

When Simplifying Isn't So Simple

"Where do I start?" When a project is overwhelming we *don't*. Start, that is.

Downsizing, or simplifying our home is daunting enough when we have the luxury of time. But when there's a deadline—say, an upcoming move—it can be darn right paralyzing. It goes without saying that the older we are, the more possessions we've accumulated.

As I support people through the downsizing process, I'm keenly aware of the emotional tugs that come while sorting through treasured belongings. I feel privileged to be present on days that a client needs to walk down memory lane. Since each project is as unique as the individual, there's no cookie-cutter plan.

For one woman in her 70's, the motivation to simplify was to save her children from doing it after she's passed on. She had done just that, a couple of weeks after her mother's funeral, and the memories were vivid. From boxes of who-knows-what in the attic to furniture in the basement, it was a huge job.

Nearly every day, she was in tears with changing emotions—from nostalgia and tenderness, to sadness, to sheer exhaustion. She vowed to make it easier for her own family by starting the process herself, little by little.

A recent client, a woman in her 90's, found it hard to part with her books, but was more decisive when sorting through collectibles that lined her shelves. She kept those gifted to her by her husband or dearest friends, while many others went into the "donation" box. Her stamina was impressive; she truly enjoyed having someone with whom to share this purposeful task.

I advise keeping only what will be used or displayed. Treasures can't be treasured in a box under the eaves. One man's fondest memories of his Italian grandmother are tangible. Within easy reach in his kitchen are two items she used often: a handled salt shaker with dented top, and a small brass hammer, well-worn from smashing raw olives.

During the process of downsizing, I also make note of potential safety concerns in the home, from tripping over rugs to the absence of grab bars in the bathroom. I point these out, and together we can improve the situation. Once the project is complete, I refer to other professionals for the selling, donation, and liquidation of items.

Are you ready to clear up and unclutter your home? Consider the following tips:

Focus on just one room at a time, starting with the master bedroom. Think about the main function of the room, and form a vision of that space as you'd like it to be. Take two boxes or bags—one for trash, and the other to donate or give to family or friends. Include books, seldom-worn clothes, and anything not directly related to the main purpose of a bedroom: relaxation. Move out the desk, that uncomfortable chair, or the exercise equipment you never use. The results will motivate you to repeat the process throughout your home.

If you encounter emotional pressure while deciding on furniture and large pieces, place a post-it on all the items about which you're undecided. Invite your kids or friends over and let them choose from the marked furniture. Insist that they take it with them now, *not later*. Maybe your daughter has always hoped for the rocking chair but was too polite to ask. If everyone passes right by the china cabinet without a second look, you know that item is one you can sell or donate.

Finally, if your project bogs down, consider involving someone who's not emotionally attached to every little object in your home--an impartial third party.

© Dianne Fazio 2012

*Dianne Fazio is a Certified Senior Advisor and owner of **A NEW DAY Senior Options**. She supports aging adults and their families through health, financial, and social transitions, as well as home downsizing and organizing for people of all ages.*

Dianne has over 12 years' professional experience with elder issues, including advanced training in dementia care.

Visit her website www.ANewDayMaine.com, and contact Dianne for a free consultation: dfazio@maine.rr.com or (207) 712-0946