



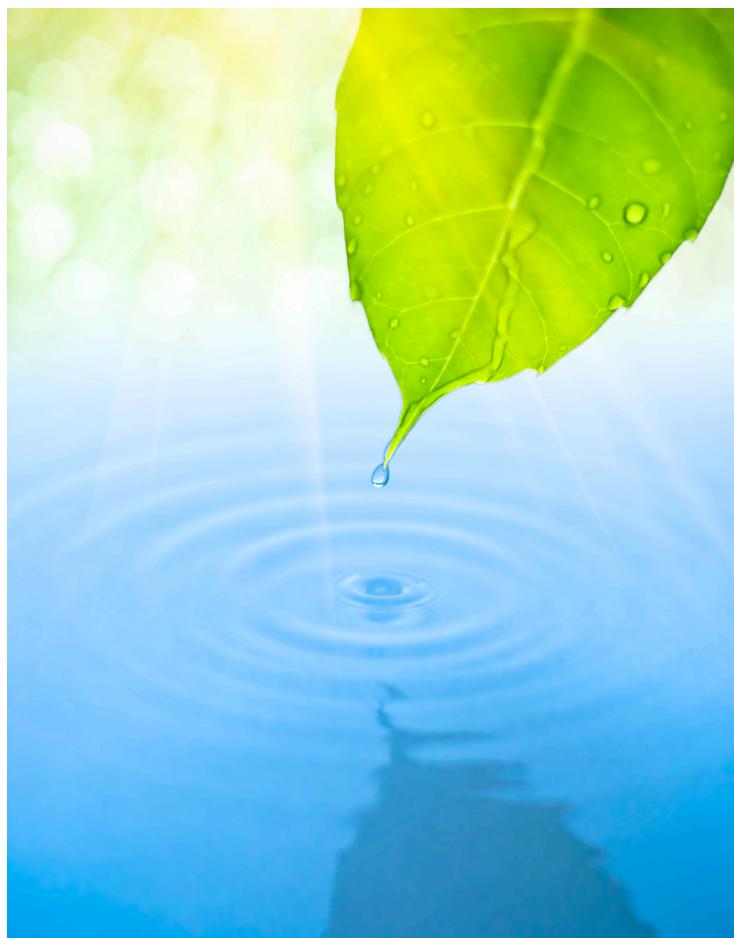
inspiration & steps
to clear the clutter
that keeps you stuck

the ART of letting go

marla dee

The ART of Letting Go

~ Acceptance ~ Release ~ Trust



Inspiration and steps to clear the clutter that keeps you stuck.

By Marla Dee

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PREFACE

A personal story by Marla Dee



Picture of my parents

Monna and Neil Stasney fell deeply in love, raised 10 children and shared a life for fifty-four years. I was the second oldest of the ten.

It was evening of August 4th, 2013 in Portland Oregon. Eight of my siblings and I circled around my mother's hospital bed. We were all singing – a heartfelt tradition from our childhood. Mom was gone. She had been healthy and happy only two days before, so her passing was a shock. All the kids except one brother had made their way to the hospital to say good-bye and be with each other. I think the hospital staff didn't know what to make of us. The Stasney family way is to connect and share our love in song. So the singing came pouring out of us, along with spontaneous stories. This went on for hours until finally there was nothing left to say. We all took in our mother's face and held each other one last time; a sacred memory that will live with me forever. This experience was one of three deaths, all within a year of each other.

Earlier, in September of 2012, my father left this life after many years of medical problems. We were expecting him to go but it was still intensely emotional and difficult. He was a big spirit, thrived on being outdoors, and had a beautiful heart. He died at the age of eighty-two. It felt like a huge chunk of my being was now missing. I felt lost. I also felt grateful for the rest of my family and the new man that had entered my life earlier this same year.

Then, a mere two months later, my twenty-eight-year-old nephew died accidentally, leaving behind a beautiful wife and two young daughters. They had all recently moved to Portland and set up a new home. His death seemed impossible and unreal. There were no practical pieces in place or emotional readiness for this loss.

One of the significant parts of these three deaths all so close together was observing what came after. Because we had prepared for my parents passing but not my nephew, there was a stark difference.

With my parents there was absolute freedom to feel what came up in the moment. I could fully celebrate my parents' lives with my siblings and also grieve their going. We

were all free to do this because we had dealt with all the STUFF beforehand. We had downsized them from the BIG HOUSE we all grew up in, and layer-by-layer had simplified their lives to one room each filled with their treasures. So our time, energy and love could be spent reminiscing and holding each other during this time.

And yet, during these same months, I witnessed the horrific stress and pain that my sister, her daughter-in-law, and everyone involved in my nephew's death went through because the vital documents and decisions hadn't been addressed in any way. He was young and this wasn't supposed to happen. It was a wakeup call. At the time we all needed to be grieving, we were faced with big and impossible choices.

I know there are many of you out there who have lost loved ones and then had to spend days, weeks, months and years dealing with all the stuff. This breaks my heart. Going through this myself and feeling such sweetness side by side with rage has been my inspiration to finally write this book. I want so much to help you clear the clutter of your past NOW so that you can live free and pass on this freedom to your loved ones when you are gone. This is the time for all of us—young and old—to make conscious choices with our lifetime of things and get our vital records in place.

There is one other simple piece of wisdom I wish to share. I have worked for years with clients whose loved ones have passed, who are now faced with past possessions, collections, and stuff to go through. It is so hard to choose what to keep and what to let go. My guidance is—take the time now to choose three treasures from that person. When you look at what you've picked, or when you even think about it, you are filled with the sweetest of sensations. This is enough. We do not need to keep boxes, rooms, and storage areas filled with their stuff to remember them by. This only causes stress.

Long before my parents left this life, each of us had taken our own things from their home, sorted through the years of family life, and picked our personal treasures.

I have my mom's old ceramic hen cookie jar, broken in two places and patched by my dad just for her. I have a few precious journal entries, recipes, and letters in her handwriting. I also treasure a funky Christmas ornament she made.

I was very close to my dad; I was a daddy's girl. Among his possessions, I kept an awesome fossil that we found on top of a mountain in Montana, and his big blue cotton shirt that I wear sometimes just for comfort. And lastly, I love having his Louis Lamour western books—a collection that he read over and over again. I can just see him in his big, brown leather chair reading for hours.

My hope is that you will read *The ART of Letting Go* and be inspired to start clearing away the clutter that is keeping you stuck, holding you back, or weighing you down. Today is the time to start. I want to help you.

Please write and share your stories with me or let me know what else you need.

Marla Dee

INTRODUCTION

The Art of Letting Go: Leaving Clutter Behind



I honor your willingness to reach out and seek help so you can let go of the clutter at last. As a Professional Organizer for many years, I have witnessed tremendous courage from my clients in their willingness to get real with the story their clutter tells, to let go of the past, and to welcome a new change. Letting go is never easy, but it can be made easier. Did you know that most of us are holding on only because of what the clutter represents?

Clutter has been described as:

- Delayed decision
- Holding on to the past
- Fear of the future

Distracting oneself from the present

Clutter can also be:

- Possessions that you do not use or love
- Areas that are untidy or disorganized
- Items that have no home
- An excess of things in too small a space
- Anything that feels heavy or drags you down
- Things that are unfinished, including projects
- Anything that doesn't serve you in your life today

In the spirit of simplicity,

I define clutter as holding on to the past or delayed decision.

Holding on to the past

Holding on to the stuff is how we hold on to our past. It is not **just stuff**—it is our story. The physical stuff in our homes, in our offices, and in our daily life is our bygone story. It represents our old value or even our pain. It is the picture of our lives and the only story we have known.

It is:

- Our children's precious things when they were young, their teething rings and booties, their first finger paintings, their height charts and favorite bedtime books; all being saved in a bottom dresser drawer or the top shelf of our bedroom closet.
- Boxes of papers from all the years in school, especially the ones with the gold stars or the A+ grades on them. It is first and second drafts of a graduate thesis.
- Hundreds of books we keep because we tell ourselves that we are life-long students of learning and that someday we will ready them.
- Piles of pictures, which have never been put into albums to enjoy due to a lack of time. Or now we have thousands of pictures on our phones and computers.
- File cabinets stuffed with papers from our former employers or employees, which might be needed someday.
- Piles of magazines waiting to be read.
- A closet full of clothes from younger and smaller times.
- Entire basements and storage units filled with our children's or ancestor's stuff.
- Boxes of memorabilia waiting to be put into order.

Yes, we hold on to our possessions as a way of holding to the past or because we're hoping to one day share them with others and honor their meaning. In just a minute, I'm going to encourage you to look at, read, and honor your story so that you can gracefully let go of the things that are now blocking you from creating in the present and looking, unencumbered, toward a clear future.

Delayed decisions

Let's now take a look at clutter representing delayed decisions. Simply stated, most of us were never taught how to make conscious choices. If we add this to the fact that we are living in a time in which change is happening rapidly, when technology has opened our homes and offices to the world, it's no surprise we're overwhelmed. I don't blame people for an inability to cope in this fast-paced world. In fact, I honor their willingness to keep swimming in the fast river that used to be a slow-moving stream. It's time to develop new tools for navigating this technology-driven, quickly changing world we live in.

I have spent more than 16 years witnessing the struggle people have with decision-making for a thousand reasons. To make the letting go easier I have created the Clear & SIMPLE Systems of SEE IT. MAP IT. DO IT. & STACKS©: a step-by-step approach for clutter clearing and organizing. The secret is asking one question at a time and making only one decision at a time. The Clear & SIMPLE Systems are outlined here and described in depth on *Get Organized, the Clear & SIMPLE Way* along with all our educational products. You can find this powerful guidance and more on our website page www.clearsimple.com/shop.

The purpose of this book is for you to learn the three steps that will simplify the toughest part of clutter clearing – the letting go. This is the second step in the S.T.A.C.K.S.© (Sort, Toss, Assign, Contain, Keep it Up & Simplify) process. At the end of this book I will share the best resources available for individuals who are really stuck or who struggle with a lifetime of clutter.

Let's explore the ART of Letting Go

By nature, **clutter** is heavy and dense, so I've simplified the letting-go process into three meaningful steps. We take these three steps again and again. Acknowledging this natural progression makes letting go easier. I use the word ART as a reminder that each of three steps is necessary. ART stands for:

- **Acceptance**
- **Release**
- **Trust**

ACCEPTANCE

The first step in letting go is accepting the story your clutter tells. All clutter tells a story and everyone has clutter in some area of his or her life. **Acceptance** of clutter's inevitability and humanness is the beginning. Accept that your environment is simply a reflection of your life up until now, a reflection of what's happened to you and what's going on inside you. There's no shame or blame in looking at this picture; that would only keep you in the role of a victim. In order to step into the power of change and growth, you must be willing to open your eyes and see it. There is no healthy payoff in focusing on the clutter itself, on staying locked up in guilt—not for you or for others. However, great power is yours when you accept that you are the **creator** of your life and of your environment. Your old things, your old patterns, your old relationships reflect who you have been and what you have built or what you have avoided—it is YOUR PAST!

By accepting the full story in front of you, you can step into present time. There is a famous line in the Alcoholics Anonymous book that says "Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today." I believe this is true. Acceptance is the beginning of any change. Acceptance brings peace. Acceptance opens the door for support to come in.

Here are some simple exercises to support you in coming to a place of acceptance:

Answer the following questions:

- What am I having a hard time accepting?
- Why am I having a hard time accepting where I am today?
- What am I telling myself about why I am stuck?
- What is the story I want to get out before I can move on?
- Am I willing to accept what is in front of me?

Acknowledge your feelings:

- I accept that I am scared.
- I accept that I feel hopeless.
- I accept that I have created this situation.
- What would acceptance feel like?

Then answer:

- Where can I begin my acceptance?
- If I accept what is in front of me, how will I be set free?
- By accepting my situation, what can I let go of that is dragging me down or holding me back?
- What would acceptance look like?

Another method to getting out and accepting your old story is to tell your story out loud. The key is to find a person you trust who is willing to listen with heart and attention. I have found many people hold on to their stuff because they feel they need it in order to share their life story with another human being.

One client I will never forget was a brilliant man—a doctor who had traveled the world and written deeply insightful books. He lived in a beautiful home in the mountains, buried in clutter to the point that you couldn't move through the space. Because of this, he was blocked from doing the simple daily activities that brought him joy, so he was always gone. As I sat in his space and listened to his story, we got to the heart of his clutter's story. He was saving all this stuff to share with his soulmate when she came. He felt he needed physical proof of his journeys and his learning. And yet the clutter was now burying his life force and preventing him from being present so he could show up for love. He eventually revealed that his soulmate had shown up a decade earlier but had left because of the clutter.

If this is your story I would like to offer a simple truth. The most powerful place to see a person's life story is in their eyes. The greatest gift you can give yourself or other human beings is to be completely present, look into their eyes, and open your heart and ears to witness who they are right now. Your past is inside you and shows up in the present moment. If you share what is going on inside of you today—you will be seen! It is a vulnerable *and* truly rich experience.

RELEASE

The second step is **Release**. After you have accepted where you are in present time, you are free to let go of what is getting in your way of moving forward. Now it is time to release the old, the block, and the struggle. Whereas the acceptance step is a breathing in and receiving of air, new life, and oxygen, the release is a long exhale, a way to let go and release back to the Universe what your body no longer needs. It can be that simple. Sometimes life is about surrender. Sometimes, holding on, trying harder, effort, pushing, or struggles are not the answers. How long can you hold your breath before you hurt your health? In the same way, bodies and creative energies can be damaged after holding on to stuff for too long. Sometimes it is just time to let go.

I say, start with the willingness to surrender. Take a deep breath and exhale. What are you ready to let go of right now?

It is natural after the surrender to be ready for action. I can imagine you worrying and wondering: "But how do I do this? I've tried for years and it doesn't work, I can't get it right. It's just too hard." I realize that you have the desire to let go but **you were never taught how**. I can desire to play the piano, but without some level of teaching, all I can do is plop out notes, a long way from playing a beautiful melody.

You can move from struggle to successful action by using the Clear & SIMPLE Systems, starting with the Foundation System of SEE IT, MAP IT, DO IT®.

This simple system has three components:

1. SEE IT—Take a look at where you have been
2. MAP IT—Make a plan for where you want to go
3. DO IT—Take the steps to get there

*Use the Clear & SIMPLE Systems handy guide at the end of this book



SEE IT • MAP IT • DO IT®

SEE IT—Take a look at where you've been

You have already journeyed through the SEE IT step by doing the exercises for the acceptance stage. You have taken a good look at where you are.

MAP IT—Make a plan for where you want to go

After you have taken the time to see the story your clutter tells, it's time to map out where you want to go. My favorite form of mapping is to create a vision for the change. There is a great old saying "I can choose to learn from joy or pain." For a clear vision, ask yourself, "How do I want the space to look, feel and function?"

Let me share the story of Louise. Louise is a single woman in her forties. She has two demanding careers and loves being on the go. I started working with her six years ago. After years of traveling, the clutter had piled up in all the rooms. This situation was complicated by the fact that her home was very small with no closets or storage areas and she had a deeply set pattern of holding on to everything. Louise and I had slowly worked on the clearing process over the years as her life and willingness would allow. She had consistently let go and changed her old patterns. Now she was ready to create the home she had always longed for. It was clear that her existing home did not work for her lifestyle and the things she genuinely wanted to keep. So she decided to sell her home.

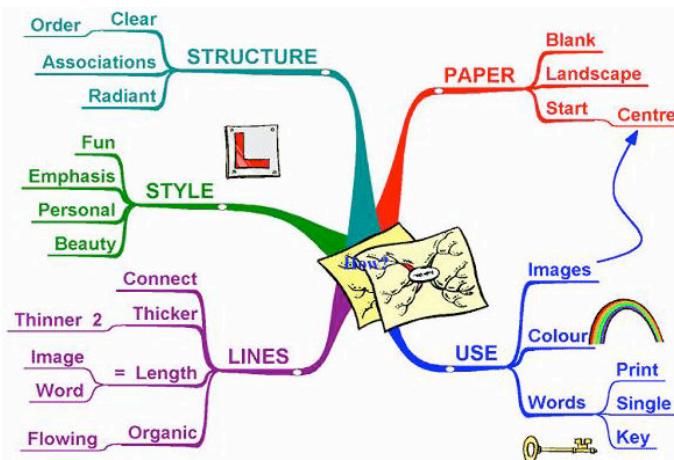
Prior to the sale of her home, I met with Louise to help her choose what to put into storage. She was incredibly tense and filled with anxiety. I brought her a binder containing all the maps she would need for the move and suggested we sit down and first write out her vision. (See *Organizing Your Move* on our product page www.clearsimple.com) She was in turbo drive, ready to dive into "the doing" and didn't want to take the time to write the vision for her new home. I promised her that if she would only take five minutes to MAP out her vision, it would save her untold time, energy, and money. I gave her a colorful piece of paper with the question on top: "What do I really want in my new home?" She let loose. In fact, once she got started, she didn't want to stop. As she filled up the page, her whole body shifted from anxious fear to excitement. It was magical. She continued to add to her Vision Map throughout our time together.

I also suggested that she could use this vision when doing the packing part of the job. Any time she got stuck, she should go back and reread it. Her primary guideline in her decision-making process would be "Does this support my vision?" That is my all-time favorite question for letting go.

As you begin mapping your vision, consider:

- What is your new vision of your space, your paper, your time, your money, your relationships, or your life? Let this be simple and fun!
- What do you want to change and why?
- What is the one thing you would want to work on this year?
- If you could change only one thing in your space or life, what would it be?
- What do you want to create in your life now?
- Describe who you would be in the new pattern.
- What support and resources do you have?
- What kind of help do you want or need?
- And—what is the STUFF you know you are ready to release?

Keep in mind that these MAPS can take any form – journaling, list making, drawing, making a collage or mind mapping (one of my favorites).



Mind Mapping – for more, Google “*mind map*”

I hope you are inspired to create a Vision MAP of your own right now. Stop reading and choose the form that would be easiest and most joyful for you.

GO FOR IT!

I hope that you now have a new vision in place for your clutter-clearing project. It will make a difference.

Before I move to the DO IT step, I want to mention that there are many other MAPS that can serve you in clarifying your vision and in simplifying any clutter clearing project. Mapping clears your brain and gives you a general idea on paper of what you hope to accomplish. Depending on the size of the project, you might want to get help so that you have a clear idea of where you want to go and how to get there.

Here is a simple list of my favorite ways to map:

- Just ask and answer: How do I want this space to look, feel and function?
- Draw a picture of what you want the space to be.
- Do a mind map (Google mind map for hundreds of examples).
- Create a collage or Pinterest board.
- Talk with a trusted friend and ask her to capture your vision.

You will find other suggestions on the C&S Systems card at the end of this book.

Tip: I am also a believer in having a container for your clutter-clearing job. Whether it's a file tub, a bulletin board, a folder, a binder, a banker's box, or anything else you want, the purpose is to "contain" and give boundaries to your project so that you know where to find your maps.

DO IT—Take the steps to get there

You've seen it. You've mapped it. Now it's time to DO IT!

You're clear and you know which direction you want to go. So now is the time for action. Clutter clearing is like any other journey. You could just get in the car and take off, but the odds of you getting somewhere meaningful are greatly increased if you take the time to tune into where you want to go and form a simple plan to get there. When you're ready, it's time to get in the car and drive!

Clear & SIMPLE has its own system for the DO IT Step of this work. The system is called **S.T.A.C.K.S®**. It stands for:

SORT

TOSS

ASSIGN a home

CONTAIN

KEEP it up

SIMPLIFY

I strongly suggest that you first try out these steps on a small project, like a closet or a junk drawer, so you can practice and witness the power of the system!

It's important to take each S.T.A.C.K.S step one at a time. This helps conquer any feeling of overwhelm. In addition, the steps build upon each other and need to be taken in the right sequence. See the Systems card at the end for guidance. This approach simplifies the process by requiring you to ask one question and make one decision at a time.

When you take them in sequence, you will have a very different clutter-clearing experience. The most common thing to do is mix them up. You may have read in other organizing books to pick up each item and, as you start to sort, make a decision about it. I strongly disagree with this approach. Remember, clutter is a delayed decision. If you could make the decision easily, the clutter wouldn't be there. I promise you that you will feel a new sense of ease and freedom when you honor the progression of the S.T.A.C.K.S. organizing system.

Please note that I am going to keep this discussion simple for this book on clutter clearing. For an in-depth discussion on the S.T.A.C.K.S methodology and steps, refer to *Get Organized, the Clear & SIMPLE Way*, which is available on the shop page of our website www.clearsimple.com/shop.

Let me step you through this process by telling you the story of a real client named Diane. I loved working with Diane. She inspired me. She first called me after attending one of my workshops in which we went through the systems. She had heard enough to give her hope but when she got home, the task felt overwhelming and she didn't know where to begin. The whole house needed to be done. For 20 years, clutter had been building up. In our first one-site meeting I asked Diane: "If we could do one little project together, what would mean the most to you?" "My purse," was her immediate response. The purse sat next to us, plopped heavily on the kitchen countertop, and Diane's whole body tensed up when she looked over at it. We first took five minutes to "see" and "map" the purse situation. Her vision was to clear out all the junk and be able to find what she needed quickly. It was time to dive into working the S.T.A.C.K.S on her handbag.

SORT—What is it?

All clutter clearing begins with sorting, whether it's your day, your desk, the junk drawer, or an entire room. You start this step just like you would with a puzzle—dump it all out on the table, haul it all out of the drawer, and just sort. The freedom is you don't have to make any decisions yet! You're just asking a single question—what is it? Have fun sorting the items, curious to discover what's there. Label the piles with brightly colored Post-it notes because your mind will forget what was in each pile when you started it. Dianne created piles for:

- Makeup
- Change
- Office supplies
- Wallet and checkbook
- Photos
- Notes
- Receipts
- Trash
- Toys

The purse also contained a stuffed daytimer that served as its own over-packed bag, so we sorted its contents also. Even in this small scenario, Dianne wanted to make decisions, but I held her focused on the sort.

When sorting medium or large projects, I strongly suggest placing items in banker's boxes with lids to contain and label the piles. The purpose and power of this is to keep the mind and body free of distractions as you sort.

Here's a Treasure Tip: After sorting, take a break. Even if its five minutes, take the time to breathe deeply, exhale, and release the “energy of the stuff” from your body. It’s such a habit for me now that after sorting my own things I usually go for a walk through my neighborhood. This is my favorite way to clear my body. When I get home, I always find myself energized and compelled to perform some physical task such as sweeping dead leaves off my back porch or some other chore I have put off for lack of energy. You will find that clutter clearing can be invigorating and contagious.

TOSS—Do I keep it or let it go?

Once you have everything sorted and can clearly see what you really have—and how much you have—the toss becomes easier. There is a wonderful quote in a book titled *Love it or Lose it*, by Barbara Hemphill and Maggie Bedrosian: “Clarity of purpose brings clarity about what to keep and what to throw away.” By having your vision firmly in place to guide your purpose and allow you to see what now requires your decisions, the process takes on a whole new life.

I want you to know how much I respect the energy of the toss. This is the moment of letting go. This step is such a big one that this entire book is dedicated to it! I would like to make this easier by offering you some simple, strong guidelines for this step.

- **Let go only when you are ready.** Forcing the TOSS step is abusive whether we are doing it to ourselves or to someone else. If you let go of even 5% of your things you will free space for the new to come in. I learned this from my meditation teacher Mary Nickle (www.timeoutassociates.net), who helped me see that I couldn’t clear a lifetime’s worth of buildup in my body in a two-hour session or even in three months. I have been meditating for 23 years and I still need a clean out every day.
- **Let your vision support you.** Ask the question, “Does this support my vision?” If not, be willing to let it go.
- **Let go of the idea that you have to figure out where everything is going to go.** Keep it simple and find one agency that is meaningful to you and donate your things to them.
- **Trust you'll find a new home for valuable things.** For unique, valuable items, many agencies and individuals are willing to help care for the items.
- **Believe in win-win.** You are passing on a gift to others who will love what you no longer need or want.

One of my favorite stories is about a client of mine who kept getting stuck on this step because all of her items were so valuable. They represented thousands of dollars of her life force and her past. But these things were paralyzing her. Finally, the day came when she had to let go. She called in sick, sat still, went deep inside and called out for inspiration. Within minutes, she jumped up and started hauling stuff outside to the front yard. She took it all out along with a big sign that said FREE. Then she sat in her living room all-day and spied as people found new treasures. She let herself witness their joy and delight. **It set her free.** It was a beautiful way to honor the value of what she was letting go. She was then able to start a meaningful new chapter of her life.

- **Ask your body for guidance.** A simple exercise is to hold the object, close your eyes, take a deep breath and ask, “Should I keep this?” If your answer is “yes,” you will feel your body lift and expand. You will feel a yes. If your answer is “no,” your body will sink or get heavy or tired. This tells you that the object is draining your life force. It is time to let it go. This works well with clutter-clearing tasks also.
- **Only take one box, one pile, or one type of item at a time.** This will support you in staying present and keep you free of distraction. Keep the other piles hidden in covered bankers’ boxes.
- **Ask the question: “Does this serve me in the current chapter of my life?”** Remember all of our clutter tells a story. Is this clutter from a past chapter that you are ready to close so you can get on with the new?
- **Always do the toss step when you are fresh.** Because this step takes so much energy, it is important to give yourself a chance of success by having as much energy as possible.
- **Allow yourself a temporary toss.** If you can’t let it go and don’t want to keep it, give yourself permission to have a temporary staging box or area.
- **Get help if you need it.** I have a professional organizer come into my home seasonally and support me in letting go of what builds up. Because it is my stuff, it is very challenging for me. I will mention some great resources at the end of this book to support you in this.

Back to Diane's purse. We had some laughs and she expressed amazement at what was inside. She really got into letting go. I will never forget doing the toss on the daytimer. It had last year's daily pages in it, unused but taking up a lot of space. She felt guilty that she hadn't used them so she was simply ignoring them. It was powerful for her to clear them out and only have the current year inside. She even ended up changing her system because she realized the system represented her old life. She was retired now and wanted to write. She no longer needed or wanted a complicated calendar to house a busy schedule. She was ready for a simpler life.

ASSIGN A HOME—Where does it go?

The beauty of the natural order of the steps is that after the sort and toss, you now have what you want to keep and are ready to assign the remaining things a home. Because our topic is clutter clearing (rather than organizing), I want to keep this simple and share one idea to support this next step. Look to assign a home for the items where you are actually going to need it. In the case of Dianne's purse, there are items she needs on a daily basis, so having these most accessible was important. Start with the things you use the most or care the most about.

Here is a treasure tip for assigning a home to things. If you are going to start with one room for your clutter clearing, make it your bedroom. Take everything that doesn't support the purpose of your bedroom (rest, relaxation, intimacy, and rejuvenation) out. Even if you don't know where it will go yet, get it out of the space so your bedroom becomes a sanctuary.

CONTAIN—What does it go in?

Once you know what you're keeping and the general idea of where it's going, it's time to contain it. Once again, this step is now much easier. Containers give you and your things boundaries. Oftentimes physical clutter is an attempt to create boundaries for protection or because you feel a lack of structure. By placing things in containers with physical boundaries, your body may experience a sense of ease and freedom. This allows you to have more energy for daily life.

- **Junk drawer:** One of my favorite examples is the junk drawer, a great small project to start with. Most people get into the junk drawer three times or more each day. If you open the drawer and see everything mixed together, your mind and body feel frustrated. By simply getting a junk drawer organizer (so that all the little stuff has a home), you experience freedom each time you open the drawer and are able to find what you need.
- **Bills:** If your bills are buried in piles of paper, I suggest getting a beautiful basket, file folder or other container just for the bills and always put them there. Then,

when it is time to pay them, they are easy to find and the experience becomes freeing rather than stressful.

- **Taxes:** Place all the tax-related papers into one container. Let this step be a simple beginning even if you aren't ready for a complicated system.
- **Photos:** Place all your photos in a big treasure trunk and let that be good enough.
- **Email clutter:** Try setting up file folders as the containers for the different categories of emails. This will add instant clarity.

KEEP IT UP—How do I maintain this?

For the category I call "Keep it up," I offer my all-time favorite strategy. Choose one hour a week, 1/2 day a month, one weekend a season and one month a year to focus on "keep it up." This is a time chosen to restore things to where they belong. Assign a box in your home a specific location and let this be the container for what you are ready to release. This makes it easier to let go. Since we are constantly bringing things in, the clutter always builds up, and we need simple systems to keep it moving out. Put a paper-recycling container near where you go through the mail. Just by enacting this simple practice, you keep the stuff moving.

One of my favorite times of the year is November, the month of my birthday. This is the most powerful time of the year to make change, to let go of the old and step into the new. Rather than worrying about it all year, I take the weekends of November to go through all the areas in my home and clear clutter. It is the nature of being human that our clutter builds up, and I am no exception. I assign this month of the year the purpose of clutter clearing. Then I celebrate the holidays with a fresh, present-time home and believe me, it feels fabulous!

SIMPLIFY—How to live with less

I love talking about simplifying! Every time I speak on clutter clearing or organizing, someone in the audience asks the question: "How do I know where to start when I get home? It all needs to be done. It's overwhelming." Please take this next part to heart. I say with much love and empathy for anyone who feels overwhelmed at the thought of needing to do it all. Choose one small project—one that can be completed in 2–3 hours (such as Diane's purse), one medium project that you can get through in 4–8 hours, and one large project (2–3 days) for the entire year! Let this be enough. Do the three projects and use the systems, enjoy yourself, get creative, experience freedom and remember that this is enough. It took me three years to get through my entire home. I have found that we do ourselves a great injustice by focusing on everything that needs to get done all at once. Take the rest of your life to bring in a new creation and let this inspire you to let go of more next year. This is the best advice I can give you.

The ART of Letting Go

Following the steps brings power and freedom. I can promise that these systems will transform your experience of clutter clearing from stressful and overwhelming to fun & freeing! The following piece is a special treat to inspire you and keep humor alive and well in the serious business of clutter clearing.

TRUST

After Acceptance and Release comes the last step on your journey of freedom from clutter... *Trust!* Trust is the most important element in clutter clearing and, in my opinion, in “doing” life.

I have five labels I use to describe the chaos of accumulation and its effects.

They are:

1. Clutter
2. Holding on
3. Stuck
4. Panic
5. Fear

However, there are five words to describe the experience of freeing oneself of the clutter.

They are:

1. Clearing
2. Letting Go
3. Moving
4. Peace
5. Trust

Let me bring these together for you.

- Clutter is transformed by clearing.
- You can hold on or let go.
- Do you want to stay stuck or start moving?
- Is your body in a state of panic or peace?
- Are you coming from a place of fear or trust?

In reality, all your choices come down to choosing FEAR or TRUST. I encourage you to take this journey from a place of Trust, and when Fear comes up, acknowledge it and let it go. Just for now, be willing to explore your own story and step into change.

AFTERWORD

The ART of Letting Go honors the fact that letting go is not a simple skill that just anyone can do at any time. It is an art, an understanding, and a way of interacting with the world. It is built on trust, on co-creating with the Universe; it opens us up to freedom, which means you must want freedom. I believe in focusing on the vision and the gift of letting go of clutter rather than the shame of having clutter. When you let go of the old, you create space for the new. It's time to create space for miracles!

I truly hope this small book has inspired you to choose a small place to start and given you simple steps to make the change happen.

I would love to hear from you any time and witness your story. You can write me at info@clearsimple.com.

Your guide in this journey,
Marla Dee



INSPIRATION

The following inspirational thoughts are posted on www.clutterersanonymous.org. I encourage you to find one for your vision and let it guide you on this journey. I hope you discover your “present-time self” along the way.

Affirmations for a Simpler Life!

- I nurture my spirit by surrounding myself with beauty and harmony.
- I believe I am entitled to surroundings of serenity, order, and joyous life.
- I put myself, and my wellbeing, first in my day.
- I let go from a place of trust and ease. I know all my needs will be met.
- I only schedule what I can do comfortably. I rest before I get tired.
- I do one thing at a time and let myself enjoy being present.
- When I feel overwhelmed, I stop and reconnect with my source and center.
- I simplify my life, believing that when I need something, it will come to me.
- I consciously allocate space and time for anything new that I bring into my life or home.
- I affirm abundance and prosperity, thus I release the need to hoard.
- I schedule time for play and rest.
- I am gentle with my efforts, knowing that my new way of living requires much practice.
- I do not yield to pressure or attempt to pressure others.
- I realize that I am already where I will always be, in the here and now. I live each moment with serenity, joy and gratitude.
- I am enough. I have enough. I do enough.

RESOURCES

www.napo.net—The National Association of Professional Organizers. Visit their website to find a professional organizer in your area.

www.challengingdisorganization.org—The mission of the Institute for Challenging Disorganization is to provide education, research and strategies to benefit people challenged by chronic disorganization.

www.clutterersanonymous.net—A twelve-step fellowship that offers practical tools, support and understanding for those who suffer from chronic clutter or who struggle with letting go. They are FREE and even offer telephone meetings if you are in an area that has no live meetings.

www.debtorsanonymous.org—A twelve-step fellowship for those people who struggle with financial clutter.

www.flylady.net—A wonderful website and resource that gives you free practical steps to take on a daily basis to change your environment. It is a very structured and wise support system.

Your Spacious Self and A Year to Clear by Stephanie Bennett Vogt, www.spaceclear.com — These are my favorite books for supporting you all the way through the clutter clearing process. Stephanie's wisdom goes deep, yet she still manages to make it simple. *The spacious way to let go and go slow.*

Love it or Lose it, Living Clutter-Free Forever by Barbara Hemphill and Maggie Bedrosian, www.loveitorloseit.com—This is the BEST book I have found that teaches you and outlines how to implement a clutter free campaign. Barbara Hemphill has been a professional organizer for over 20 years and has a vast well of knowledge and real life experience to offer.

The Simple Life by Marla Dee, www.clearsimple.com—This is an inspiring and small book of Marla's articles in the Catalyst Magazine on The Simple Life on topics such as *Simply Create, Simple Play, and Simple Celebrations*. She will inspire to live today simply and joyfully.

Making Peace with the Things in Your Life by Cindy Glovinsky—This book honors the relationships that we have with the stuff.

Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui by Karen Kingston—This small, wonderful book can be read in an evening. It was the one that inspired me to begin my three-year journey of clutter clearing in my home and my life. It offers depth of insight into our relationship with our environment. Karen now has online course offerings to help you clear the clutter in your life. Visit www.spaceclearing.com/web/.

www.becomingminimalist.com—Joshua Becker strikes a chord that all of us can relate to. His story began on a typical Saturday when his wife was cleaning the house and he was re-organizing the garage. All the while his five-year-old son kept asking them to play. As he chatted with a neighbor about his predicament, her simple statement of “Maybe you don’t need to own all of this stuff” really struck him. He and his family now live and share a whole new way of living. His book is called *The More of Less*.

www.theminimalists.com—The dynamic duo of Joshua Fields Milburn and Ryan Nicodemus will change your life. Our entire team has read their story and made huge changes in our spaces and lives. For them it all started as they both neared their 30th birthdays and realized that while they had achieved all of the things that the American Dream is all about—six-figure jobs, cars, houses, toys, more stuff than they knew what to do with—there was a nagging sense of dissatisfaction. As they cleared their belongings they found more of what really matters: time. They now have time to pursue their true passions, time to focus on their over health and wellbeing, to nurture relationships, and to simply be.

www.bemorewithless.com—Courtney Carver has transformed our closets, spaces and our days with her incredible clarity and straightforward guidance. Her programs are powerful! Courtney started simplifying her life after she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and was told that stress could magnify the symptoms. She decided to drastically simplify her life, starting with her wardrobe and shopping patterns. The results were a simple, joyful closet and [Project333](#). A few years later she started her blog *Be More With Less* to share her stories, advice and programs. In simplifying her life she too has found more—time, health, and love.

TOOLS:



clear & SIMPLE™
Our systems make organizing simple.

SEE IT • MAP IT • DO IT[©]

The Foundation System
Take each step below in order to save time, energy and money.

PURPOSE	ACTION Choose One	REWARD
SEE IT	<p>Take a look at where you've been.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write the story your clutter tells. • Draw the story. • Take pictures. • Answer questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is working? • What is not working? • Where are you stuck and why? 	<p>You have a clear picture of where you are now.</p>
MAP IT	<p>"Make a Plan" for where you want to go.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do a mind map • Make a list or create a chart. • Draw a picture or create a collage. • Write a description of your top three priorities. • Write your vision of what you really want. 	<p>You have a map to guide, inspire, and move you forward.</p>
DO IT	<p>Take the actions to get there.</p> <p>Work through the S.T.A.C.K.S.[®] system on the opposite side.</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;"> S • Sort T • Toss A • Assign C • Contain K • Keep it up S • Simplify </p>	<p>You have a system that will take you through from start to finish.</p>



We make organizing fun, simple & freeing.

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clear & SIMPLE™
Our systems make organizing simple.

S.T.A.C.K.S.®

The Action System

Take each step in order and make only one decision at a time.

	QUESTION	ACTION	TIP	REWARD
SORT	What is it?	Sort into piles of like with like. <i>No other decisions yet!</i>	Place items in banker's boxes. Label each box with a post-it note for steps ahead.	You will know exactly what you have.
TOSS	Do I need it or want it?	Put it in the keep or discard pile. <i>Tackle one pile or box at a time.</i>	Ask, "Does this serve me in my life today?" Only let go when you are ready.	What you have left is what needs to be organized.
ASSIGN A HOME	Where does it go?	Identify how you use the item and create activity zones accordingly.	Place the items you use most often in the easy-to-access locations.	Everything will be where you need it when you need it.
CONTAIN	What does it go in?	Measure the "stuff" and the storage area before shopping.	Choose containers that are both functional and fun.	You will enjoy retrieving and re-storing your items.
KEEP IT UP	How do I maintain it?	Create a simple plan for how you will maintain the area.	Choose a high energy time for upkeep.	Your keep-it-up system will make maintaining your space easier.
SIMPLIFY	How can I simplify and live with less?	Decide whether any new items pass the test. →	Does it serve me? Do I love it? Will I use it? Do I have room for it?	You will feel free, energized, and abundant.

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The Clear & SIMPLE™ Systems are a step-by-step approach for any type of organizing or creative project. They identify where to start, what to do and how to keep it up. The Clear & SIMPLE™ Products address all the areas of your life, from kids to moving to getting your vital documents done. We are here to help.



BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER

Are you ready to launch an exciting, rewarding Professional Organizing Business? Skip the years it takes to come up with the successful systems and tools by taking our Comprehensive Self Study Course. Get everything you need and join our Circle of Organizers around the world!



GET ORGANIZED, THE CLEAR & SIMPLE WAY

Are you overwhelmed at the mere thought of getting organized? Help is here! In this 9-hour audio course Marla Dee, creator of the Clear & SIMPLE™ Way, teaches professional organizers and individuals how to get and stay organized while addressing all areas of your home, office and life. Freedom, order and clarity are possible.



THE SIMPLE LIFE

This heartfelt little book will inspire you to let go, simplify and find deep meaning in your day. It is filled with stories of hope and real life guidance. *The Simple Life* makes the perfect gift for you, your family, friends, clients or co-workers. It is utterly unique and it will change you.



THE ART OF LETTING GO

It takes courage to let go of the stuff and the stories of our past. It is also freeing. In this timely book, Marla Dee guides you through letting go of the stuff, beliefs and patterns that hold you back or drag you down. Marla brings you the inspiration and direction you need to make the change you are longing for.



ORGANIZE YOUR VITAL DOCUMENTS

This important guide is designed to assist you in compiling your vital documents into a central location to prepare for life's emergencies and tragedies. This overwhelming process is laid out in three simple steps that anyone can get done. This is the perfect support for those just starting out, in the middle or near the end of their life.



OUR FAVORITE CONTAINERS

Choosing the perfect container for organizing is fun but it can also be confusing. Our amazing collection of products and containers will help you select the right products for all areas of your home and office. Included are pictures of spaces utilizing the products, product measurements and where to get them.



ORGANIZE YOUR MOVE

Anyone who has ever moved knows how stressful it can be. This book will help you be organized from the moment you decide to move so you can successfully juggle the relocation of yourself, family, and possessions—while still managing everyday life. Gain control over the event and all the little details that go with it.



ORGANIZING FOR KIDS

Most kids are not born knowing how to clean up and organize. And sadly, most parents don't know how or don't have time to teach them. This much needed book will help you teach your child basic organizing skills to last a life time. Our guide will also help parents who struggle with organizing. Organizing can be fun!

"Imagine how it would feel to be surrounded by the things, the people and the beliefs which support you, and lift you up."
- Marla Dee, Creator of The Clear & SIMPLE™ Way



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About Marla



"Organizing your space and the aspects of your life is the greatest gift of all. Every day I see individuals and businesses overwhelmed by chaos and disorder. The lack of time, training and systems makes "getting organized" seem impossible. I am here to tell you organizing can be simple, fun and freeing. Embrace it now."

Marla Dee, President
Clear & SIMPLE, LLC

Organizing your home, office, paper, space and time frees you to be available for the things that mean the most in your life. Providing the support, training and tools for this transformative process is Marla's passion. Marla strongly believes that focusing on the gifts of clutter clearing and organizing can be empowering to the individual or business and motivate positive change.

Marla is a well-known speaker and trainer. She has incredible enthusiasm for organizing and is passionate about making it FUN & SIMPLE! Marla believes organizing is a skill that many people have never been taught. Therefore, she teaches the Clear & Simple™ Systems that identify where to start, what to do and how to keep it up.

Marla is a Certified Professional Organizer, Golden Circle member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, member of Mountain West National Speakers Association and past President of the Utah Professional Organizers. She is a Certified Feng Shui Practitioner and member of the International Feng Shui Guild. Marla has appeared on KIQ and KSL talk radio, KUTV Channel 2, KSL Channel 5, Channel 2 Good Things Utah, Salt Lake Tribune Fall and Spring Home Shows, Barnes & Noble, Wild Oats and others. She is a popular keynote speaker, trainer and consultant. Marla is the creator of The Professional Organizer Training Program and is the author of *Get Organized, The Clear & SIMPLE Way* and *The Simple Life*, along with numerous other publications. Marla is a master messenger of the Clear & SIMPLE Way!

