

Self Improvement: How Organization Can Improve Your Life

By Chris Perrow, Perrow Systems

If you've ever known the freeing feeling that comes from throwing out junk and finding yourself with more space, you'll recognize the fact that removing physical clutter also eliminates mental clutter. Somehow more space gives a feeling of ...more space. It simply feels good when even a desk is less crowded.

- **Desktop clutter:** studies have been done monitoring the affect of clutter on blood pressure. People walked into a clutter-free office and blood pressure was monitored. The same personal later walked back into the same office, cluttered with papers, files, books sticky notes. Blood pressure was again taken. It was significantly higher. The clutter on her desk visibly stressed one client: the more she talked about it the more agitated she became. She felt out of control, almost hated coming to work due to the clutter. We spent 4 hours on a Saturday morning systematizing her office. Two weeks later, she physically looked different: more color in her face, smiled, and was more energetic.
- **Family Clutter:** One client was struggling with the clutter of papers and tasks dealing with the business of life: 3 busy children, volunteer activities in the community and church, social obligations. She had the right 'tools' but the system kept breaking down: deadlines were not met, activities were forgotten, chaos and dis-harmony ruled. We analyzed, assessed and re-structured how she was processing everything. Her response: "It has only been one week, but I already feel that I have become more efficient and productive. The system is working out great for me and I am happy to be using the desk for how it was originally intended to be used.
- **Multi-generational clutter:** Another client had moved her aging parents in with her, her children were grown but she had recently adopted her granddaughter. This client was managing the business of 4 separate generation's lives: trips to doctor's and hospitals, responsible for medical needs, helping a young child with schoolwork, maintaining sanity juggling the responsibilities, not wanting to continually be so overwhelmed that she missed the joys of having 4 generations under one roof. We set up a resource center fro her to use to access the many different types of information she needed to grab at any given time: medical information for the ambulance for her invalid mother, immunization records for her grand-daughter, keeping the medical bills straightened. Her response: "I wanted you to know..... how much peace of mind it has brought me, how much more settled and calm things are around here".

Clutter often is the symptom of a deeper issue. When people hold onto “things” for dear life, and are loathe to throw anything out or put it out of sight, that could be a sign of an emotional matter that needs to be resolved.

- **Emotional baggage:** Severe clutter, not mildly disorganized but clutter that actually impacts one life (relationships, work, family) often has at its base a major life-changing event. I have experienced this with clients from the death of a spouse, divorce, emotional/physical spousal abuse, illness, loss of a child and more. When you begin to peel back the layers of clutter, you can find an organized system underneath. The clutter was piled on top of this system. Almost the way one layers on clothes to keep out the cold, people layer clutter on top of their lives to provide them with a cushion to keep out the pain. Until a person is truly ready to deal with the emotional impact of the trauma, no ‘organizing’ technique will work.
- **Depression:** The lethargy that can accompany forms of depression often creates an overwhelming amount of clutter. The clutter then creates an environment that produces internal and external anger: “Why am I such a slob?” “My mother would be so ashamed of me.”, “I am such a terrible wife/mother.” Help to overcome the depression with some guided behavior modification is the right solution, along with time and confidence building.
- **ADD/ADHD:** Organization is a learned skill. Many adults who have experienced a life of ADD never grasped the basics of organization. They were usually too busy trying to cope with their mental clutter.

Human beings often belong to what I call the “Society of Possession Obsession.” The psychology of clutter-bugs is rooted in our desire for things. The reasons for this are:

- Having more increases self-esteem
- We don’t like empty spaces
- Afraid we might hurt someone’s feeling (the ugly lamp Aunt Martha gave you 8 years ago)
- I might need it someday. (For the summer cottage I hope to buy)
- It might be valuable someday (if ONLY my mom had not thrown out those baseball cards, Barbies, etc)
- We have a difficult time saying no so we often become the keeper of someone else’s stuff.

The effects of clutter show that there is a direct relationship between the number of things you own and the amount of time they consume. Physically we can’t find what we want when we want it. Psychologically we feel overwhelmed, and moan, “I will never get through all of this stuff.”

The good news is, your life improves dramatically when order is introduced. Current life problems associated with disorganization include:

- Feeling tired and lethargic
- Living in the past
- Poor health
- Being overweight
- Loss of clarity
- Procrastination
- Conflict and disharmony
- Feeling embarrassed and ashamed
- Depression
- Posing a fire hazard
- Wasting time
- Double or triple work
- Mismanaging money
- Inability to prioritize

Clearing clutter and bringing harmony and order to your life will improve all aspects of your existence. Managing stress by organizing your life will help you know yourself, set realistic expectations, schedule appointments with yourself for mental health,, and be able to find what you need.

Most people fall into one of four categories: scooper, visual, neat freak or pack rat
So it is important to design your systems around your style.

About Chris Perrow:

Chris Perrow designs organizational systems that fit the nature of the individual, department or company, helping people perform at their peak while maintaining order and flow. As President of Perrow Systems in Silver Lake, Ohio, Chris conducts training for time management, lean office, productivity, change management, leadership, and employee development. Perrow is a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO).

Chris holds a BA in psychology from Muhlenberg College. She has helped clients like Kent State University, Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority, Office Max and SummaCare. to achieve new productivity through new, lasting process training Contact Chris at Perrow Systems at 330-686-0282 or by e-mail at info@perrowsystems.com, or view her website at <http://www.perrowsystems.com>.