

Determine What Started the Accumulation

Imagine I am sitting with you now. Choose a space for us to look at first and consider:

1. What makes up the accumulation?
2. What influenced you to place each of these items and leave them where they are? (The reasons may be different for different types of things.)
3. What was the original plan for this area?
4. What were the ideas, needs, or vision behind that plan?
5. What events or choices prompted you to alter the plan?
 - For now, let's accept that temporarily, these things are where they are. Did you begin to lose focus about the plan? If so, when?
 - Did something happen during the time frame when the buildup began?
 - Did you start to put the plan in place and encounter barriers to moving forward?
 - If so, what were/are those barriers?
 - When you look at the piles, do you see a collection of anything (for example, documents, unopened mail, bills, and receipts) with common dates? Are these dates associated with anything that happened at that time?
 - Was there some other reason that prompted you to change or abandon your plan?
 - Are you better at starting multiple things rather than finishing them?
6. When was the last time you were able to assign *permanent places* for things?
7. Where would these things normally be kept and used?

If you can't figure out where you would normally keep an item, review "Decide the Permanent Place for Each Keep Item" for determining each item's permanent place.

What is causing the accumulation to be maintained?

Generally, something prompted your original plan for the area to be changed. You might have valid reasons for the change in plan and the clutter still being maintained.

The fundamental question is "What is maintaining this particular cluttered environment?"

What stops you from resolving the accumulation?

As you look at this space, the next question you must ask yourself is "What keeps me from resolving this situation?" Do your thoughts, fears, beliefs, or lifestyle habits prevent you from resolving the situation? Are you so overwhelmed by your clutter that you cannot move forward to uncluttered? Do you find making decisions to be more difficult than you can manage at the moment?

It is OK if you have to come back to this section more than once. These questions are like peeling an onion. Undoubtedly, there are multiple layers to progress.

In the meantime, let's move on with what you know now. Let's consider how to approach this situation effectively at this point.

My guidelines are to:

- ✓ respect the attachment you feel;
- ✓ respect the relationship you have with your things, and therefore your preferences; and
- ✓ respect yourself by working at your pace.

To do this effectively, you need to understand:

- ✓ what you actually see when you look at an item;
- ✓ how you feel and what you say to yourself when you look at it; and
- ✓ what your relationship is to it and your need for it.