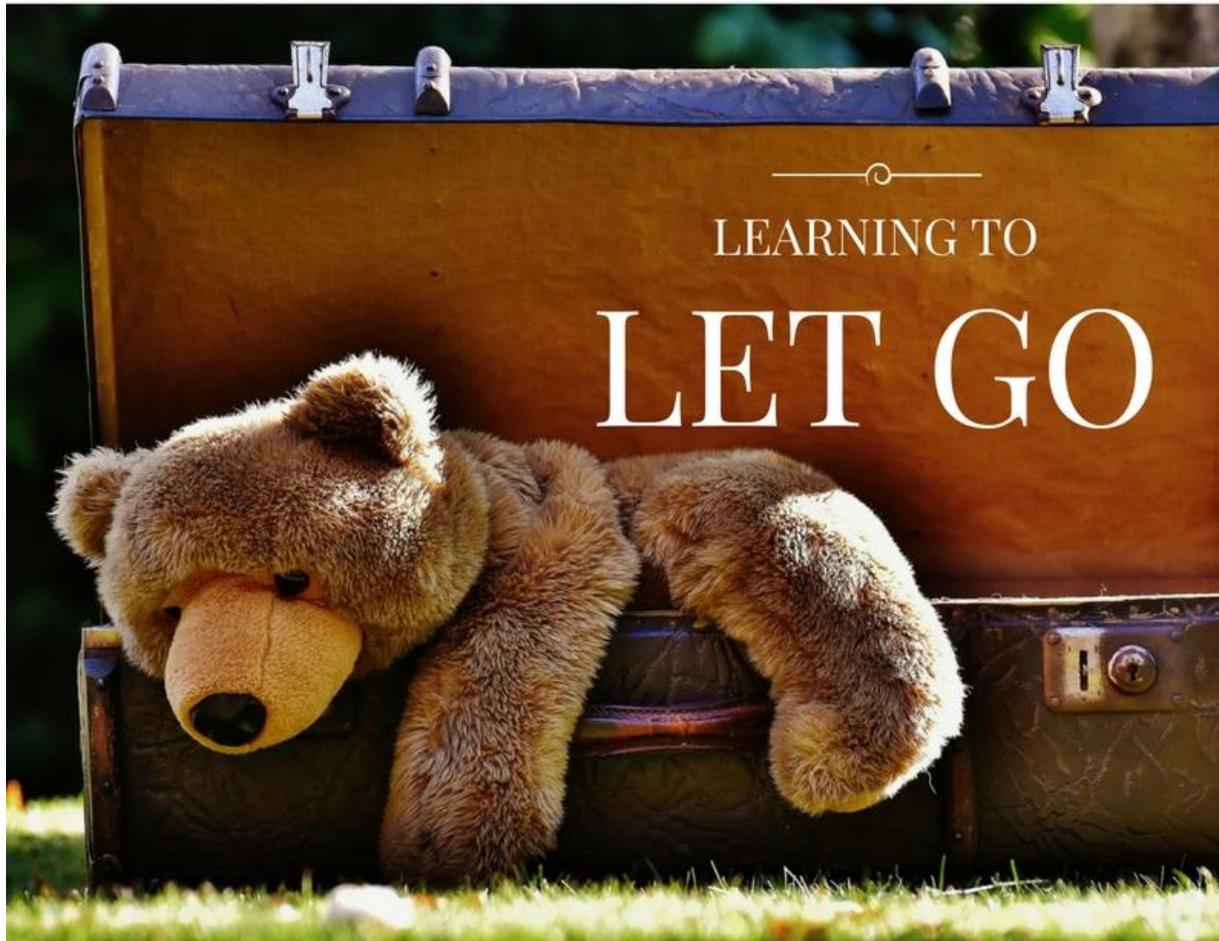


Special Report



LEARNING TO
LET GO

6 Surprising Hacks that Help Free You
From Emotionally Charged,
Sentimental Clutter

Cary David Richards

Learning to Let Go!

6 hacks that help free you from emotionally charged sentimental clutter

In the process of letting go you will lose many things from the past, but you will find yourself. It will be a permanent self, rooted in awareness and creativity. Once you have found this, you have found the world...

--Deepak Chopra

There are many facets and nuances of a cluttered life and many ways that the clutter problem can sneak up on you.

One of the biggest reasons many of us end up with an overstuffed life is the habit of keeping every nick knack and ticket stub that has any kind of memory or sentiment attached to it.

Plastic trophy's from little Jimmie's days as a soccer player, out of focus snap shots of some random Rhododendron bush from the trip to England ten years ago, A tattered menu from the restaurant where you had the first date with your spouse... Things we think at the moment are priceless but that after a period of time become dust collectors in the attic or never even noticed clutter on the top shelf of a book case...

It's almost unthinkable for some of us to consider getting rid of some of these items...yet many of us face that moment of truth when we realize that it's all just too much. We're being weighed down by the sheer volume of sentimental "Stuff" ...

(Note: Things are changing a bit as we rush headlong into a maturing digital age. Specifically, when it comes to snap shots and pictures. Most people these days are taking snap shots with their phones or other digital devices... So, the problem of stacks of random out of focus hard copy snap shots of your cousins, moms, Brother Ralph at a picnic is changing... It's becoming digital clutter on our phones, i-pads and computers... (We'll talk digital storage of your snap shots in a moment.)

Another somewhat hidden and un-talked about issue that is raising its ugly head with more and more frequency since us baby boomers have begun our inexorable slide into geezerdom...

Is the problem of what to do with all of Mom and Dad's stuff, which in many cases also includes Grandma and Grandpa's stuff that Mom and Dad inherited and have been keeping in the attic.

Here's the scenario...Mom and Dad have either passed or are in an assisted living facility and have moved out of the large house they inhabited for many years...and guess who gets to deal with all of their "Crap"

That would be YOU!

This is a special kind of clutter because much of it carries with it all sorts of emotional baggage. Getting rid of it can be a heart wrenching emotional nightmare...

If you're a Boomer like me, you have probably already encountered this problem. The question is, do you really want to store all that "Stuff", then add your "Stuff" to it and eventually burden *your* children with an ever growing pile of emotional "Baggage"?

I'm here to invite you to stop the insanity and deal with the heirloom, sentimental, emotional clutter in a rational, systematic way that preserves the family history and allows you to cherish the memories but reduces that pile of "Stuff" down to a manageable level...

The fundamental concept that you need to keep in mind here is that you need to attach the emotion to the memory and not the item of clutter.

I know that may sound like an easier thing to say than to do but with a little practice you should be able to get into the swing of things and pretty soon you'll be amazed at the clean, clear, uncluttered space that you live in...

One of the best ways to allow yourself to do this is to take a picture, or several pictures of the item... Then just let it go! Perhaps even go so far as to take a picture of the item while the family member or members it relates to hold it up or stand in front of it etc. Then digitally store the pic. (See #1 below)

Keep in mind if a loved one has recently passed or a child has recently flown the nest. It's a good idea to wait a few months (6 or more) before attempting to sort through their things.

Another road block that can get in the way of removing unwanted "Stuff" is the *"My sister gave that to me and she'd kill me if I got rid of it"* syndrome...

Here's the thing. Every situation is different of course but chances are very good that your sister doesn't even remember she gave the "Thing" to you. Or if she remembers, she probably couldn't care less if you got rid of it.

So, how do you solve this conundrum? Simple, just call her up and ask her. Saying, "You know that *"piece of clutter"* that you gave me two years ago? I'm thinning out my space and I wondered if you'd mind if I donated it to a good home?"

Again, chances are she doesn't even remember she gave it to you, or won't have a problem with donating it. If she does, worst case scenario is to go ahead and store it and drag it out whenever she comes over.

6 Hacks that Help Free You from Sentimental Clutter...

1) Photographs:

Think digital!

I had a big blue 50 gallon plastic storage box with a Tupperware type top where I stored my family photos.

I mean this thing was stuffed to the very rim with snapshots from as far back as the late 60's.

Now, some of these pictures were priceless!

Most however, were either random shots of people or places I didn't recognize or they were out of focus or just plain bad pictures.

It took me a couple of months of working a few hours a week on it but I eventually was able to cull out the really good heirloom type pics that I wanted to keep and I literally threw the rest in the garbage can.

This is a very hard thing to do for some people. Believe me, I get it...

The thing to do if you're having trouble is to start small and slow. Pick the two or three worst, out of focus, what the heck is that even a picture of? Type snap shots and throw them away. Give yourself a few days and then when you do another session work up to the ones of Uncle Ralph that you don't really care about anyway and throw those... Just be gentle with yourself, but firm as well, and get out of your comfort zone a little more each time...

Once you have the pics you really want to keep identified the next order of business is to digitize them in one way or another. This will not only allow you to be much more organized with your keepsake photos but it will preserve them indefinitely.

When you think about it, a musty attic or basement is not the optimum place to be storing your hard copy snap shots which after all, are made of paper and the older they get the more fragile and susceptible to damage they become. If you have a picture that is truly priceless to you, it should be preserved and stored (or displayed) in such a way as to protect it from the elements.

Most of your basic snap shots that have sentimental value are best stored digitally in some way.

Most major metropolitan areas these days have local companies that specialize in digitizing photos and will be able to accommodate you for around \$0.05 per photo.

Some people go so far as to make beautiful full color glossy photo books out of their snap shots. There are several companies online that will do this for you at varying price levels.

One of the better ones is called Blurb.com It's an easy to use interactive website that will create eye popping photo books at quite reasonable prices...

Bottom line is... Don't let your family snap shots rot away in the attic in some cardboard box or Tupperware container. Get them out, sort them and get the really good ones digitized..

Then...LET THE REST GO!

2) Kid Stuff

Our children mean the world to us. I'm sure you feel the same way. Family is the most important concept we have and preserving our memories of the special moments is a fundamental need for most people.

Having said that, to keep great memories alive doesn't necessarily mean you need to keep every one of Johnnie's third place, runner up t-ball tournament trophies...Or every one of the adorable stick man paintings Jill brings home from third grade.

Once again, taking a picture of these types of items and digitally storing them is way more efficient and usually just as good for reliving the precious memories they produce.

One

3) Get help if you need it.

We all have different approaches to dealing with emotional stress. Sometimes a good task master is needed to keep us on track and hold us accountable. Other times it's just nice to have another person around to bounce ideas off of, help make decisions or simply lend a shoulder to lean on. There are tons of local organization experts who, for a few will come in and help you put things in order. If it's simply moral support that's needed, I would recommend not having someone who is too close to the situation lend a hand. A person who is just as much of an emotional wreck as you are, or conversely has some sort of ax to grind can do way more harm than good in this type of situation.

4) Work in Short Intervals

In my book, I talk about two distinct ways of attacking a clutter problem. One is to plan and implement a major purge project, the other is to take it step by step and bite off smaller more chewable chunks that are more easily dealt with. No matter which way you chose to go, taking your time and working in shorter stints I believe works better when sorting through a large pile of sentimental items. This is especially true in an inheritance situation. Dealing with emotions and making tough decisions about what needs to stay or go. Or, who gets what, can be extremely exhausting. It's best when dealing with these type of items to do shorter more intense bursts and then come back another day when you are rested and ready for another round than to try and do it all at once.

5) Keep one of a set and remove the rest

Lots of times in an inheritance situation or with your pile of kids left overs there will be many of the same type of item. Your moms collection of miniature ceramic frogs for instance. Or your daughter's huge pile of school art work. It will preserve the memory and drastically reduce the clutter to pick out one or two of the best examples and remove the rest.

6) Give yourself permission

Sometimes it's as simple as giving yourself permission to do what you know you should do. Don't let societal or family pressures make you feel guilty. If something is truly a cherished keepsake item then keep it and store it properly or display it. If not, sell it, donate it or even just trash it with a clear conscience. If anyone in the family protests, tell them to get over to your place and pick it up quick because it'll be gone by Friday. (Or something similar)

There several things to remember when dealing with this and really any kind of clutter. They are:

- 1) YOU are not your "Stuff".
- 2) We are all more than our possessions, much more!
- 3) Holding onto things has a way of imprisoning us, Letting them go can be very freeing.
- 4) Things that may have sentimental attachment for us can possibly be of great use to someone else. (and we still get to keep the memory)

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if I can help you in any way.

Cary David Richards