

Donna Lewczuk's

~Home Owner's Newsletter~

July 13, 2005

Today's Article: The Psychology of Clutter

For a growing number of Canadian home owners household clutter has become an emotionally charged reaction to overwhelming pressures and expectations. The pressures are many; pressure to succeed at work, to pay relentless bills of all kinds, family pressures to create the perfect parent, commercial expectations to own all the trappings of modern life just like everyone else etc. etc.

The increased acceptance of Professional Organizers, for the most part by the women in household, has opened the door to this common psychological problem. Many don't want to regard clutter as a psychological problem but what is emotional distress caused by overwhelming disorder if not psychological?

The good news is that people now know they are not alone in being messy and that there is a cure.

Time and Motivation

There is no doubt that, for many, time plays a key role. There's never enough of it and cleaning up after a less than stationary child can become numbingly relentless. So what does it take to stay organized in your home keeping up if not ahead of the game? The answer is moot, pick it up when it falls down or carve out moments from the day to re-focus. More on that in a moment. But whenever possible clean it up when it gets

dirty. If you knocked over a potted plant wouldn't you be inclined to vacuum up the dirt? If you knock over a glass of cranberry juice don't you feel the urge to scramble for a cloth. Extend that thinking into few fleeting moments of maintenance into every day for junk mail, laundry, toys.

But what if you're overwhelmed by the immensity of the work. Where does one start? How does one start? What happens is inertia sets in and the world stops at the doorstep. It's a case of stop the world I want to get off. Less and less gets picked up and the flow of the home – the Feng Shui ceases. To walk in such a home feels as though you are wading through molasses. There is no lightness, no breathing spaces from which to draw energy. One of my clients whose home was similarly and alarmingly cluttered was prompted to seek my help when her four year old daughter asked her if, "Daddy could move us to a neat house?" Her motivation suddenly became crystal clear – her children's health, mental and otherwise.

Restoring the flow requires guidance, patience and a few tricks of the mind. Read on for one good way to 're-perceive' to start you on your way:

Men and Motivation

It's commonly accepted that men are more prone to accept living in disorder than women. As Humphrey Bogart remarked in *The African Queen*, "A man living alone starts to live like a hog". Indeed a common inhibitor to advancement for many housewives is that their husband is not "on board" to de-clutter. As the saying goes, "A Woman's work is never done and a Man's work is never done either."

The male of the species is motivated by two things: gain and avoidance. Nothing gets a guy to put out the garbage faster than the thought of avoiding an argument about it. At work a man has peer pressure, boss pressure etc. He must perform or risk embarrassment. He is proactive in order to avoid something. He also has

monetary gain. At home he is reactive - reacting to sudden demands on his time. Sometimes he's entrenched sometimes he plays along. Speak his language. Telling him something makes sense to do is not a motivating factor to drop the golf clubs or remote.

To be fair more women are catching up to the Bogart standard and seen to be as messy as pressures mount and the need to escape takes over. Which brings us to escape mechanisms.

Escape Mechanisms

With the help of a good organizer one can be guided to live life less large and reclaim not only breathing space but peace of mind. But first it has to be recognized that one has little mental avenues of escape that become ingrained habits the moment those feelings of being overwhelmed starts to tighten the chest and weigh the mind down. Some look at the entirety of the clutter then instantly do an about face and have a sandwich or watch some TV or call a friend or have a little lie down anything but "tackle the problem".

Answers and small exercises

Let's get past the nature of the things we own and how we simply own too many things we don't need. Let's concentrate on doing something small to get you overwhelmed. Let's use the psychology that's been blocking you and use it to return flow one bit at a time. It works Trust me.

The answer is not to look at the entirety of the whole mess whether it's a pile of laundry or papers or toys or tools or lots of everything under the sun jumbled in a pile in your room of shame.

One has to refocus, change one's perception. Develop a new outlook, a paradigm. Reinvent your viewpoint. Stand back and shake your eyes

and when you look again see only one single item to work on. And as the Buddhists say, "if you're going to do the dishes, DO THE DISHES." Make it tactile. Enjoy the feel the water on your hands, the small exhilaration of each cleaned dish, dried and put away as a triumph. Pat yourself for each small victory. Make a point of it.

This is directed at husbands as well. Men need to take a more active role in their home upkeep.

So enjoy the moment in time as if it's a meditation. It means draw the experience into your life. It has to be done anyway so instead of making it an onerous 'away' experience make it a 'toward' experience. Bring it into the present moment, don't dwell on all the other pressing tasks that await you.

If you truly want to get things done then break down the moments you own each day. Even the most harried mother cannot say she doesn't have five minutes a day to tend to clutter. You do what you can do so do five minutes on things that would otherwise remain undone. Give your mind a mental escape if you must, use those tricks you've ingrained in your mind but instead of being ashamed of running away, use it as a reward system to take bites out of the problem with 5-15 minute segments each day.

Tell yourself you are going to do one thing for 15 minutes then you get to run away. But then do it. Run away. It's okay – start small and build the focus. I have had clients who cried at the mere sight of the problem and did nothing at all. But soon were phoning me up telling they just did three hours and felt hugely elated. As long as the process starts it lifts a weight of the home owner – a psychological weight. Your mind will love you for it. Call it therapy for your home.

As you choose one item from the pile to repatriate to its true home – the one task at a time, make it tactile. Slow down time. See the task done in your mind. If it's the dishes handle one plate at a time and see it going from the sink to its proper and one home – the place it is supposed to reside. Each thing you own has a true home. Life is out of order when things are out of place, their place. Restoring order means looking at each single item individually and not

as a whole. You brought each thing into your home one at a time so single each out again to go where it should, do what it should, be where it should be. If the item no longer serves a purpose in your life then GET RID OF IT. Decide its fate then and there. No picking up ten things to decide on, dropping them on the floor and creating a whole new pile to trip over.

Focus your mind on one moment of time and ONE THING AT A TIME. (How to apply this to specific areas such as a home office in later newsletters.)

In fact repeat that phrase to your self as you choose one thing and one thing only to replace to its true home. If that means the trash then so be it. Let your psychology and emotions work for you and not against you. Know the there is truly not a moment in your life when you are not in control. What you lack is the right perception. To use an odd analogy, the Maritimers say, "There's no bad weather – only inappropriate clothing. Change your clothes folks.

Next time I'll discuss donating the things you don't need.

Have a great day!

Donna

<http://www.donnasmortgages.com>

Donna Lewczuk
Mortgage Specialist
Mortgage Financial Corp.
(905)529-2521
dlewczuk@on.aibn.com

To unsubscribe please send return email.