

Not using an item? It's time to lose it

What would you do if you actually had to use — or at least enjoy — everything you own?

Truth be told, most of us never would live long enough to accomplish such an overwhelming task. Instead, we pack it, stack it and pile it away — even pay rent to store

it — and keep right on accumulating, acquiring and attaining even more. More doesn't add to our joy the way we thought it

would. More stuff only dilutes the quality of our lives.

Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, "discovered" the 80/20 principle in 1897 when he observed that 80% of the land in England (and every country he subsequently studied) was owned by 20% of the population. Pareto's theory of predictable imbalance has since been proven widely and applied to almost every aspect of modern life, including the things we own.

It's difficult to fend off that sick feeling when you calculate clutter's actual cost in hard-earned cash. Of course, there's that original price tag. But then there's the cost to own it.

One woman who finally had it with all her clutter loaded it up (it filled two pickup trucks) and headed for the flea market. Excited that she could possibly net \$800 to \$1,000 for one weekend of selling, she quickly changed her attitude when she realized her prices were about one-tenth of the price she paid.

Her mind went to the time she'd spent earning the money to buy all the stuff, the time spent shopping, lugging it all home then storing it until moving day. She figured even if she made \$1,000 on this effort that meant she had spent at least \$10,000 (probably more) purchasing it. That day, she vowed to never buy anything again unless it was absolutely necessary.

Ask yourself a series of questions to determine what stays and what goes.

■ Does it work? So much of the clutter in our homes is made up of broken things we plan to fix someday and clothes that don't fit anymore but we hope they might someday.

■ Do I really need it? The answer will be clear as you imagine the impact of this item disappearing.

■ Do I enjoy it? If this item brings beauty and joy to your life, it is not clutter. Sentimental belongings should be treated with great care and respect — not left in the attic.

■ Am I using it now? If it doesn't fall into the 20% of things you use on a regular basis, it is suspect.

Once you've earmarked the stuff that needs to go, move it out. Sell it, give it away or throw it out. Of course, one of the best solutions for "good stuff" is to give it to someone who really wants or needs it.

Decluttering will calm your spirit, clear your mind and increase your ability to enjoy your current situation, your family and relationships — your life.

► Write to Mary Hunt at P.O. Box 2135, Paramount, CA 90723 or cheapskate@unitedmedia.com.



MARY HUNT