

The Black Holes of Inner Space

Where to find the missing items in your home that refuse to expose their whereabouts.

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Have you been playing hide and seek with your stuff for your entire life? Not being able to find things when you need them is akin to serving a life sentence. Misplacing things automatically propels you into meaningless and directionless activity in search of the lost objects. You run from room to room, retracing your steps, peering under furniture, up-ending cushions, or tossing the contents of drawers, all to no avail. Eventually, you give up, resigned to the missing possession's departure from your life, forever wondering where it is hidden.

As professional organizers, specializing in downsizing and supportive relocation for older adults, we work with overwrought clients, who unable to end the cycle, continue to form search parties without results. In the course of de-cluttering we often recover documents, cash, mementos and treasures that have remained unseen for decades.

In our role as "household archaeologists" we encounter categories of items that regularly go astray. Our book, Good Riddance: Showing Clutter the Door identified the 100 belongings that are most responsible for cluttering homes. Similarly, there are objects that are more liable to disappear than others. If you are at the point where you would rather face a firing squad than track down another errant pair of reading glasses, then this guide may prove worthwhile.

The Black Holes of Inner Space

Black holes are places into which objects disappear and are not expected to be seen again. According to their definition, black holes possess a gravitational field so strong not even light can escape from their vicinity. We conjecture there are vulnerable "black hole" regions in your home. These domestic black holes lie in wait for a second's inattention to swallow one of your necessities or personal treasures. In essence they function as Venus Fly Traps for your stuff. . Knowing what the black holes are and their respective location will add an element of precision to your searching. You will know where to look, and what to avoid

1. Pockets

Searching in pockets is always a productive use of time, especially if you are taking a garment to the drycleaners or giving it away. Pockets are repositories for rubbish like gum wrappers, scratch and win cards that you did not win, and unspeakable things like used tissues. They are also the perfect hiding places for missing keys, money, cell phones, phone numbers, credit cards and snack-sized sources of nourishment. The problem is, you have lots of pockets. It may be a bit time-consuming, nevertheless you will locate a few golf tees, a single glove, or even the key to your storage locker.

2. Purses

Think about the contents of your handbag: wallet, keys, smokes, gum, tissues, cosmetics, checks, the mail, appointment cards, phone, sunglasses, book, pens, pad, water, analgesics. You know. The basics. When you are transferring this cargo from one handbag to another, there is bound to be residue. All of this mobility exerts a dispersed black-hole effect. Your spare change, unfilled prescriptions, birthday cards that never got mailed and the fob for your underground parking –all await you imprisoned in fifteen different purses.

3. Hangers

This one elicits an “aha” moment every time it occurs. You are looking hither and thither for a favourite camisole. After multiple checks through every closet, every dresser drawer, laundry hamper, bag for donation, the washing machine and the dryer, you are ready to give up and surrender. You figure, you will never wear it again. Then you have an epiphany. What would happen if you looked to see if you had hung more than one item on the same hanger? Within seconds, the cherished garment is revealed, exactly where you put it, before you covered it up with your bathrobe.

4. Luggage

Some people unpack the minute they return from a trip. Others take their time. Several months after your homecoming you find yourself madly rummaging around looking for the mate to your tennis shoe. The usual haunts turn up nothing. You start browsing for a replacement pair. You wrack your brain for some clue. Then it hits you. You haul out the suitcase, listening for sounds of life in its capacious hollow space. Unzip it. There, in one of those contoured compartments lies your abandoned shoe.

5. Back of the Cupboard

Kitchens are usually characterized by a behind-closed-doors approach to storage. For those who endure perpetual losing streaks, closed doors represent another barrier to easy retrieval. Cupboards that can only be accessed by lying face down on the floor and require a long handled implement to probe their inner reaches constitute black holes. Waffle irons, the extra blades for the food processor, glass milk bottles, party goods and gigantic serving platters are the types of things that get trapped in these cabinets. Anyway, they are worth looking into, but only if your knees can handle it.

6. Under the Bed

Many people store things under their beds, especially if they are apartment dwellers. But, because they are out of sight, items placed under the bed, either by design or happenstance, are rarely remembered. The space under the bed is haven for slippers, undergarments, pet toys, half-finished novels, single earrings, doll clothes and pillow cases, sharing space with the storage containers.

7. Couches and Chairs

A number of items tend to fall between the cracks, completely un-noticed. Along with the remote controls slip pens, coins, eyeglass cleaning implements, matches, tins of mints, pocket combs and books of stamps, a mere five inches of padded springs separating them from their owner. You can check these black holes in your upholstered furniture as a matter of course, or simply wait for a spring cleaning marathon, when they will be discovered during a bout of power vacuuming.

8. The Wrong File

There is probably nothing more soul-destroying than trying to locate missing documents. Some documents need to be kept our entire lifetimes and others of little or no consequence, like old homework. Most people construct filing systems to help them manage paper. Filing cabinets carry black hole status for a couple of reasons. First is simply, out of sight out of mind. Another file-related issue is cramming. Our clients tend to stuff so much into a file drawer it becomes unusable. Plus there is human error factor. Filing documents in a neighbouring folder is a fairly common occurrence.