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It's Not Clutter, It's Objets d'Art

MAGGIE MEGENBIR

It's garage sale season, once again, so get out your maps and your GPS. Check *Used Victoria* ads, make your lists and go!! So many treasures, so little time. Re-purpose, re-use, and save money! I'm all for it. All for it, that is, until Ron comes home with a third pair of vintage, leather goalie pads (he said it was only the second pair but I beg to differ).

Here's the thing with Ron. He likes to collect. He likes to collect lots of things. His thinking is "if one is good, then three or more must be better". This goes for old leather jackets, wood or brass saguaro cacti, and let's not forget the resin skull collection. You can see how this might be a problem for someone like me who likes to de-clutter. What to do, what to do? Rant and rave? Tried it. Get rid of things behind his back? Wouldn't dare. Nag and cajole? Been there, done that.

So here's the challenge. How do we co-habit with significant others who have different ideas about being organized and about what constitutes clutter? Well I decided to talk to a number of people to find out what they do. Here's what they said:

- "I have my own room/office and he has his, so the space that belongs to that other person is somewhat sacred and off-limits to the other....we need to be respectful of their choices for that space and whatever organization they impose is theirs". "So unless [his room] starts to be a health hazard....." Deborah
- "We're in agreement with how things are in the rooms where we spend the majority of our time...the main rooms work really well for us". Leslie
- "Without any discussion, we limit our paper and file clutter to the office." Laura
- "We have some common understanding about what a particular space has been created for.... on-going dialogue about use of the space and if changes are to be made it has to be negotiated." Deborah
- "We approach things from a different angle (literally)...I organize things for a right-handed person and he does it for a left-handed person." "Ultimately the one who's doing a chore the most is the one who decides how [the space] is organized, set-up and [things] put away." Cathy

What about when it's not working so well?

- "I spend half my life turning off light switches, closing drawers, picking up...." Dave
- "You pick your fights...I don't want to be a nag....I'll pick [a time] when I think I'm going to get the right response. I can't let the tension build because if I do it will all come out wrong...I'll just let him have it!" Cathy
- "He starts one project and finishes it. I'll have several projects going at once and may leave the mess out for a couple of days. He will come around behind me and clean up before I'm finished." Jeanette
- "Usually I just let you do what you want with your stuff and I do what I want with mine....the only time I find it disruptive is when your clothes are all over the bed and I want to go to sleep." Ron (That could be me he's talking about.)
- "I put [her mess] away." "Do you ever freak out about it?, I quip. "I might have at one time but it didn't work anyway." Dennis

A friend and I joked about putting labels on drawers and kitchen cupboards identifying where things should be put away. But as she said:

- "I would do it but I know it wouldn't work." Yvonne

When it comes to holding on versus letting go:

- "I get rid of things too soon. If I don't use it or need it I don't want to see it. And I don't want to clutter up another area with it....it can backfire because if I get rid of things in haste I may have to replace it....Murphy's Law!" Cathy
- "He is allowed to pile up the "might-be-useful-one-day" things in the small outside storage room and I no longer get upset about all the gardening type stuff lined up alongside the house as there is no where else to put it!" Laura
- "If we have room in the crawl space he will put things there. He has a store of items and if someone needs something....like a chair....he goes to the crawl space and gets it." Cathy

And speaking of all those things in the crawl space:

- "The stuff is gone from your life but it's not gone....it's like it's in purgatory." Dave

By the way, Ron did eventually free his goalie pads from purgatory and send them on to a better place.

So there you have it! What can we glean from all of this?

1. Find some common ground where you can agree on how certain rooms look and function.
2. Allow room for each other's clutter and organizing style somewhere in the house.
3. Sometimes you just have to pick it up and put it away for your own sanity and the sake of the relationship.
4. Nagging doesn't seem to work (too bad because I was really hoping to fall back on this).

Laura summed it all up rather nicely....."tolerance is the right word for how we have coped." And if nothing else is working as you grapple with the irritation of another's clutter, try changing your perspective. After all....."It's not clutter, it's objet d'art." Leslie

Many thanks to all the contributors to this article.

Maggie Megenbir is the founder of Calm, Cool & Uncluttered, Organizing Services and a member of the Professional Organizers in Canada