

Marie Kondo on the Joy of Tidying Up

Simplicity Invites Happiness into Our Lives

by April Thompson

Japanese organizing consultant Marie Kondo helps us discover happiness through tidiness. Already perusing home and lifestyle magazines by age 5, she spent her childhood “tidying” up her surroundings rather than playing with toys.

The organizing system Kondo went on to develop, the KonMari method, defies most long-held rules of organizing, such as installing clever storage solutions to accommodate stuff or decluttering one area at a time. Her *New York Times* bestseller, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, has been published in 30 countries, demonstrating that her methods speak to universal desires, including a hunger for order and simplicity. She’s now released a companion book, *Spark Joy: An Illustrated Master Class on the Art of Organizing and Tidying Up*.

Kondo’s principles, including vertically stacking clothing and using special folding methods for socks, can seem quirky, yet her approach gets results. Kondo claims a nearly zero percent “clutter relapse” rate among clients because they’ve become surrounded only by things they love.

How can we begin to get and stay organized?

It’s not about a set of rules, but acquiring the right mindset for becoming a tidy person. Think in concrete terms, so



photo by Ichigo Natsumo

that you can picture what it would be like to live in a clutter-free space. Start by identifying your bigger goal. Ask yourself why you want this, repeating the question to get to the root of the answer. As you explore the reasons behind your ideal lifestyle, you’ll realize that the ultimate reason is to be happy. Then you are ready to begin.

I recommend cleaning out and organizing your entire space in one go-around. When completed, the change is so profound that it inspires a strong aversion to your previously cluttered state. The key is to make the change so sudden that you experience a complete change of heart. By discarding the easy things first, you can gradually hone your decision-making skills, including knowing who else can use what you don’t need. I recommend starting with clothes, then move to books, documents, miscellaneous items and finally anything with sentimental value.

Is it important to touch every single object in the decision process?

At one point in my life, I was virtually a “disposal unit”, constantly on the lookout for superfluous things. One day, I realized that I had been so focused on what to discard that I had forgotten to cherish the things I loved. Through this experience, I concluded that the best way to choose what to

keep is to actually hold each item. As you do, ask yourself, “Does this spark joy?” When you touch something, your body reacts, and its response to each item is different.

The process of assessing how you feel about the things you own—identifying those that have fulfilled their purpose, expressing your gratitude and bidding them farewell and good wishes for their onward journey—is a rite of passage to a new life.

Must keepsakes be included?

Mementoes are reminders of a time that gave us joy, yet truly precious memories will never vanish, even if you discard the associated objects. By handling each sentimental item, you process your past. The space we live in should be for the person we are becoming now, not for the person we were in the past.

What do you recommend for organizing what remains after a purge?

The secret to maintaining an uncluttered room is to pursue simplicity in storage, so that you can see at a glance what you have. My storage rules are simple: Store all items of the same type in one place and don’t scatter storage space.

How does this process change us and our relationship to things?

Through it, you identify both what you love and need in your home and in your life. People have told me that decluttering has helped them achieve lifelong dreams, such as launching their own business; in other cases, it has helped them let go of negative attachments and unhappy relationships.

Despite a drastic reduction in belongings, no one has ever regretted it, even those that ended up with a fifth of their earlier possessions. It’s a continuing strong reminder that they have been living all this time with things they didn’t need.

Connect with freelance writer April Thompson, of Washington, D.C., at AprilWrites.com.