

CHAPTER ONE

From If I'm So Smart, Why Can't I Get Rid of This Clutter

By Sallie Felton

“Are You Kidding, There are Three?”

“When considering change, remember — there is an emotional connection necessary for people to commit to new ways.”

Stacy Aaron

WHAT IS CLUTTER?

When you think about clutter, what comes to mind? You might think it's just the physical stuff—on your dining room table, stored out of sight in your attic or taking over your car. Or maybe you think about the paperwork piling up on your desk that needs to be filed, how you can't ever seem to find what you're looking for or how you haven't see the surface of your kitchen counters (aka, “magic magnets”) in a while

The truth is, clutter shows up in our lives in three ways—mentally, physically and emotionally—and each area plays an important role in our well being and none of them stands alone.

So if you are feeling disorganized and/or unproductive, which form of clutter do you start with first? Is it your emotional clutter that stops you from letting go of your physical clutter or is your physical clutter responsible for the mental clutter?

When I work with clients on clutter issues, the things I ask them to help zero in on what kind of clutter we're dealing with are:

- WHAT IS IT LIKE TO GET UP IN THE MORNING AND FACE YOUR CLUTTER?
- WHERE DO YOU HAVE CLUTTER IN YOUR LIFE?
- WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR CLUTTER?
- WHERE IS IT SPINNING IN YOUR HEAD?
- WHERE DO YOU FEEL YOUR CLUTTER?
- WHERE DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE THE MOST DISORGANIZED?
- WE KNOW CLUTTER WORKS FROM THE INSIDE OUT, HOW IS IT AFFECTING YOU?

Finally, I'll ask them, "Which form of clutter is the most difficult for you to start clearing?" The response, nine times out ten, is, "All three." Now, we're getting somewhere and all we have to do is agree to begin. And now is the time to be kinder to yourself and to think more positively.

At the end of this chapter, I'll share you with my own personal story and how I used the same tools I'm giving you here to de-clutter my own house (literally and figuratively) over the course of a year.

*"I believe if you stir up mindful clutter,
You will have a recipe for a potent stew.
By learning which herbs and spices to use,
You create a gourmet feast."*

Sallie Felton

TOOL #1

RECOGNIZING MENTAL CLUTTER

When I ask audiences, "What's the one thing you'd like to have come into your life?" Their first answer is "More money." The second is, "More balance in my life." What kind

of balance, I'll ask. "More time for friends and family and less stress at work," they'll say. The third, almost without fail is, "Less clutter."

To find real balance, we have to look at all facets to our lives, including clutter and the various ways it shows up in our lives and our psyches.

It's no wonder—we live in an era that moves at warp speed. From drive-thru and pick-up windows to Skype, and smartphones, we have an abundance of information at our fingertips, ready for consumption in seconds. So it's also assumed or implied that just because information comes in at the speed of the light, we'll respond to that information the same way—in seconds.

What do you think this does to your body, mind and spirit? It's recipe for an over-stressed, over-schedules, over-exhausted and over-stimulated self. Throw all of these requests, demands and obligations into the blender, puree at high speed and what's the result? Dis-ease. Mental, physical and emotional stresses have to go somewhere and if we don't find outlets for them, we'll direct them inward, unconsciously.

As amazing as it sounds, we actually *do* get to control what comes into and goes out of our lives. What a concept!

I believe mental clutter is the "what I didn't do", "what I need to do" and "what I should be doing", running on a non-stop loop in our heads.

Multi-taskers are skilled at clearing mental clutter. Surgeons in disguise, they thrive on deadlines, dissecting every task that needs to be done, checking each item twice before crossing it off their list. Their tools of choice are Blackberries, calendars, day planners, notebooks, pencils and pens; the process they follow is backed by a strong sense of organization.

For the rest of us, it's more like we're waging battle against a never-ending flow of information streaming into our minds, where it gets stuck. If this sounds like you, take heart. Recognizing that you've got a problem with mental clutter is the first step in beginning to rid yourself of this excess baggage before it begins to seep into the rest of your life.

*“I think we all have a little voice inside us that will guide us...
if we shut out all the noise and clutter from our lives and listen to
that voice, it will tell us the right thing to do.”*

Christopher Reeve

TOOL #2

RECOGNIZING PHYSICAL CLUTTER

The second form of clutter is the one we all think of when we hear the word. It's our physical clutter, all that extra and **VISIBLE** stuff that piles up around us and takes over our work and living environments.

It's easier to identify: newspapers, magazines, mail, catalogues, paperwork, pile of clothing, overflowing closets, shoes on the floor, tools laying which way and that all over the basement or garage, mixed in with holiday decorations, etc.

When you read that description of physical clutter, how does it make you feel? Anxious? Overwhelmed? Shameful? Have you ever stopped to think what the emotional price of having physical clutter costs you?

I know for me, if my office is not somewhat tidy, I feel fragmented and my productivity decreases; my thinking gets cloudy, I start to lag behind on my to-do list and I'm definitely not firing on the cylinders I need to be.

Physical clutter affects different people in different ways. Spend a few moments thinking about how you react to it. What happens you take a good look at all that stuff? Do you feel a pit form in your stomach? Does it grate on your nerves? Maybe you just want to close the door and run. Out of sight, out of mind, right? Wrong. What takes up space in our physical environment naturally takes up space our in head (cleaning and organization need to get done) and in our hearts (negative self-talk).

“You will find it easier to do a single, small piece of a large project than to start on the whole job.”

Brian Tracy

TOOL #3

RECOGNIZING EMOTIONAL CLUTTER

Emotional clutter comes straight from the heart. It includes the feelings surrounding past and present issues we haven't yet processed, worked through, nurtured or released.

Emotional clutter is judgment (of self and others), expectation, unresolved conflicts (with self and others) and self-defeating behaviors, like perfectionism.

I believe emotional clutter lives in the very center of the heart, affecting our sense of self and our self-esteem. Symptoms of emotional clutter can range from feeling over-stressed and overburdened to simply feeling imbalanced. These symptoms manifest into conditions like low productivity, inefficiency and lack of effectiveness.. They can also show up as fear, pain, sadness, frustration or anger.

When you're trying to determine if you're dealing with an emotional clutter issues, ask yourself:

- Is there someone you feel needs forgiveness or you feel you can't forgive?

- Are you avoiding confrontation?
- Have you let a personal or professional issue go too long unaddressed?

When you know the answers, spend a few minutes thinking about how these situations affect you emotionally. How strong a grip do they have on you? What role do they play in keeping you from being at peace?

“Say no to anything that is not a high-value use of your time and your life.”

Brian Tracy

Tool#4

“COACHES HAVE CLUTTER TOO”

Many times over the years, I’ve been asked:

- How do you stay focused and maintain the momentum to complete a task or reach a goal?
- How do you not get distracted?
- How do you set yourself up for success vs. failure so you’ll actually begin?

In 2008, I decided to turn my coaching skills on my self and make the experience public by writing about it on my blog. At this point, my children were grown and had fled the nest, leaving my husband and me with a large, empty house that needed to function differently now that it was just the two of us.

Following are excerpts from my blog that show you how I got started and continued to move forward, even when it proved challenging.

JANUARY 23, 2008

MY TURN

I am throwing the gauntlet down and making a pledge to myself. By January 28th I am going to post my New Year Resolutions for 2008 and everything I would like to complete by the end of the year....no matter how large or small.

I am going to write in this blog each day or week (should technology and the newness of this blog not fail me) all of my failures, disappointments, wins, successes and tips that I used to complete my goals. Accountability is key!

What better way to show others of you out there what can be accomplished by setting the example? Through thick or thin, one way or another my list will be ticked off line by line. So stay tune...6 days until I unveil my own goals....

...Yikes, what have I gotten myself into?!

JANUARY 23, 2008

BABY STEPS

Ok, now that the gauntlet is down and I'm going to reveal to the world what my New Year's goals/resolutions will be, let me say that in making this list, it will be long because I'm giving myself a year to complete it.

There will be more than 15 de-cluttering, but less than 25.(I hope). There will be some tasks that need more time allocated than others, however, everything will be listed.

Here is what I plan on doing first:

- List will be created.
- Beside each task or job will be how much time I believe it is needed for me to complete it.

JANUARY 28, 2008

MY GOALS FOR DE-CLUTTERING

Today is January 28th, the day I promised that I would give you my goals for the year 2008. But before I do that, I want to answer the question, "What is the most important aspect of making a goal?" And the answer is that you show up and be accountable for taking action, whether it is daily, weekly or monthly. So here I am, **ACCOUNTABLE TO ALL OF YOU READERS AND MY RADIO LISTENERS.**

My goals for the year appear in random order for a reason—they're simply the result of brainstorming everything I would like to accomplish during this year. Some goals are loftier than others, but it does not matter. What matters is how they get done and what plan is in place to make that to happen.

MY GOALS FOR 2008

1. Redo filing system for the business
2. Update personal files
3. Shred unnecessary health files...my kids', my parents', my husband's and mine
4. Make new website for ROCKING HORSE (my holiday company)
5. Clean out every closet in the house: the kids', ours, laundry room, bathrooms, kitchen, workshop, living room, dining room, office, den, linen closet and the 1/2 basement (no we don't have an attic—thank goodness!)
6. Organize all the photographs from past 14 years and put them in: albums? On CD? Or give to kids?
7. Recycle and donate to Salvation Army, veterans, consignment shops, etc.
8. Sell hot tub
9. Paint kitchen, den, back hall
10. Select, buy new couches for den
11. Choose fabric for club chairs and reupholster
12. Clean out above the garage
13. Clean out tool shed

14. Clean out loft above the back-hall
15. Replace screens in office
16. Cut back trees and bushes from storm damage
17. Simplify two perennial garden beds
18. Plant vegetable garden
19. Redo stone wall
20. Sort through EVERY drawer in the house, simplify
21. Shred outdated house files
22. Go through every file in all the file cabinets: shred, simplify, combine
23. Give away furniture that no longer suits our needs
24. Straighten out all items on the walls in the garage
25. Recycle; dispose of all unused paint environmentally
26. Clear, sort every shelf in the house

That does it for now. I'm sure I've forgotten some things, but can add on as time goes by. Tomorrow I will show you how to breakdown and priorities.

JANUARY 29, 2008

PERSONAL GOALS

OK, it was just before the stroke of midnight last night on January 28th when I realized that I didn't include my **personal goals** for 2008. Here goes:

1. Schedule and make time with old friends
2. Increase exercise routine...i.e. walk with the dog
3. Recreate good habits...take time to eat breakfast and not on the fly
4. Take a Yoga class
5. Redesign early morning routine...make habit forming

JANUARY 30, 2008

PRIORITIZING

I awoke this morning with the thought that I needed to prioritize my list of goals for 2008. But before that one more thing needs to happen: WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE LIST AND be S.M.A.R.T.

S stands for Simple and Specific

M stands for Measureable

A stands for Attainable

R stands for Realistic

T stands for Time-oriented

Tomorrow I will show you how this works.

FEBRUARY 1, 2008

HOW TO BEGIN

Yesterday, I introduced you to the S.M.A.R.T goals. Here is a review:

S stands for Simple and Specific. When you outline your goals, make sure they are simple and be specific about what you want to get done.

I want to do #2 of my list, update my personal files. What do I mean by that? Being specific, it means I want to:

- Discard all those papers that are not relevant anymore
- Put those papers that I wish to keep in newer files, if applicable (for example: if I have old report cards that belong to my eldest son, who is now 27, I think it's time that he has his own specific box labeled with his name on it and the contents of that box listed. No need for **me** to hold onto those report cards).

When I go through his folder, I will sort out all the most important reports and comments from his teachers. I need not hold on to every homework assignment or note that came home. All of those unnecessary papers will be shredded. I have kept up with this task over the years, but sometimes it is best to do a complete review.

M stands for Measurable. Is this a task that can be measured? How long will it take me? How will I feel when this is completed? The answer is, I'll feel great, because I am 1/3 of the way there going through my adult children's files. It is important to me to complete this goal because it cleans out the file drawer of unnecessary material and allows something else to come into our lives. Possibly travel brochures of places we would like to visit!

A stands for Attainable. Can this be attained? YOU BET! How? I can easily bring the files into the TV room and work on them while watching the nightly news. Becoming a multi-tasker is not all bad.

R stands for Realistic. Is it? ABSOLUTELY! This is something I could do each night until it is completed. Break it down, one file each night for 7 nights...that's 7 folders done.

T stands for Time-Oriented. The big question is always "*When* are you going to do it?" Am I going to make excuses not to? What complaints about the task(s) will come to the surface? Whatever they are, they're not valid—just excuses.

I'm going to start tonight with Corey's school files. The news is on and I can get started right now. How can any goal be reached if it cannot even begin?

So I have marked in my calendar from 6-7pm "Go through Kids' personal files". I am showing up and being accountable.

How long do I think this will take me? Realistically? Two nights. one-hour each. Two hours of TV news listening and shredding at the same time. I will let you know the results of one night tomorrow.

FEBRUARY 4, 2008

FURIOUSLY FILING

And you thought that I was not doing anything!! Why, because I have not written for a while? Never, not me. I want to tell you that the other night I collected all the personal files for two of our three adult children containing elementary school, high school and college stuff. When I lifted the boxes, my first thought was, "Oh my gosh, this box is so heavy—there is going to be so much to do.

Here is what happened: with a cup of coffee, a fire in the fireplace, and the news at hand I was able to get through that box.

What am I learning from this?

I was very aware of how heavy the box of files felt as I carried it. Metaphorically speaking, it weighed on my shoulders as well. It was exciting to see the pile of discarded papers piling up...higher and higher! There was a real jolt of accomplishment and something that I had wanted to finish for such a long time. When all was completed, the remaining folders were lighter...readily returned to the file cabinet for my adult children to inherit. Yeah me!

FEBRUARY 7, 2008

PRIORITIZING AND COMBINING GOALS

Last night before I taught my Conquer Clutter class, I sat in the den with my husband watching the news. Knowing that I needed to keep whittling away at the warranty, appliances, and vacation files, I found the time sitting by the fire to be a masterful way of multi-tasking.

Job done. Length of time? One hour. Files back into the file drawer, each appropriately labeled on the outside with either: "Household, Pets, Kids, Travel, Airlines, Important Documents, Computer."

What am I learning from this?

When trying to accomplish a task that I don't particularly like to do: especially the warranty and appliance folders (can't get more boring than those), I felt more energized to be in the company of someone else. My husband and dog were there which made the chore less of drudgery.

How to Prioritize/Combine Goals:

Here's the thinking process I applied to prioritizing and combining my own goals for the year:

- What season are you in...What can be done now?
- What can you do inside of your house that you can't do outside?
- Make a notation by your goals of the month this will be done
- If there is a repair, which season do you need it for? Ex: screens needing repair? Fix in the winter, ready for the summer. Bet your repair bill will be even cheaper!!
- Paint rooms, do in the winter: less expensive and painters are looking for inside jobs
- Think of spring cleaning: fresh...renewed...go through closets and drawers
- Outside work waits until the late spring, like me if you live in the northeast

I review my list and make a notation of what needs to be finished by a certain SEASON. For example, item #15, screens in my office. What a perfect time now to call and have them fixed, as I don't open up the windows up here in the Northeast during the winter. Therefore, I make a notation of the Month that these will be repaired; March. They will all set and ready to go in the Spring.

Notice that some of the items can be done in the summer (# 12, **garage** is not going to be cleaned or sorted through in -2 degree winter weather; I am hearty, but it is NOT my priority to freeze out there). Therefore, I make a notation next to garage, do in the early summer months: May, June early July. # 24 and #25 will be completed with the Garage at the same-time. #13, tool shed to be cleaned out, same method applies, early summer. Again it can be done even in the rain. These two jobs can be done one after another.

NOW I AM CELEBRATING MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND WINS!

And I'm taking the weekend off.

What's next:

1. #29 is scheduled
2. Making time for old friend
3. #30 redesign early morning routine...make habit forming

FEBRUARY 7, 2008

FURIOUSLY FINISHING, PART II

ONE GROUP DOWN!!! As of last night, I finished our youngest child's personal folder/files. It felt great to be able to have completed this task. I lightened the load and the file cabinet actually breathes!

What I'm learning from this:

When first opening the file drawer and seeing all the files dealing with our three kids, immediately I instinctively wanted to shut it. There was **so much** and I **waited and procrastinated** for this long, what difference would another couple of years make?

Does that sound familiar? Who is that voice?

My inner critic—the inner critic we all have. So what do we do? Let the inner critic know this is something you have wanted to tackle and accomplish for a long time. Look to the vision...down the road; visualize what this file drawer will look like, how it is going to make you feel. Now, piles of paper gone, my kids will appreciate it when I give them their own THINNER files back someday....very soon!

FEBRUARY 26, 2008

VACATION OVER, BACK TO WORK

You must think that I have been slacking for the past two weeks. Well, to tell the truth, the first week I was on vacation with my adult sons and daughter...the second week, getting back on schedule.

While I was away from the blog I made a list of what HABITS I WANTED TO CHANGE.

The first was to re-design my morning routine and make myself commit to this, even when I'm distracted by other things I'd like to do.

Job Done. First thing was simply to make sure that our bed was made in the morning. Simple, yes, but not when I have a husband that likes to plop back on top of the bed to read his book before he heads out to work. That can be challenging.

What I'm learning from this:

I timed myself; it would take me exactly 3 minutes to make the bed. Why were these three minutes so hard to come by? There are so many other things I'd rather do. But I noticed, when the bed wasn't made, I never quite felt put together. You know what I mean, when something's just not right.

I have made it a point now for the past week to get up and not leave our room until the bed is made. I have to confess that it does make a difference in my attitude for the day.

Knowing that I accomplished something that has been so hard for me to recommit to, I'll keep working on it and it will become a habit.

What's next:

Tomorrow, another look at the goals...and habits, working at whittling away the files.

MARCH 3, 2008

STRUGGLING

This has been a long and sad week for me. A very dear friend and my old tennis coach died of cancer this past week. To say that I have felt down is an understatement. I apologize for the delay in logging and posting my accomplishments.

As I write this I'm having an "A-HA" moment. While visiting Rick in his Hospice room, I was struck that there he was just surrounded by friends and family. A plethora of get well cards, drawings from his grandchildren and pictures of his loved ones surrounding him—did he need more?

Did he **need** his old tennis racket, did he **need** all the extra socks, shoes, towels and did he **need** all those trophies to remind himself or others of his accomplishments? **No!** He needed what was most precious...family and friends.

I was reminded again when we leave this world we take with us three of the greatest gift: our memories, our wisdom and our experience. And if we are truly wealthy...the gift of love.

What I'm learning from this:

Sometimes when we make a promise to others and want to be accountable for completing that task, life gets in the way. Case in point, the death of my dear friend. How has it affected me and my goals...I have felt tired, withdrawn and not my usual upbeat self. This past Sunday, I participated in a wonderful conference celebrating women and their

empowerment. The gathering was fruitful, amazing to watch, but I was not at my very best. My mind kept jumping back to Rick, knowing there was a celebration of his life taking place that day and I was not able to be there. I am attending his funeral today.

I share this with you because it goes to show that things do get in our way of progress and taking action. Situations happen which we have no control over; however, they're not a reason to jump ship and give up on a goal. Yes, my week was full of lows, but it did not deter me from continuing on little by little to regain the steam of the earlier weeks.

Remember, one step at a time...be kind to yourself.

What got done:

- #15, Replace Screens is done! We are all ready for the Spring.
- #30, Changing Bad Habits...yes, I continue to jump out of bed, make it and begin my day as if the bow on the present was beautifully tied. It feels more complete to me...and it is becoming a better habit.
- #7, Took items to the Consignment shop last couple of weeks...and I received a check in the mail. SWEET! Time to celebrate.
- #2, 21, 22 Files, discarded to the recycling pile all unneeded paint charts from my "Paint" file, Kept any important info from "My Computer" file, only one more file left to go in the two long file drawer cabinet... "House" files...here we go!

What's Next:

#5, Think I will begin to go through each of the closets, one by one...Spring is coming and it will feel good to recycle, remove and regain space. It is nice to be able to vary the goals from week to week. I can still continue to work on the paper filing again during the evening hours while watching the news. That has worked well for me and it has not become troublesome.

#9, Calling painters to get estimates to paint the kitchen, den and back hall. Better to do it now when the painters are not able to head outside for summer jobs.

MARCH 19, 2008

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Can't believe that my last entry was almost two weeks ago, but then again, yes I can. Life can play funny tricks on us. I never thought I would feel so drained by the death of my former coach and friend, Rick.

So here I am now, pulling up the boot straps and putting one foot in-front of the other. ONE STEP AT A TIME. I am being kind to myself and doing what it is that I can with the energy that I have left at the end of the day. How?

I start where I stand. Even if it is an inch...I just do a little bit. Better to do something than nothing at all. That just breeds frustration, guilt and stirs up the inner critic.

What got done:

#21, Shred unwanted house files.....DONE, DONE, DONE! Realistically, it took me two weeks to get through this group of files, but then again I found estimates from work to be done on the house going back to 1977.

#1, Redo filing system for the business... 1/2 way done...Great to sit by the fire and wade through these files. Not been tended to since 2004. Reorganized, consolidated, recycled and reused back sides of paper.

#7, Took unneeded items to an auction house and will receive a check this week...SWEET!

What's Next:

I am going to finish #1 goal tonight...YIPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE, another one down! and start on #5...cleaning out every closet in the house.

MARCH 29, 2008

FEELING LIGHTER!

GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#1, #2, #3, #7 (ongoing), #15, #21, #22, #26, #30

What I'm learning:

I am amazed that **nine of my goals** for 2008 have already been **complete**. That is 9 out of 30!! Not bad and it's only March. The momentum continues and as I gather the next group of goals, I find myself like a steam engine.....this can be contagious.

What got done:

#1, Re-doing my entire filing system for my business is now COMPLETE! Recycled 8 paper bags of paper!

#7, Taking those unneeded items to be donated or list on www.freecycle.org are constantly being tended too. Posted items on freecycle and they were gone in 24 hours....

What's Next:

Have begun to tackle one shelf at a time in my office. By tonight I should be finished. Living Room, downstairs bathroom, dining room will be next...one shelf, one draw, one closet at a time

APRIL 1, 2008

I'M ON A ROLL!

In the past week I have:

Collated, hole punched all articles and photos of our son's last 5 years on the professional freeskiing circuit. This has been something that I have wanted to complete for so long, but kept putting it off because it looked so daunting. And now here it is, labeled with tabs, so any other information can be easily entered. What a great feeling!!!!

All business files are completely done and each night before I leave the office the paper is filed. THIS IS CREATING A GOOD HABIT (and I thought I couldn't do it)!!

All books in my office have been organized by author's name and categorized by topics, which means my OFFICE IS COMPLETED.

Tackled one of the cabinets in the living room. I stored financial papers which are no longer necessary to keep. Shredded them all. One cabinet down...three more to go.

Put four items on the freecycle list in the morningby the afternoon they were all gone,

What I'm learning from this:

One Step at a time....I know I keep saying that, but it is true. A little bit...just being able to reorganize all the books in my office was a huge undertaking. But I did one shelf at a time; less daunting to me than to take all the books out and see them in a huge pile.

Visually that may have done me in. So figure out what works best for YOU.

What's next:

Today is a warmer day, so I am going out into the Tool Shed, Goal #13 and working at freecycling all those extra garden tools and supplies I do not need. If you don't want to freecycle use Craigslist.org. But know there are people out there who could use what you no longer need. How many of the SAME shovels do you really need!

Will do another cabinet in the living room.

APRIL 11, 2008

SPRING FEVER FRENZY

LISTS OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#s 1, 2, 3, 7, 15, 21, 22, 26, 30

In the past week I have:

1. Kept my desk free and clear of "breeding" piles of papers
2. No clutter is left on the kitchen or dining room tables, NOTHING!
3. Freecycled all the old record albums that I have not listened to in 30 years....so why did I save them, memories!
4. Dug out the potting shed and the tool shed.
5. Raked out all the gardens and simplified.

What I'm learning from this:

When it came to my records, I kept them because they reminded me of my youth, great days, and freedom of responsibility. However, I still can hear many of those songs on the radio today. Being a creature who does like change, having them sprinkled amongst today's "listening pleasures" are OK with me. I still have all the memories and no one can ever take those away!

What's next:

1. Finish up on the potting shed
2. Do one more cabinet in the living room...three to go
3. UGH...better do the loft above the mudroom before the painters get here. That will be an undertaking unto itself.

APRIL 23, 2008**DO THE RIGHT TASKS AT THE RIGHT TIME**

LISTS OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#s 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 26, 30

What got done:

17, All garden beds are simplified

9, The painting for the kitchen, breakfast room, den, back-hall are all scheduled TO BEGIN late fall

8, I have a buyer for the hot tub!

13, The potting shed is completely cleaned and all extra supplies have been freecycled

16, All bushes and trees have been pruned

For me, choosing to work outdoors in the good weather is critical to handle outdoor tasks, even if indoor ones get delayed. I could say I still needed to work inside, but the summer weather will be hotter and I will be able to accomplish inside whatever is on the list during the heat or rain.

What I'm learning from this:

Even though it was 60 degrees this past week, it was 85 degrees above the garage and getting hotter. Smart to work on de-cluttering that area while I still was feeling energized. I realized that this area needs to be accomplished much earlier in the Spring season. So this will be next on my list.

What's next:

1. De-cluttering the other half of the garage attic
2. Cleaning out another cabinet in the living room
3. Taking newer items to the consignment store
4. Freecycling items that are up in the loft

MAY 5, 2008

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

LISTS OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#s 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 26, 30

Over the past two weeks I have:

#14, The loft above the mudroom is completely sorted, reorganized, and boxes labeled. All unwanted items were freecycled

#18, Planted one half of the vegetable garden, other half to be done in two weeks when the weather is a bit warmer

#22, Completed going through every file in all the cabinets: shed, simplify, combined

#26, All living room cabinets under the bookcase have been cleaned out and simplified

#3, Took more to the consignment store

What I'm learning from this:

At first I was daunted by the amount of stuff in the loft. As we do not have an attic in the house or a basement, items we want to keep protected end up there in the loft. Extra lampshades, pictures, small rugs, kids' pottery, sentimental childhood items (kids' personal ones), current paints, etc.

In my mind I sectioned off the space and did 1/4 of the area at a time. This made the space DOABLE and MEASURABLE. Remember the S.M.A.R.T goals: s-specific, simple; m-measurable; a-attainable; r-realistic; t-time oriented.

What's next:

#7, Another batch to go to the consignment store tomorrow

#25, Call the Town Hall and ask them what their policy is on environmentally recycling and disposing of paints

JUNE 3, 2008

FEELING LIGHTER AND LIGHTER

LISTS OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#s 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30

I have accomplished 18 out of my 30 goals total...not bad, half a year, another half to go!

What I learned from this:

This past month was more than a bit chaotic. One of our sons was in an avalanche in Haines, Alaska. For the past three to four weeks he has been here recuperating with a repaired ACL and his brother and sister have visited too. Unfortunately for him, I was walking through the den asking questions of whether or not he wanted "x,y,z, "or did he want me to freecycle it.

We got a tremendous amount done, especially when it came to dealing with the garage. We put a couch in the corner of the garage, plopped Corey on top of it and brought items down from the attic one at a time. "Want it, need it, donate it?"

While Sarah was here she went down memory lane reading her old journals, parting with some letters, artwork, and notes from grade school classes. She could not believe she held on to some of it. Taylor wanted to hold on to almost nothing...His response, "way too much to cart around".

This is cathartic.

What's next:

#25, Need to call the town hall to ask about paint disposal policy

#5, 20 Start on closets and drawers.

JULY 14, 2008

WHEN ONE DOOR CLOSSES ANOTHER ONE OPENS

LISTS OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

#S 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30

(19 out of 30...11 more to go!)

Have you ever noticed "when one door closes another one opens"? For example, after spending all this time de-cluttering, ridding my house of all the things that we no longer needed...my husband's parents' house sold and the furniture needed to be divided

amongst the three grown siblings. (There was a moment of panic when I thought of all the furniture and other stuff that would now be descending on and into the house...after 6 months of cleaning and clearing, ugh!). Here is where the door opened: Attitude change.

For years we had not used the living room because pieces of furniture were being moved from one place, it became the "storage" unit for my own family of origins furniture, knick knacks, paintings, etc...until I finally decided what to do with it all. I must admit the living room was not a high priority on my list, as we never used it often enough. The thought of redecorating, covering and reupholster was daunting and costly. We lived in our den which we always found to be cozier with roaring fires, especially in the cold winters.

When my husband came back from selecting what he might like from his parent's house, I was surprised to learn that much of what he selected would have been my choice too. **AND THEY ALL WERE LIVING ROOM FURNITURE PIECES!**

Last night we had his family over for dinner, we used the living room for the first time in four years! It gave them and us great pleasure to see where the furniture from their past was now living.

So just when you think you have cleared and cleaned out and have all your ducks in a row, don't be surprised if some other door opens. Greet it with enthusiasm and curiosity; you never know where it will take you. Lesson, **BE OPEN TO RECEIVE.**

What's next:

#7, More items to Salvation Army last week

1. Move all "inherited" furniture to storage unit for kids' future houses
2. Take painting to auction house for sale
3. Go through my closet on a rainy day this week
4. Go through all my drawers in my bedroom
5. Redo and reorganize linen closet

#5, Tackle Corey's closet...when that is done the entire upstairs will be FINISHED!!!

#3, Take more to the consignment store

#8, Hot tub fell through, so I need to try and sell that one more time

JULY 20, 2008

ONE DRAWER AT A TIME

I am moving further still!

#3, Taking more tomorrow to the consignment store

#20, Went through all my bureau drawers: how many short sleeve shirts does one person need?

What's next:

#5, Tomorrow I believe it is going to rain...so I will hit Corey's closet and then tackle mine. When #5 is finished, the entire upstairs will have been done!!!

OCTOBER, 2008

HOME STRETCH

LIST OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 28, 30

(25 COMPLETED...5 TO GO!)

CAN'T BELIEVE THAT I LAST POSTED JULY 20!!!

I AM SORRY, THE DE-CLUTTERING HAS TAKEN OVER AND THE ACCOUNTABILITY TO SHARE MY PROGRESS GOT PUT ASIDE.

What I'm learning from this:

Even though I have not shared these past 4 months with you, I never gave up continuing to work away at this clutter. I kept myself always having the vision and the finish line in

sight, what that would look like...the end result, **the goal**. This has been a long process, but if one takes chunks, breaks it down it can be done!!! So go for it.

What's next:

5 more left to do...whew...**and 2 of them are, of course, the ones I have been leaving to the last...why, because I REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO THEM.**

#4, Make a new website for the Rocking Horse with photos

#6, Organize all the photographs from past umpty ump years, put into individual albums for each child

(The pictures are already in albums, but this next step is removing each one and sorting per child)

#11, Will be done in the next three weeks

#19, Stone wall will be fixed today

#29, Look into different Yoga classes in the next 2 weeks

So there you have it, the last 5. Do I hear a drum roll? (I am my own orchestra here)

Do I hear cheering in the background?? No, I hear the quiet conviction of setting a goal and following through, even when hitting the wall. It's those lessons learned of structuring a way for each job to get done...but it has to work for YOU.

DECEMBER 17, 2008

☺ I DID IT!

LIST OF GOALS COMPLETED TO DATE:

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30

#4, The Rocking Horse web site, has begun to gallop. Though it is a work in progress, it has been the focus for the past couple of weeks. Sometimes I thought I couldn't get this

done, especially since I am not a techie, but persistence is one of my core strengths and values...and I don't give up easily! **Start where you stand and do one step at a time.**

#6, Remember how I was leaving this for last. Well I have not procrastinated...I have taken all the kids' photo albums and gotten three boxes (one for each). In the evenings, by the fire, and watching a movie, I have removed the best pictures of each and placed them into their respective boxes.

#11, I have asked my older sister, Nina, to help me with this. And it is right up her ally plus I love her taste! She is going to help me choose fabric for the furniture to be recovered in the living room AND I get to spend a couple of days with her one on one. That's a win-win!!!

#19, Stone wall all repaired before the snow fell.

#29, Decided the hot yoga classes were just too hot for me, so I joined another exercise class. Feeling great!!!

What I learned from this experiment:

A year is a long time....keeping up is a commitment, but the end result for me is feeling tremendously accomplished. No one said that this would be a walk in the park, and many times I believed I took on way too much. However, after three months into it I had two choices: continue or give up.

If I continued I knew I was accountable to those of you who read my blog and listen to my radio show, "A Fresh Start" with Sallie Felton. To quit meant to not even try to succeed. I could have used any number of excuses to stop this de-cluttering project, but I would be cheating myself of two things:

1. What I learned about myself from achieving these goals; and

2. How to find a way to succeed when I'm struggling so the urge to quit doesn't take over.

Most importantly, I never would have found out how setting and achieving these goals served me in the end.

What I can say to you now, at the end of it, is that I grew from this experience and so can you. It is by no accident that I feel de-cluttered mentally, physically and emotionally.

What it took to get here was making a plan. It also took passion, patience, strength, focus and accountability.

I leave you with this:

START WHERE YOU STAND.

Set small goals.

Be specific, make them measurable, attainable, realistic and time-oriented.

Be kind to yourself.

Accept your struggles.

Take in the learning.

and

GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE TO SUCCEED!

Chapter Two The Running Tape

“A quiet mind cureth all.”

Robert Burton

TOOL #1

HOW TO TELL IF YOU HAVE MENTAL CLUTTER

*“In order to seek one’s own direction,
one must simplify the mechanics of ordinary, everyday life.”*

Plato

Read the following statements and make a note each time one applies to you.

- My mind never shuts off.
- My mental to-do list is a mile long.
- I can’t let go of thinking, even when I put my head on the pillow at night.
- I often forget appointments, what I need at the grocery store or why I walked into the other room.
- I feel like I am having to “everything”.
- I frequently tolerate situations that are stressful.
- I feel unable to keep up.
- I feel pressured to be superhuman.
- I find myself procrastinating.
- I rarely say “no” to requests.
- I am always over-doing, over-scheduling and over-committing
- I find myself doing things I don’t want to out of fear or guilt.

Let me tell you a little about mental clutter. Often, it’s the result of overdoing, over-scheduling and over-committing. We try to do too much in a day and the truth is, we sincerely believe we never actually do enough within this 24-hour timeframe!

Mental clutter is that infamous “to-do” list that seems to be living in everyone’s head--appointments, meetings, schedules, tasks and worries—and it looks like this:

1. WHAT I DIDN’T DO
2. WHAT I NEED TO DO
3. WHAT ELSE I SHOULD BE DOING

We all have these lists we keep in our heads that keep us up at night and make us crazy, but let’s stop for a moment. Can you remember a time when you felt free of that clutter? Where were you and how did you feel? What did you do that allowed you let that tension go? How were you able to do it?

Spend a few moments recalling what it felt like to let go of that tension and stress. Really let yourself access that memory with all parts of you. Recreating that feeling now—or whenever you need to—reinforces the belief that it’s possible to experience that freedom again, no matter how overwhelmed you may feel in this moment.

My colleague, Tara Sheldon, a life coach and Feng Shui consultant, encourages us to look at the relationship between mental clutter and worry. She asks clients to look at it this way:

“Another contributor to mental clutter is constantly expecting the worst to happen. While one can argue you may be better prepared if something does not turn out the way you wish, doing so is not helpful, as well as a major drain on your well-being. In fact, if you are familiar with The Secret, you know the energy you put in is what you get out – good or bad. You could be bringing the negative outcomes to you by focusing on it. Imagine putting that same amount of energy into believing and expecting a positive outcome?! Even if things do not go exactly as you wish, having a positive outlook will make you better prepared for dealing with any mishaps.”

So the next time you find yourself cluttering your mind with worry, ask yourself what worst-case scenarios are taking up space in your head? How does it feel to imagine the best-case scenario instead?

TOOL #2
IDENTIFYING YOUR MENTAL CLUTTER

*“Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen.
Keep in the sunlight.”*
Benjamin Franklin

Whenever I do a workshop on clutter, I ask the participants to describe what mental clutter means to them. I am always amazed at how similar the answers are. Where do you see your clutter show up on this list?

Worry	Errands
Stress	
Fear	
Grief	
Obsession	
Anxiety	
Co-dependency	
Feeling “paralyzed”/stuck	
Ruminating	
To Do List	
Responsibilities	
TV	
Media	
Technology	
Things to Avoid	
Money	
Health	
Email/Telephone/Voicemail	
Work	
Commitments	
Schedules/Calendars	
Repetitive Thinking	
Deadlines	
Procrastination	
Prioritization	
Children	
Work	
Money	

Before you can get a handle on your mental clutter, you need to know where it's coming from. Below are some exercises I've developed to help you identify your particular issues and understand how they're affecting you. Take out your journal and a pad of paper and answer as accurately and honestly as you can.

Exercise: Creating Self Awareness

Reflect on your day. What did you hear, read or experience that honestly, you couldn't care less about or had little meaning to you, but took up space in your life? Consider each of these items and how your day would have been different if they hadn't captured your attention.

Then ask yourself:

1. What does my mental clutter look like?
2. What effect does it have on me?
3. How much time did it steal from me?
4. What could I have done with that time if I hadn't lost it?

We are constantly bombarded with information from a variety of sources—social media, text messages, TV and radio, email, voicemail—that we often forget we have a choice about what we take in, how we respond and when.

Do this exercise for several days until you begin to see patterns emerge. Only when you see the patterns can you begin the process of clearing space in your mind.

Exercise: Taking Action to Reduce Mental Clutter

Now that you're starting to get a sense of what your mental clutter looks like, take the following steps:

1. Name three things can you do to cut down on mental clutter.

2. Pick one you can do in the next week.
3. Choose the day you'll focus on it.
4. Write it in your calendar so your well being is on your to-do list!

Exercise: Be Curious

Mental clutter often obscures the view of what *is* working in our lives that we're unable to make room for. Spend a few minutes with the following questions to discover what your mental clutter is keeping you from noticing in your day:

1. What was positive in your day?
2. What is something you heard or read today that was upbeat or inspiring?
3. Why did it touch you?
4. What makes you curious?
5. What do you do to make learning part of your everyday life?
6. When you want to energize the mind, what do you do?
7. When you want to quiet the mind, what do you do?

**TOOL #3
LIST MAKING**

"Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do."
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

What does your to-do list look like? I mean that literally. Do you keep a day planner or are you one who has dozens of sticky notes posted around the house? One of my sisters uses sticky notes all the time to remind herself to do anything and everything—she even has them in her car!

No matter what your system is for tracking your to-dos, getting them out of your head and onto paper is key to reducing mental clutter. This is particularly helpful when you're dealing with a large-scale project.

I had a client I'll call "Winnie". During one of our coaching sessions I asked her what was getting in her way and keeping her stuck. She said it was the mile-long list that ran through her head of everything she needed to do for her house, but even the idea of making a list was overwhelming.

Here's what I asked Winnie next:

Sallie: "If you knew you could not fail, how would that make you feel?"

Winnie: "I would be ecstatic!"

Sallie: "So feeling ecstatic, what might be one of the first things you could do to unload this list from your mind?"

Winnie: "I'd like to make a list--I am visual that way--but when the list gets too long, I start feeling like I'll never it all done."

Sallie: "So, Winnie, let's change that sentence to be more positive and affirming. How about saying, 'I'd like to make a list and I will break it down into smaller lists in order to keep moving forward.' How does that sound?"

Winnie: "Wow, that sounds more doable!"

Why at first did it not seem possible for Winnie to make her projects list? The reason is simple: when you set a goal of writing a list of errands, projects or other tasks to complete and you've only completed a small portion of them, it's easy to feel disappointed or a sense of failure even though your list is smaller for having done so.

And why is it that we do not give ourselves credit for the tasks we completed? Because we didn't complete the ENTIRE list and if something isn't finished in its entirety, we tend to believe we've failed. That, right there, is how we generate negative clutter in our minds. The truth is, we didn't fail—we just miscalculated the amount of time we really need to work through the list.

Now that Winnie was ready to take on making her list, we needed to find out what was going to be on it and how it would be organized. Winnie opted to name each project and call out what she would be responsible for, what her husband would do and what someone else might do.

The goal with Winnie was to get her to make the list and then have her systematically and realistically work her way through it. When you're stuck like Winnie was, it's critical to have a point of accountability. Winnie decided that she would update her list regularly to show what was complete and what was left to do and email those updates to me.

Here is Winnie's complete list as of the last update. She calls it her "Honey-We-Do List". You can use a similar system to make your own lists, but as long as you commit to whatever system you choose, you'll increase your chances of success and reduce the clutter in your mind in the same time.

Project	Shane	Winnie	Other	Done
Refresh cedar in cedar closet		X		½ 9/8/08 ¼ 9/13/08 Done 2008
Get rid of dirt in garage			X	1/8/09
Energy audit (Called 9/3; waiting for call back)			X	10/14/08
Chimney inspection and cleaning			X	10/25/08
Fireplace cracks inside	X			10/25/08
Replace fuel oil tank lock		X		10/7/08
Small desk for my BR (laptop)		X		11/1/08
Check that all bulbs are CF	X			11/30/08
Complete cleaning of kitchen Stove, oven, microwave Refrigerator Kitchen pantry Cabinet fronts (Cabinet Magic) Get rid of stuff I don't use Sharpen knives Organize under sink; move cleaning stuff to laundry room shelves		X		12/31/08
Move rest of my stuff from cat room		X		8/27/08
Move shoes to BR		X		8/27/08
Buy freezer		X		8/28/08
List to the 4 circuit boxes		X		8/29/08
Weeding and Preen		X		8/29/08
Cut binding on blanket		X		8/30/08
Install solar lights in side yard		X		9/1/08
Move china cabinet back	X	X		9/1/08
Move sofa table back	X	X		9/1/08

Set up my BR correctly; clothes and stuff (i.e., "move in")		X		9/1/08
Clean fireplace		X		9/10/08
Clean cobwebs in mechanical area, basement		X		9/13/08
Clean out junk drawers in kitchen		X		9/13/08
Clean up mold in my shower		X		9/13/08
Pest control outside (cob webs) (October)			X	9/13/08
Replace Shane's shower curtain liner		X		9/13/08
Dripping faucets (AAA Plumbing) My shower Guest bath sink			X	9/14/08
Organize shelves in laundry room Floors Laundry Kitchen cleaning supplies Bath cleaning supplies		X		9/27/08
Disposal cleaner		X		9/6/08
Finish filing systems Personal Universities		X		9/6/08
Fix garage door	X			9/6/08
Clean out credenza drawers		X		9/7/08
Clean out desk drawers		X		9/7/08
Phone in my BR		X		9/7/08
Repair drain under laundry sink			X	9/8/08
Birdfeeder		X		No
Get rid of ramp			X	No

What's running circles in your head? Use the following exercise to motivate and inspire you to take the first step.

Exercise: Unloading

In 2008, I wanted to de-clutter my whole house, top to bottom and inside and out. Yes, this was a physical job, but it had been weighing on my mentally for a few years at that point and more so now that all of my children were grown and out of the house.

It was a lofty goal (the house is large), but I knew if I took the time to list everything I wanted to accomplish, then broke it down into seasonal tasks, I'd have a concrete plan of attack that seemed reasonable, doable and increase the chances it would happen by the beginning of 2009.

Your mental clutter project needn't be as big as mine, but it should be something that's been nagging at you and sapping your energy. Think big and think outside the box. Don't let that inner critic tell you why you can't accomplish your goals. If you do, what's weighing on you now will grow heavier as time goes by. I know from what I speak.

Now, **make a list**. Use your journal, notebook or pad of paper and write down everything you can think of that you want to get out of your head and is taking up valuable space in your brain. Putting this down on paper is first step down the path of de-cluttering your mind.

Trust me, it's a tremendously empowering exercise, so be brave and let it all out! Soon you'll start to feel that each word you write is like pouring water out of a large bucket you've carried for miles uphill. The more you pour out, the lighter the bucket (and the clearer your mind).

Finally, **chunk it out.** Break up larger tasks into smaller ones that are reasonable and doable, so that when you schedule time to complete them, you'll be successful instead of overwhelmed.

TOOL #4 **THINGS TO DO RIGHT NOW**

While list making is a powerful tool to clear your mind, there are other ways you can accomplish your de-cluttering goals, whether they be mental, emotional or physical. The good news is that they're all steps you can take right now to begin your own process. For some this will be easy; for others, they may prove difficult.

Open your mind. The first—and for some, the most challenging—thing you can do is be open to receive what the Universe has to offer. It sounds easy, but when you're feeling stuck, unproductive and find yourself procrastinating, it can be a tough hill to climb. You might feel unmotivated, frustrated, anxious or all three but whatever you're feeling I can guarantee this: you feel the weight of the mental as though it were physical weight.

Say the issue that's nagging at you is that if you were to actually clean and organize your desk, you'd lose critical files or information or won't be able to find it if necessary. You don't want to look at the clutter any more, but you don't know what to do with it either.

Be open to finding solutions to help with the physical clutter and ease part of the stress. In this case, let's use a file cabinet. But wait. You don't have a file cabinet and now you're stressed about having to purchase one.

Really think about what you truly need, with intention, and be open to what comes back to you—a call from a friend who's moving and is giving furniture away, a Craigslist ad, an office-supply store closing sale you notice on your way to the market.

TOOL #5

MAKING TIME FOR WHAT YOU WANT

“We don’t have eternity to realize our dreams, only the time we are here.”
Susan Taylor

No one will come to your party if don’t send an invitation to them. The same is true for anything you want to create in your life—clearer thinking, more balance, less stress, peaceful mornings, etc. Ask yourself:

1. What is it I want?
2. What do I need to support this and make it happen?
3. What do I need to do to quiet my “inner voice” in my mind?

When you have less mental clutter, you almost always feel like you have more time. Are you going to spend that time on yourself or use it to create more clutter by watching violent movies, working on the computer until bedtime, mindlessly surfing the Internet, letting clothes, books, children’s toys or other items pile up around the house (or worse, in your bedroom where you’ll take it all to “sleep” with you)?

Or will you make excuses like “I don’t have enough time to do what I want to do in the morning/after work/after the children go to bed”. I’m going to let you in on a secret: yes, you do. It’s just a matter of changing the way you think about time.

Just like we experience feelings of failure when we don’t complete our massive to-do lists in their entirety, we deprive ourselves of activities we enjoy because we’re not able to sit and read that book cover-to-cover, go for a ten-mile run or start and finish a painting.

However you choose to use the space and time you’ve created for yourself, it’s important you feel relaxed and give yourself permission to enjoy what you’re doing in the time you have allowed.

As you've probably guessed, the same holds true when you look at your to-do list or a big project and wonder on earth you'll ever get through it.

TOOL #6

HOW TO CLEAR YOUR CLUTTER

“Worry only about the things under your control, the things that can be influenced and changed by your actions, not about the things that are beyond your capacity to direct or alter.”

Charles E. Hummel

Limit your clearing sessions to anywhere from 15 minutes up to three hours, but no more. Why am I asking you to put a limit on it? I want you to be successful here. I don't want failure—I want success. A useful way to stick to this is to play your favorite music in the background. Usually, it takes 45 minutes to an hour for a CD to finish and you can commit to clearing until the CD is over.

Next, it is absolutely necessary to limit distractions. So if you need to go to the bathroom, or you're hungry or thirsty, take care of it before you start. I also don't want you to look at your computer, answer your cell phone, your landline, the doorbell, check e-mail or anything else. And don't even try texting! When you're clearing, I want you to clear with no distractions at all.

When we release clutter in our minds, our emotional clutter tends to follow suit. We feel less stressed, less burdened and more at peace. This exercise is just the beginning, but done regularly, it has lasting results.

Make sure when you start your clearing process you have the right tools in place. What tools might those be you ask? If you're dealing with mental or emotional clutter, you might want a notepad and a pen to write (or your computer with email and browser

closed, please). Use colored markers and butcher paper if that's what feels right to you—it doesn't matter so long as you can keep the clutter flowing freely out of you.

The point is to get some paper and write down every thing that's lodged in your head. What's on your mental list? Get it out—all of it. Then choose one thing from that list that you can begin to work on right now and start where you stand.

Following are some stories clients have shared with me over the years about the positive effects working some or all of these steps have had for them.

Client 1: Changing a Routine

This client has been experimenting with different ways of settling back into a routine when he returns from his many trips. As you read through it, pay special attention to how he tried one approach, and then modified it to fit his schedule.

"I'm having my morning coffee and checking emails. I thought I'd drop you a quick "Saturday morning hello". I just wanted to thank you again for the clutter class last Thursday. I felt privileged to have your time for the entire hour!

I got back from San Diego on Tuesday night and before I did anything else, I unpacked my clothing bag and put my toiletries away while the cats were eating. In the morning I got up and spent 15 min sorting my souvenir carry on so things didn't end up all over the place.

The rest of the week I have been doing 15 min after work and 15 min before bed. I've found that the "first thing in the morning 15 min" is just not happening right now, as it takes a while to get my wits together.

I'm going to see how the 15 min after I get home and 15 min before bed routine works. Normally when I get home from work, it's feed the cats, put the kettle on, check the mail, check my email. I'm experimenting with feed the cats, put the kettle on, 15 min of clutter, THEN check the mail, check my email so I don't get wrapped up in something interesting then put off the clutter 15 min."

Client 2: Objects Aren't Feelings

I have been always been a believer in re-gifting instead of keeping unwanted or unloved items hidden in the drawer or hiding it in a closet. I mean, what are they doing in there anyway except making us feel badly about them? Still, the urge to hold onto things for emotional reasons, whether or not we like or use those things, is strong.

This client was having difficulty separating sentiment from physical objects that were weighing her down on both levels. Notice how each scenario involves a piece of jewelry that no longer serves the individual and how she held onto these items just for the sake of it and the process I took her through to “let go” of the objects and release the emotional clutter.

“I feel badly if I give away something Aunt Susan gave me, but I just don’t like the necklace and I know someone who would love it!”

“This belonged to Joe, but I’m not with him anymore/we broke up...but we had some great memories.”

The reality is the client doesn’t dislike Aunt Susan. She is still her Aunt and she loves her—it’s the necklace she doesn’t like. However, she knows there is another person who is perfect for the necklace...so what to do?

Does she allow the anxiety and guilt which surfaces with mental clutter (and emotional clutter) prevent her from passing it on (which adds to her physical clutter) or does she allow someone else to enjoy a piece of jewelry which he/she would treasure?

Release the guilt, let go of the necklace and guess what? Now you are de-cluttering. In the case of ex-boyfriend Joe, keep the memories and let go of the jewelry.

Client 3: Being Accountable

No matter what you’re working through in your life or on your to-do list, it does matter that you hold yourself accountable to someone and report on your progress.

Accountability plays a major role in changing habits, but it takes practice, patience and persistence to keep moving forward one step at a time.

Below is a progress report from a client who had several things to tackle while also getting ready for a trip abroad. You can use it as a model for tracking your own progress.

“Hi Sallie! I did my homework this weekend:

- 1)going through my photos*
- 2)selecting what I wanted up*
- 3)going to the store to pick out a matching frame*
- 4)mounting the photo*
- 5)measuring and trimming*
- 6)hanging*

I would like to get at least "Dali and the rhino" picture up within the next week or so to meet your challenge part-way. I am going to the UK on July 23 til August 4 to visit my friends, and my extra time is being spent getting myself prepared for my excursion! I was very productive this weekend toward my trip. I did the following:

- 1)made a UK "to do" list*
- 2)paid all my bills*
- 3)made a "shopping" list*
- 4)printed out my itinerary*
- 5)emailed family members my flight info*
- 6)called my credit cards to notify my travel*
- 7)shopped for my electricity adapter and purchased*
- 8)HUNG DALI PICTURE!!!!*

I'm VERY proud of myself to have done so much and not be keeping things to the LAST MINUTE as usual.

My goal is to have everything done (besides the packing itself) by the Monday before I go (I leave on that Wednesday). I have about 10 tasks to go! whoo hoo!

...what a productive weekend & day.”

Can't you just hear this client's enthusiasm and excitement over accomplishing these tasks and making progress toward his goals? What would it feel like to see yourself moving down your own to-do list with feelings like this?

TOOL #7
DECIDE TO BEGIN

“The beginning is the most important part of the work.”
Plato

Are you tired of carrying your mental clutter around with you, but worry you’ll never be able to sort through it all? Or worse, do you feel like a failure because you haven’t tried? Let’s replace that negative thinking with a more positive mental attitude.

Decide that you’ve had ENOUGH and truly want to do something about the clutter in your life. Once you’ve decided, you’ve already started.

To decide is a choice—a positive one at that!

TOOL #8
LETTING GO

*“I am here to tell you, to promise you in fact, that simple,
tiny changes made one minute at a time,
one experience at a time,
will positively change your life and every outcome of every experience,
in powerful (though sometimes subtle) ways.”*
Karen Casey

I want to share a personal story with you about the power of letting go. When I was in my mid-thirties, I ran a small cottage industry designing and manufacturing outerwear. As the sole designer, I was always working on a deadline. During this particular time, I was racing to complete the new fall line of children’s vests for a show in New York and trying to balance it all with the needs of my three-year-old son and infant daughter. I was mentally and physically exhausted and mentally cluttered.

One night, I was nursing our daughter at the same time that I was sketching and my husband came into the workshop—it was 2am—and said, “Sallie, I know you love to do this, I know you do, and I’d never say you couldn’t do it, but would you at least consider putting this on hold? You’re exhausted. Are you really having fun with this?”

That was a major “A-HA” moment for me! By having someone ask me to consider putting it on hold and not say you have to sell it or give it up was a kinder, gentler way of asking, “Where is YOUR life balance?” That made all the difference.

As it happened, I did put my outerwear business on hold and it wasn’t so much “getting rid of” it, but knowing I could start it back up again if I wanted to (even in a different form). It was the act of letting go of the business, even though I loved it, which allowed me to be MORE PRESENT with my children without worrying about the next season’s designs or upcoming deadline.

That for me was a turning point: It’s when I began to say “**No**” to things that created more mental clutter instead of putting more wood on the pile.

Exercise: Practice Letting Go

Part of reducing mental clutter is letting go of what’s not serving us in the moment (or ever). In your journal, answer the following questions:

1. What’s one thing in your life you want to let go of this week, even if it’s just for this week?
2. Choose the day you’ll take action on it. For example, canceling the appointment, resigning from the committee, turning a negative thought into a positive affirmation, etc.
3. Write in your calendar so your well being is on your to-do list!

TOOL #9
HOW TO DEAL WITH OVERWHELM

“When we are the most overwhelmed, we are the least resourceful.”

Anthony Robbins

“Calgon, take me away!” If you are a boomer, you’re probably familiar with this old television commercial. In it, a woman is stressed out by traffic, her boss, the baby and the dog. “That’s IT,” she cries, “Calgon, take me away!”

Been there? I have—**I’m there right now.**

I am struck, while writing this book, by how overwhelmed I feel at this present moment. I’m scanning documents, research and notes. Some material overlaps, some doesn’t. At the same time, I’m trying to keep the project contained and move forward but all I’m really doing is making myself crazy and nervous at the same time.

As I’m writing this, I’m sitting in front of the fire watching each log burn from the bottom of the pile up and think that maybe that’s precisely how I should be writing this book: from the bottom up, starting with the easiest tasks first. I could have easily changed the energy of this fire by pouring kerosene or lighter fluid on it, but as I watch this particular fire, I see that each flame has its own path to travel. And that’s when I know how I’ll continue on with this book.

In order for me to take a step forward, I have to take a step back. I have to leave the comfort of the fire and my laptop to come up with a better plan. I need to remove myself from the chaos in front of me, take some deep breaths and relax, then go outside in be with nature, which always calms me. In doing so, I’ll gain the clarity I need to revise my plan, put distance between me and my monkey mind and be all the more productive for it.

Here’s the plan I put in place:

- Chunk out the book documents and all material at hand

- Keep notes on each chapter and put them in a specific/separate files
- Send important notes to my virtual assistant, JUST IN CASE! (yes, I have lost critical items in the past)
- Delete information which I will no longer use for this book
- Continue to send draft for editing to my virtual assistant
- Continue to send the edited drafts to Maureen for reworking
- Continue to deleted edited “finals”
- Keep only the final versions
- Create Final Folder to hold all the final versions

What benefits did I get from this?

- DE-CLUTTERING OF THE MIND
- ORGANIZATION of physical content
- A sense of relief
- A quieter mind
- A feeling of accomplishment
- Motivation to continue

Exercise: Crafting Your Plan

Write down an event or situation which overwhelmed you and explain why it did. Then answer the following questions:

1. What was your mind telling you while you were being challenged?
2. What inner messages were you given?
3. How did you respond to them?
4. And what did you say?
5. What steps did you take to get past the monkey mind (inner mind chatter)?
6. How did you remove yourself from the event or situation, or did you?
7. What action steps did you take to alleviate the matter?
8. What could you have done better?

9. Finally, what was your final outcome?

10. Most importantly, WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF?

*“Amidst all the clutter, beyond all the obstacles,
aside from all the static, are the goals set.
Put your head down, do the best job possible,
let the flak pass and
work toward those goals.”*

Donald Rumsfeld