

VTech Guest Article

Do Your Possessions Possess You?

Love, Leave, Sell, Store and Don't Stress over Your Stuff

By: Adriane G. Berg
CEO, Generation Bold

When we come face-to-face with disposing of our stuff, it's all personal. Even though there's a practical aspect to shedding possessions, it's our emotional attachment that makes "downsizing" a major life event.

Duke University studies explain that we stay attached to our things as a confirmation that nothing has changed. Look in the mirror, and you will see an older face staring back at you. Look at the porcelain figurine you've had for 30 years, and it hasn't changed a bit.

When we engage in downsizing, it's normal to feel angry, sad or out of control. Here's where a willingness to communicate can turn a painful process into a celebration of the past, and a bright look at the future.

Make "downsizing" a family or even a community event

To loosen the attachment to items, focus on what you are trying to achieve. Share your goals with others in a spirited way. If you are helping an older adult get rid of stuff, discuss his or her future plans; create an event, such as a brunch, to honor them after the tasks are accomplished.

If you are planning a yard sale, whether on your own or with a professional (most require a minimum of \$3,000-\$4,000 of items to sell), make the sale an occasion. Invite close neighbors, and people from your new area to attend the sale. Engage in conversation about the history of a piece of furniture, vase or jewelry and the memories it invokes. If you would like, create a picture album, scrapbook or memory book. This also is a good business tool, as it gives you a "provenance," or a history, to access the value of an item and set a sale price or donation value.

If you are a caregiver, respect the stuff

If you're a caregiver, you probably don't want your parents' furniture, jewelry or art. Decades later you might regret it. But, for now, just pretend. Remember that we identify with our possessions, so rejecting, snickering or criticizing items is no different than belittling the owner. Give a compliment or ask about the lamp; it doesn't hurt.

Make a plan

Here's a practical technique to organize the project:

Take stickers of four different colors and divide possessions into these categories:

1. I want it, and it's valuable. (keep it)
2. I'm neutral, and it's valuable. (sell it)
3. I want it, and it's not valuable. (pick one of a group; make a gift of the rest)
4. I'm neutral, and it's not valuable. (swap, barter, donate)

Talk through your reasons for wanting to keep or shed items. Give yourself a few days to make final decisions, then let go. It's OK to store a few things until you have time to attach to a new setting.

Match up the disposal method with your temperament.

There are multiple avenues to getting rid of stuff. Some of us find auctions a thrill. Others stress over the speed at which it's all over. Some of us don't appreciate strangers picking through our things. Others enjoy a yard sale as an opportunity to

meet new friends. Many older adults prefer the joy of gifting to charities and loved ones over getting money for their valuables.

If you are helping a love one, walk him or her through each process and exactly what to expect. And be with him or her as things leave or are sold. If you are in the dark as to how auctions, estate sales or dealers operate, use our list of resources and web research to educate yourself.

Whether you have a helper, or you're on your own, acknowledge that letting go of stuff is both a physical and emotional challenge. By talking and listening with family, friends and professionals, you open new doors of communication and rapport.

Resources for Disposing

Donate

- <http://www.missminimalist.com/2011/04/where-to-donate-your-stuff-101-places-your-clutter-can-do-good/> (Lists 101 places)
- Habitat for Humanity -- www.Habitat.org
- Pick up Please -- www.PickupPlease.org

Helpers

- National Association of Senior Move Managers -- www.NASMM.org
- Senior Real Estate Specialists -- www.SeniorRealEstate.com
- OCD Foundation for Hoarders -- http://www.ocfoundation.org/EO_Families_of_Hoarders.aspx

Sell

- www.eBay.com
- www.craigslist.org
- www.Volusion.com

Swap/Barter

- Barter Place -- www.BarterPlace.com
- Book Mooch -- www.BookMooch.com
- Neighborrow -- www.Neighborrow.com
- Paperback Swap -- www.PaperbackSwap.com
- Switch Planet -- www.SwitchPlanet.com
- Swap Treasurers -- www.SwapTreasurers.com
- Swap Tree -- www.SwapTree.com

Auction Houses

A list of top houses -- <http://www.gia.edu/research-resources/library/resources/industry-references/auction-houses/index.html>

What's it Worth?

- Fine Art-Bernard Benezet (get a copy in the library or art museum)
- Paintings -- www.askart.com/askart/b/bernard_benezet/bernard_benezet.aspx
- Collectibles, furniture, and more -- www.kovels.com, www.kovelsonlinestore.com/
- Collectors list themselves through associations, like toy train collectors. Here is a site for fine art collectors -- <http://www.artfortune.com/list-art-collectors/>
- American Society of Appraisers (ASA) -- www.appraisers.org/