

Milwaukee/NARI Encourages Homeowners to Start Year by Clearing Out Clutter

By Milwaukee/NARI Home Improvement Council

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Space in a home can be functional or dysfunctional, depending on how well it's organized.

According to members of the Milwaukee/NARI Home Improvement Council, Inc., the area's leading home improvement and remodeling industry resource for more than 47 years, when homeowners plan ways to clear out the clutter in their home, they could benefit by taking baby steps.

The gradual approach to organizing is the most productive, according to Brenden McDaniel, owner of Action Organizing Services LLC of Milwaukee. McDaniel doesn't believe in purging a room of all contents, then starting over. He sees the best progress when the work is done in small doses. "Discipline yourself to work on it an hour or two a week," he says.

When homeowners are inconvenienced by possessions and the space they require, and when the items cannot be seen, reached or used, then pruning is needed. "When people value their stored stuff more than they value their time to navigate their house, there is trouble," McDaniel says. Renting storage units simply relocates the problem and can create a burden for other family members, he adds.

McDaniel says most disheveled homes begin with explainable human behavior. Procrastination and perfectionism are frequent causes of abodes gone bad, he believes, with health problems also a factor. Some people hoard possessions for various reasons.

"Be patient as people sort out their stuff. Impatience can cause stress and stress is probably what caused the problem in the first place. Don't look impatient or they might give up," he adds. "Grab a boombox, listen to music, and make it fun."

Defining the purpose of a space can help determine what gets tossed and what belongs in the space. McDaniel recommends that homeowners stop and think about the function of the family room, screened-in porch, so-called "junk" drawer, or kitchen pantry.

Categorizing is key. McDaniel organizes by sorting items into three categories according to how often they are seen and used; he labels them "best friends, acquaintances, and strangers." His advice: "Keep best friends to a minimum." Items marked "strangers" are clearly not used every day, and "acquaintances" probably aren't, either.

Discarding items is a hard step for many homeowners. McDaniel says to start with easy decisions about unused appliances and recycling materials that have accumulated. He says to frame questions to get results. "Can I get rid of any pillows?" is too general. Instead, ask: "Which pillows can I get rid of?"

McDaniel advises homeowners to make a decision to let go, and then remove the items promptly. "Don't fall into the trap of thinking 'I can use it someday,'" he says. "If it's not beautiful or useful right now, why keep it?"

Organizing an emptier room can make or break the functionality of the space. Michael Aliota, Certified Remodeler and vice president of Aliota Bros. Contracting, Inc. in New Berlin, notes that spatial utilization is a common problem in houses. "Keep in mind how best to utilize the space you have," he says. "Keep same-size items together." One rule of thumb is to group larger items and store them lower while smaller items are grouped higher on a shelf.

Aliota says that home-organizing equipment, similar to all other furnishings, can be chosen to fit a specific budget. Options range from fancy to purely functional. "If you're on a tight budget and don't have a lot of time, simple plywood or melamine shelving with a 2 x 4 framing might be the answer," he says.

Finally, reward the new organized behavior, perhaps by going out to dinner or taking before-and-after photos. Connect the project with something positive and even perfectionists can find satisfaction. Then move on to the next room and do it all over again.