, such as Store, Need at hand, Give away or Sell
- Think about why you are keeping an item. If it's just for sentimental value, maybe take a photo of the item and then give it away
- Don't keep anything that is not of use or beauty
- If it is too difficult, bring in a professional who has experience and is not emotionally attached to your belongings

Check out the Professional Organizers in Canada website at www.organizersincanada.com.