



House Resolution #1: Easy De-Cluttering for 2013

by

Susan Borax, Good Riddance Professional Organizing Solutions

As one year dissolves into another, many optimistic individuals seize the occasion to right the wrongs of the past. Making resolutions for the New Year provides the impetus to tackle difficult hurdles like losing weight, quitting smoking and getting more exercise. Resolutions are a tool for engaging a time-worn enemy – procrastination; particularly when it comes to getting rid of old stuff.

Yet, history tells us that the good intentions tend to peter out before month's end. Perhaps the goal itself is too ambitious or significantly vague for the desired result to materialize. Any change in behaviour requires an accompanying roadmap identifying small milestones that can be acknowledged and celebrated along the way.

Professional downsizers work year round to assist people whose attachment to possessions leans definitively toward the “keep” as opposed to the “release” side of the equation. We try to instil an element of balance in our clients' relationship with their things, helping them to distinguish between the meaningful and purposeful from the inconsequential and burdensome. After 8 years of de-cluttering, we have identified 9 categories of what we describe as CRUD (completely ridiculous useless debris). CRUD is basically stuff you need like a hole in the head. These are items that impinge on your comfort and living area and render your storage space unworkable. If you limit your January purging to items belonging to the categories we describe below, you are destined for success. Your days as full-time caretaker for lots of neglected belongings are numbered.

1. **CRUD that is too good to throw away.** Many examples immediately come to mind –plastic food containers, free samples, glass crème brulee ramekins from Costco, prestige shopping bags and memo pads. The concept here is that these often enter the home surreptitiously, usually as packaging for something else. These items are kept simply because they are durable, even if you have no purpose for them.
2. **CRUD Beyond Repair.** This is highly detectable CRUD and can live in any room of the house. This category includes any garments left in a laundry basket labelled “mending” for more than five years, appliances no longer supported by the manufacturer for which no parts can be located, or an old couch in such bad condition even the dog won't lay on it.
3. **Collectable CRUD.** Collections consume a lot of interior real estate. They usurp almost every horizontal surface. They control a good deal of storage space in cabinets, closets and basements too. Collections can be high-maintenance. Whether it is dusting and cleaning or simply keeping track of all of the components, owning a large number of anything takes up a chunk of time. Consider streamlining to your favourites.

4. **Invisible CRUD.** There are a few hideouts in your home that allow belongings to live while remaining totally unnoticed by any of the inhabitants. These objects hibernate on the top shelves of the kitchen cupboard, in the far reaches of crawl spaces or in the bottom box in a stack that extends to the full height of your storage locker. Eradicating members of this CRUD category is a bit more arduous. You are looking for something you can't see and don't remember anyway.
5. **Fear-induced CRUD.** Here is a list of what people are most afraid to throw or give away.
 - *Paperwork, of all stripes! This encompasses everything from receipts, bank and utility statements, records from lawsuits settled decades ago, pay stubs, and business cards to centuries of tax returns. Much of this stems from a basic distrust of digital information. Loads of people save boxes too, worried that if something breaks it won't be repaired unless returned in the original packaging.*
 - *Nuts, screws and washers that appear out of nowhere. The person has no idea what they belong to but holds on to them indefinitely, perennially dreading the moment when the furnace explodes or the air-conditioning conks out.*
 - *Tags on mattresses that threaten prosecution if removed.*
6. **CRUD you are saving for others.** If you are old enough to have children who have left the nest to strike out on their own then you already know that they regard your home as the economical alternative to renting a self-storage unit. If you merely to call you sons and daughters to ask them to take possession of their cast-off belongings, you might find that 80% of what they have left is of no importance to them. Even heirlooms and high-quality items you have been salting away for them may be viewed more as a burden than a gift.
7. **CRUD that is too hard to find homes for.** A lot of what we define as CRUD is circumstantial. When an item serves its purpose, functional or aesthetic, it is considered valuable. The moment you either tire of it or something goes wrong with it, it becomes an encumbrance, especially when nobody else wants it. When you have to think about paying someone to come and take and oversized appliance or musical instrument to recycling, the urge to purge atrophies. People opt out of the process when the obstacles seem insurmountable.
8. **Sentimental CRUD.** This is huge. We have learned that people need touchstones to help them hold on to their memories. If they don't retain the photos, keepsakes, kitchen tools, linens, or handcrafted items from people gone from their lives, they believe they will forget those people or the period of their lives from which those reminders emanated. There is a logical limit as to how much can be saved. It is your home, not a museum.
9. **CRUD you might need someday.** If you are a crafter, tinkerer or hobbyist, almost anything can earn the status of being kept for the future. Whether it is reading matter that is being stockpiled for retirement years, random building materials in search of a project or "wishful thinking" clothes you may fit into again, the same criteria applies. Evaluating this kind of stuff requires both sobriety and the assistance of someone with a more objective viewpoint.