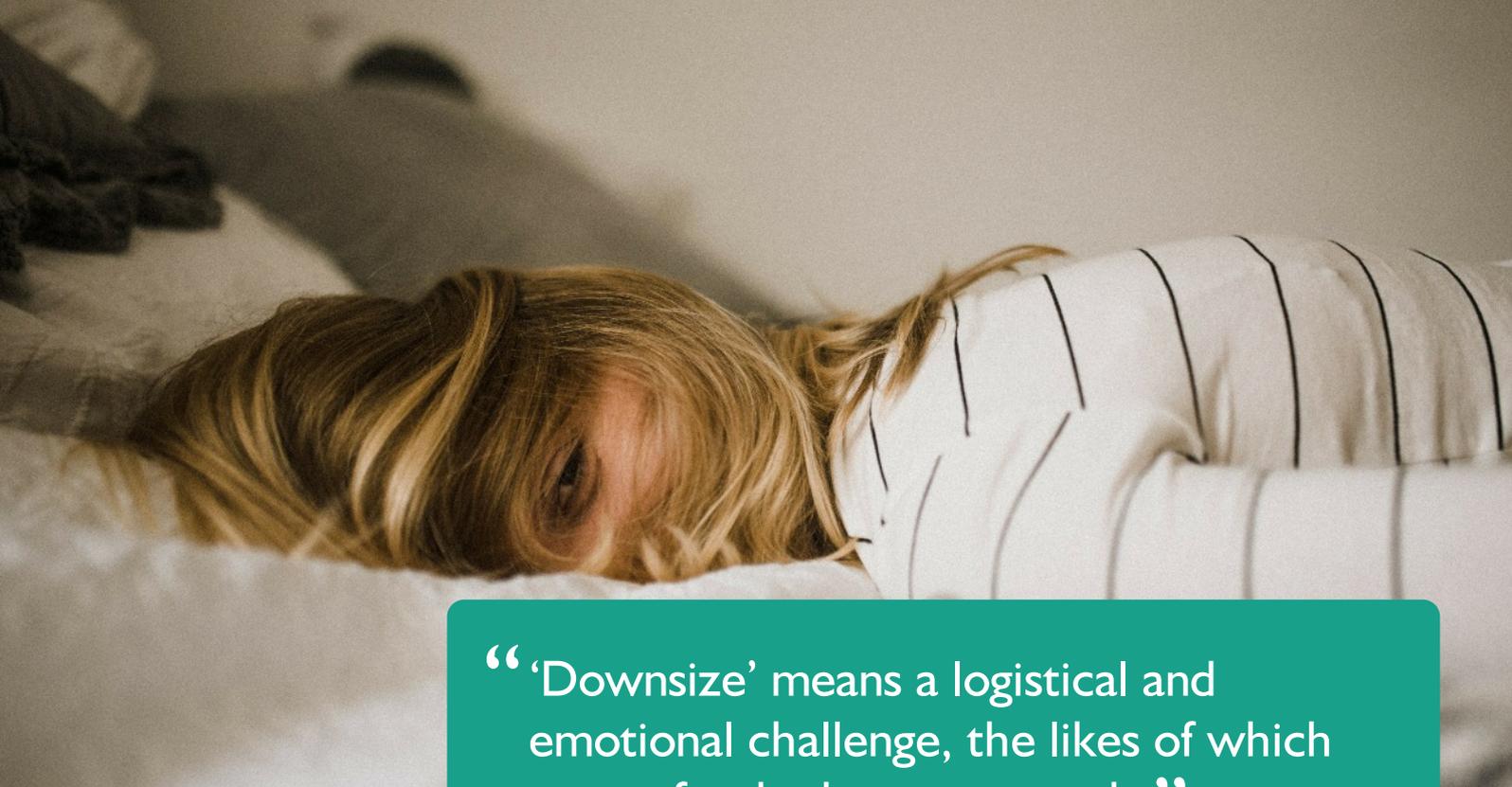




Downsizing For A Simpler Life

How to downsize, de-clutter and make smooth transitions to an increasingly simpler life.





“ ‘Downsize’ means a logistical and emotional challenge, the likes of which most of us had not expected. ”

Life Happens... So Does Complexity

Downsizing is one of those issues which usually sits somewhere way in the back of mind - something we may need to do someday, but not really a priority. But when life circumstances change - be they planned or unplanned, there are a few basic things we can do right now to make that stressful process, more stress free. The need to make important life decisions about our possessions is something that we can do voluntarily and consciously or it could be forced upon us due to changed life circumstances.

As an 're-homer' of furniture, I often see people in very difficult and vulnerable circumstances such as after the loss of a loved one or at a time when staying in the family home is no longer an option. These "forced" change in circumstances make it doubly difficult because you may find yourself having to make very difficult decisions when you feel extremely vulnerable.

The dictionary definition makes it seem easy: Down-size (doun'siz') (v.) To reduce in number or size. To simplify (one's life, for instance), as by reducing the number of one's possessions. To become smaller in size by reductions in personnel or assets. But for most of us, "downsize" means a logistical and

emotional challenge, the likes of which most of us had not expected. For example, downsizing isn't just about getting rid of physical things: it's also about releasing the emotional attachments that comes with them. As I have seen this process unfold for many, it has taught me that no one should underestimate the amount of work — management really, of things, people and feelings — involved.

Furniture and decor over the ages speaks volumes about how people live. Not only does furniture choices and trends identify social attitudes but provide evidence of how these social attitudes were expressed in day-to-day living. If you are furnishing a house today, you can adopt one of two points of view. You can say to yourself that tables and chairs and cupboards are articles of convenience and nothing more, and that their appearance is of no consequence provided they are solidly constructed - the chairs can be sat without discomfort and the cupboards are of sufficient size and shape to accommodate all of the things you want to put in them.

Alternatively, you may recognize that a great part of your future life will be lived with the furniture you choose, and its purpose is not simply functional and well crafted. With

careful selection of pieces, it can not only be functional through its construction but add a lot of enjoyment by its design, look, feel and even history. Pick up any book on the history of civilizations and you will see a vast array of furniture styles, designs, materials, uses and concepts. It is not unusual to see how furniture is often a form of self-expression, a statement of social attitude at a particular point in time and even an art form. In museums you may see a piece of furniture in isolation. But in reality, furniture pieces can be a bit like a jig saw - when looked at as a collective it builds a unique picture - a piece for a special place in the home. This perspective opens a wonderful panorama on the possibilities each piece can present in your unique story - and the challenge when it is time to let it go.

Based on what I see on a regular basis, there is much to be said for a proactive approach to considering what you keep and what should be moved on. But most importantly, this does not necessarily need to be a one-off exercise. By being mindful of your possessions, you can reduce clutter and make the transition easily when the time come to downsize and ultimately lead to a simpler, less stressed life and home environment.

Where Has All This Stuff Come From?

Each and every one of us has this yearn to create a home. Some do it consciously, but many do it unconsciously. So, what is our home and why do we do it?

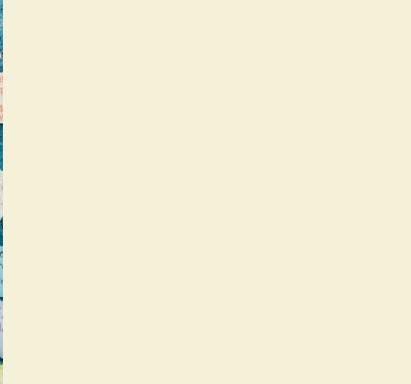
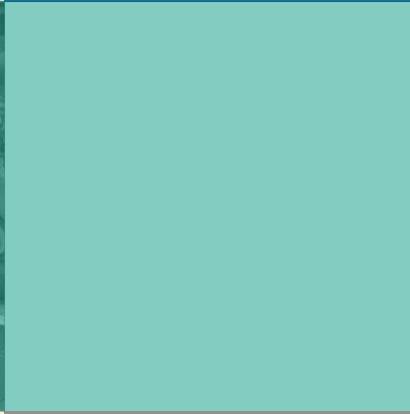
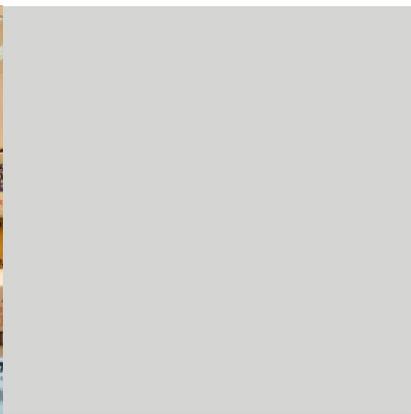
Well, in its simplest form, we assemble our chairs, beds, sideboards, tables, decorations, cutlery, china, rugs – all of our individual choosing, into our expression of HOME. In many respects, it is an expression of who we are. And why would we do that? At the most basic level, it helps us every day to remember who we are, what we stand for. In effect we overlay our individual identities with the things that we surround ourselves with. In that sense, it becomes our temple.

The original creation of temples in ancient times was the “home” of our Gods. We created a home for them that represented who they were and was a daily reminder to us of their importance in our lives. When we create our own homes, we are not seeking to be worshipped, but we are seeking to create our own personal environments that expresses who we are. We actively seek objects that bring that expression to life. So, in this sense, when we are finding pieces of furniture and other objects for our home – be it grand or humble, it is a true expression of who we are.

The furniture and objects that we surround ourselves with whispers to us each day, gently reminding us of who we are, what we show up for each day and our little statement to the world around us. They become our tangible expression of our identity, who we are and seek to be. Perhaps a beautiful way to describe it is they become a container for our Soul.

But just like in other parts of our life, at some point in time it becomes necessary to stop and take stock. We often find that our life has become crowded with things that we have accumulated over time and increasingly complex. Sometimes, it is not until we actually stop and take stock that we suddenly realize just how much stuff we have actually accumulated. When this day arrives, it is then the magnitude of the problem that confronts us. I have found that for many, this can be quite an overwhelming time in one's life.

It is often magnified when this time arrives as a result of changed life circumstances rather than something we consciously decide. But one aspect of starting this process is the realization that the process is a lot more than just dealing with stuff. There are many emotions that will arise and need to be considered as well as a number of logistical issues to consider. I have tried to give some structure here to assist with this by providing some guides and templates to use to help.



How Will I Do This?

When confronted with what seems to be an overwhelming task, my advice is to take a structured and disciplined approach. This means you will quickly start to see results even though the task appears huge. The important thing with this approach is to make sure you finish one thing before moving on to the next. Do it once - do it right. This helps to quickly move through a seemingly huge task.

Before you start, visualize your destination. It can be dangerous to just start by throwing stuff away indiscriminately. Firstly, it is important to realize that when some of these things are gone, they are gone for good. The other important aspect is to realize that some thought needs to be applied to the process of downsizing and simplification in your life. To fail to do so may in fact invite failure as the outcome. At a time of stress and complexity, this is the last thing you need.

The visualization process does need some precision. It is important to put some definition as to what you think your home will look like after the downsizing and simplification process. This requires some thought around what your living areas will actually look like, and if possible, feel like. I always recommend making some notes about this because this makes it real when it gets out of your head onto paper. An important aspect of writing this down is also addressing the 'why'. Why do I want it to look like this?

Then comes the time to start making decisions. Some decisions are easy, while others not so easy. Some of the easy decisions might be with things that are broken and cease to be functional. Others might relate to things that are no longer in fashion and out of date. It is easy to make decisions around these things because the reason behind discarding is obvious. Where it becomes a little more difficult, when there is no compelling reason behind the decision. It is easy to

manufacture reasons or criteria to help make decisions, like 'if I haven't used this for over 12 months, it should go'. But there is a danger in adopting these artificial rules. If your focus is primarily on what to discard, it misses perhaps the most important context - what to keep. One way to make this a 'real' process is to carefully consider each item individually and ask yourself the fundamental question, - "Does this spark happiness?" If it does, keep it. If not, throw it out. I personally have found that this is the simplest and most accurate yardstick to apply to make those all important decisions.

You may wonder about the effectiveness of such a vague criterion, but the trick is to handle each item. Don't just open up your wardrobe and decide after a cursory glance that everything in it gives you a thrill. You must handle each item in your hand. When you touch each item in a conscious way, you 'feel' it and will find that the reaction will be different for each item.

I recommend this approach for a reason. After all, what is the point of downsizing and simplification? If it is not so that our possessions bring us happiness, then there really is no point at all. Therefore, the best criterion for choosing what to keep and what to discard is whether keeping it will make you happy, whether it will bring you joy. Keep only those things that speak to you, then get rid of the rest. It will liberate you.

Do it once...
Do it right ...



Making this a conscious process increases the chance of success.

Approaching the process consciously with an intent of finishing what you start will lead to positive outcomes. One outcome is likely to be a sense of liberation.



Start Right - Finish Right



Start by categories - not by room. Why? Well the simple answer is that we often store our stuff across the home. If you start with one room at a time, it is highly likely that when you finish with one room, there will be stuff in another room which might affect the decisions you have already made. Before you know it, you find yourself going in circles. Overlay this with the degree of difficulty, and frustration is sure to quickly emerge.

Things have several dimension of value. They have a physical value but it is often four other dimensions which bring complexity into this process. These are functional value, information value and emotional attachment. People have trouble discarding things they could still use (functional value) that contain helpful information (information value) and that have sentimental ties (emotional value). On top of this, if they are hard to obtain or replace (rarity), they become even harder to discard.

The process of deciding what to keep and what to discard will go much more smoothly if you begin with items that are easier to make decisions about. As you gradually work through

the easy categories into harder categories you will be honing your decision making skills. Clothes are easiest because their rarity value is so low. Photographs and letters not only have a high sentimental value, but also are one-of-a-kind; therefore they should be left until last.

By taking this sort of structured process, you will gain confidence by practicing your decision making on the easy things first. When it comes time to consider the harder categories, you will find that you will tend to be more objective when faced with difficult decisions.

When it comes to the larger items, like pieces of furniture, the task can be difficult. The emotional ties and sometimes the rarity (with antiques) can make these decisions very difficult. Where many years of family dinners on a dining table are factored in, it can be extremely difficult to separate the sentimentality with the reality that the dining table is just not going to fit in the new apartment.

When it comes to furniture, I recommend asking yourself, "what can I not live without?"

“ Start by categories - not by room. Finish what you start before moving on to the next. ”

De-cluttering is a Dialogue With Oneself.

I have found myself, and had feedback from clients, that the process of de-cluttering and simplification can be like a dialogue with oneself. The work of carefully considering each object you own to see if it sparks happiness inside is like conversing with yourself through the medium of your possessions. For this reason it is essential to create a quiet space in which to evaluate the things in your life.

The quiet is the key here because this has to be a conscious process. This means it requires your full attention. Some people always seem to like to have music in the background. I feel that noise makes it harder to hear the internal dialogue between the owner and their belongings. Listening to TV is, of course out of the question. This really should be a conscious process, so try and eliminate all distractions.

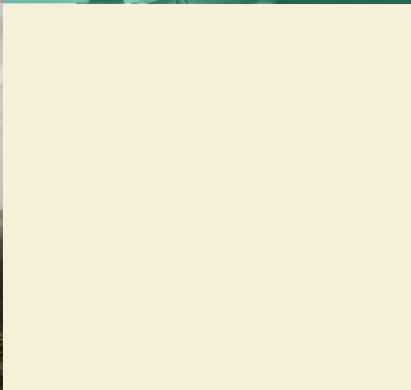
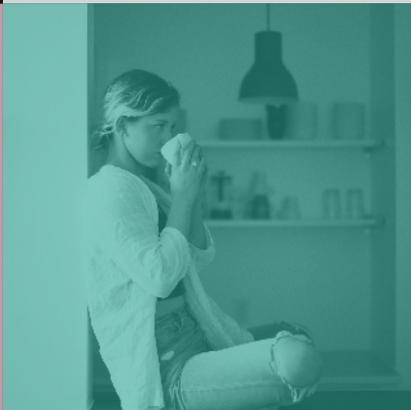
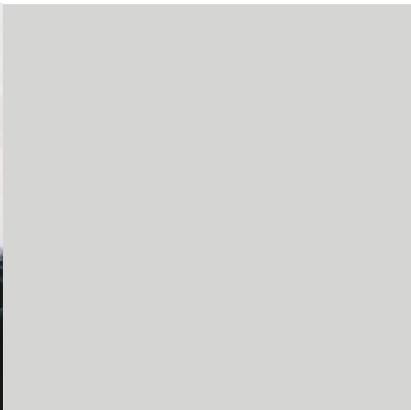
I find the best time to start a process like this is morning - preferably early. The freshness of the new day helps keep your mind clear and your awareness sharp and clear. A clear mind is important because it will be likely that unexpected emotions are likely as you go through this process. Some items will bring up memories and emotions from times past. Emotions are very powerful and bring a fascinating dimension to this process in my experience. I personally have found myself asking questions of myself - like 'why have I been holding onto

this for so long?' Having the presence of mind to let things go - physically and emotionally is a very liberating experience, but not necessarily an easy one.

This journey can take you down many paths that are sometimes long forgotten. So, when they come rushing back into the now, it can bring with it a whole kaleidoscope of emotions and feelings. But just like the process you have started, it is the perfect time to deal with whatever arises there and then and move forward. We can surprise ourselves with just how much stuff - emotional and physical we drag along with us.

So, as you can see, this conversation is a very important one. This is why distractions need to be minimized and you need to be fully present as you work your way through this process. I am not saying necessarily that each of us will encounter these emotions, but in my experience, they often do arise. In one sense, this should not surprise us because we over our lives accumulate possessions from many sources. We buy them, have them given to us as gifts, inherit them and even just 'find' them.

So as you consciously enter into this process, be kind to yourself, give yourself time and space. The results will be worth it.



What to do When you Can't Throw Something Away

Sometimes you will find a conversation like this happening - "I know I don't need you and there is no room in my life now to keep you, but I just can't let you go." Those items that we can't bring ourselves to discard, even when it is clear that they are not even bringing us joy are a real problem.

Human judgement can be divided into two broad categories - intuitive and rational. When it comes to selecting what to discard, it is actually a rational judgement that causes trouble. Although intuitively we know that an object has no attraction for us, our reason raises all kinds of arguments for deciding to keep it. These thoughts spin around and around in our minds, sometimes making it impossible to let things go.

Hesitating on an object is not necessarily the wrong thing to do. The inability to decide demonstrates a certain degree of attachment to a particular object. At the same time, not all decisions should be made based on intuition alone. But when this arises, it demonstrates the importance of why we need to carefully consider each item with care and not be distracted through thoughts such as being wasteful or making up a story about needing it at some future time - when we know this isn't true.

When you come to something that is hard to discard, carefully consider why you have it in the first place. When did you get it and what meaning did it have for you then? Reassess the role it plays in your life. If for example, you have clothes that you bought but never wear, examine them one at a time. Where did you buy that particular outfit and why? If you bought it because you thought it looked cool in the shop, then it has fulfilled the function of giving you a thrill when you bought it. Then why

did you never wear it? Was it because you realized that it didn't suit you when you got it home? If so, it has fulfilled another important function - it taught you what doesn't suit you. In fact, that particular article of clothing has already completed its role in your life, and you are free to say, "Thank you for giving me happiness when I bought you" or "Thank you for teaching me what doesn't suit me," and let it go.

Every object has a different role to play. Not all objects have to be worn out, broken or no longer functional before they are discarded. It is the same with people. Not every person you meet in your life will become a close friend or lover. Some you will find hard to get along with or impossible to like. But these people too teach us the precious lesson of who we do like, so you appreciate those special people even more.

When you come across something that you cannot throw away, think carefully about its true purpose in your life. You will be surprised at how many things you possess have already fulfilled their role. By acknowledging their contribution and letting them go with gratitude, you will be able to truly put things that will remain are the things that you really treasure. To cherish the things that are important to you, you must first discard that which have outlived their purpose. To discard something that is no longer needed is neither wasteful nor shameful. To do so will allow you to feel clear and refreshed.



Let it go, with
gratitude...

Let it go with gratitude.

Letting go does not have to be a sad or negative process. A altered perspective can show you the blessing in the letting go process and the positive reasons of moving forward.

Downsizing A Process

Category List

CHECKLIST

Category	Sub-categories	Keep	Discard	Re-home/Discard/Donate/Sell/Recycle
Clothing	Bags/Purses/Wallets Clothes Shoes Accessories Watches Jewellery Sunglasses			
Office and Media	Magazines/books Texts CD's/DVD's Old electronics Receipts/bills/documents Stationary supplies			
Photos	Photos Albums Picture books			
Kitchen	Pots/Pans Storage containers Crockery/cups/glassware Cutlery/implements Appliances			
Laundry	Cleaning tools/equipment Cleaning supplies			
Linen	Sheets and blankets Towels Table cloths/tea towels Doily's			
Workshop	Tools Gardening implements Mowing and trimming Fasteners/fixings Hardware supplies Automotive accessories			
Furniture	Lounge Dining Room Bedroom Living Room Outdoor Office Artwork/sculptures Decor			
Bathroom	Cosmetics			

A Quick Recap - The Path To Simple.

Our possessions are an accumulation over many years - sometimes lifetimes. But at some point it will become necessary to have to make sometimes difficult decisions when it is time to downsize - be it through life circumstances or through the need to de-clutter. This process can become much easier if a structured, conscious approach is adopted. Make the right decisions, the first time. Undertaking this process can make a difficult process liberating. Along the way, we can also become more aware of some important life lessons which when carefully considered, can enable us to move forward confidently with a real sense of freedom.

Life Happens.

Planning and early action helps prevent pain and stress in difficult circumstances.

01

Its a conscious process.

Do this consciously - minimum distractions and careful consideration of each item.

02

Take a structured approach

Start by category and finish what you start before moving to the next category.

03

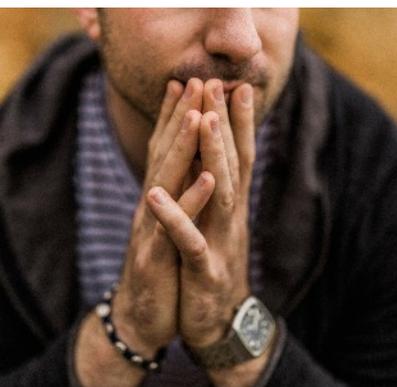
Dealing with difficult decisions.

Make decisions based on both rationality and intuition. A different perspective can help move forward.

04

It is a Process

1. Plan for the outcome - visualize the outcome you want - what will your new life look like, feel like?
2. Think about how to tackle the task of downsizing and simplification. Where to start, time to be allocated to the task, create a staging area to put the things which will be moving on.
3. Be conscious - get into the zone, remove distractions and be focused. Start with the small and work up to the complex and difficult.
4. Be ready when emotions come. Take a different perspective - be grateful for the lessons and new beginnings and possibilities.
5. Take a structured approach - by category rather than rooms because you will have stuff stored in different rooms under the same category.
6. Finish each category before starting something new.
7. Deal with difficult decisions using both intuition and rational thought. Having a different perspective sheds new light on issues.
8. Enjoy the new freedom when done.

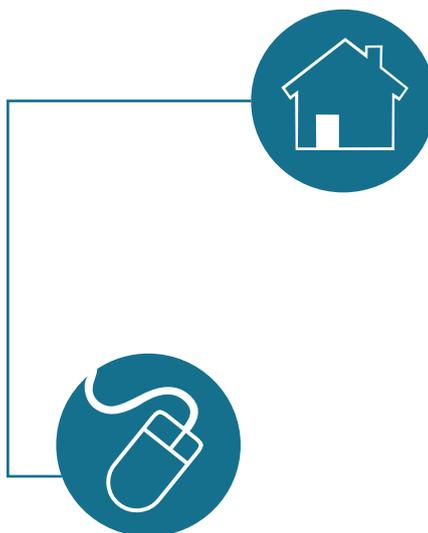


Downsizing For Life Transitions

Life happens - and at some point there will come a need to downsize your possessions - sometimes collected over lifetimes within the family.

By taking a structured and conscious approach, this can make a difficult and complex process freeing and liberating. Our goal through this process should always be simplification and happiness.

“ De-clutter and feel liberated. ”



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