

THE PURSUIT OF MINIMALISM

(And Why We Can't Let Go of Our Things)

BY Nicole Pyles



Editor's note: Minimalism, downsizing, decluttering...whatever you want to call it, it's a very hot topic these days. We asked one of our 44691 writers to take a look at this popular phenomenon and, in particular, to go behind the scenes and try to explore some of the psychological aspects of the "stuff" of our lives.

Does having less stuff make you happy? It all depends on whom you ask. Joshua Becker, blogger at BecomingMinimalist.com and author of several books including his latest, *The Minimalist Home* sure thinks so. Before becoming a minimalist about 10 years ago, Becker realized that his stuff wasn't making him happy anymore. In fact, it was doing the opposite: It was distracting him. "There is a misconception that minimalism is about sacrifice and living a barren lifestyle," Becker says. "[But it actually] frees you up to pursue happiness."

With popular shows such as the Netflix hit *Tidying Up* with Marie Kondo, many Americans are at least obsessed with watching people organize and get rid of their things. However, the 38-billion-dollar self-storage industry suggests that we may like our stuff out of sight, but we're not ready to get rid of stuff completely.

Becker's own journey into minimalism began quite by accident, as part of a process that perhaps most of us can identify with. It was Memorial Day Weekend and Becker was engaging in a time-honored American tradition: cleaning/organizing the garage at his family's home. After watching him struggle with all the family's "stuff" a neighbor simply commented, "Maybe you don't need to own all that stuff." This simple yet powerful observation set Becker on a path of self-examination which has now seen him write extensively on the subject and serve as a mentor to others who want to follow his family's path. >>>



OUR ATTACHMENT MAY BE A BIT COMPLICATED.

So, why are we so connected to what we own?

While the answers are complicated and vary with each person, one suggestion is that we are emotionally attached to our things. Dr. Amy Przeworski, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychological Science at Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University, who also is part of the Hoarding Connection of Cuyahoga County, suggests that individuals who engage in hoarding, "often report a strong connection to their possessions. For example, an individual who keeps greeting cards because the cards are a way of connecting to the person who gave them the card. In some cases, the individual will say that throwing out the card would be the same as throwing out the person who gave the card to them."

While this experience is a common one among individuals (and not all of us are hoarder) it provides a little bit of insight into why we can be so attached to our things. Other reasons for not letting go include the fact that our stuff may evoke a specific memory (like that favorite toy from childhood), or the object might represent a promise you mean to keep (like that desk you intend to refurbish). Or, the process of buying or otherwise getting the object may evoke a sense of comfort or even control when we otherwise may not have control in our lives (shopping therapy anyone?).

Emotional or sentimental attachment probably is the leading reason people give when addressing the inability to let go of items. But we have to ask ourselves: Does living a life chocked full of boxes, storage totes and basement, garages and storage spaces filled to the brim truly give us joy? I think we all can see the answer is a resounding "no."

Sometimes tough choices have to be made, but numerous experts suggest that one way to deal with this is to take one particular item that has special meaning—be it of a person or event—and display it in your home. Then, make the difficult but necessary decision to part with everything else that formerly was stored away—and in the way. Just because you remove something from your living space doesn't mean you are forgetting about either a child who has grown up and moved away or a loved one who has passed on. It simply means you've chosen to remember them in a different way than keeping every single thing that reminds you of them.

GET TO KNOW YOURSELF TO GET TO KNOW YOUR STUFF.

All this doesn't necessarily mean it's bad to hang onto things, but if you are interested in having less stuff in your life or participating in a more minimalist lifestyle, it's time to really think about what you want to hang onto.

Marcia Sloman, a professional organizer for 25 years, helps people let go of their stuff by helping them learn more about themselves. "I believe it's important to learn about yourself because your own behavior guides decisions you make," Sloman says. "So when you learn what your life's priorities are, you will know what's important for you to keep or not keep. Learning what overwhelms you will give you an idea of what areas you need guidance. Knowing why you might procrastinate may motivate you and prevent you from putting off important tasks. Using our strengths and weaknesses can make us very productive."

This is exactly the type of approach Becker suggests. His priority was to spend more time with family, entertain friends and invite people over. So, he kept the things that helped him do that and got rid of the things that inhibited him. Another approach Becker suggests is doing a trial run and experiment with less, such as taking out half of what is hanging in your closet, and put it in storage for a month.

The process of moving also can be a powerful tool to "live more with less." Once they reach adulthood the average American will move nine to 11 times. Other than making decisions when packing, a simple method to determining what you really need is unpacking a little bit at a time. That is, you only unpack boxes as you find the need for those particular items. A year or two down the road boxes that haven't been unpacked are very strong candidates for a garage sale, thrift store or charity donation.

GUILLAUME TECHER BY UNSPLASH





“WHEN YOU LEARN WHAT YOUR LIFE’S PRIORITIES ARE, YOU WILL KNOW WHAT’S IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO KEEP OR NOT KEEP.”

— MARCIA SLOMAN

BE THE CONSUMER YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD.

In our consumer-driven society, it is easy to be tempted by The Bargain, to go shopping to alleviate stress, or to get the latest and greatest item to keep up with trends (or neighbors). However, in order to pursue a minimalist lifestyle and to truly embrace this change, it’s also important stop buying more things. This may be difficult in today’s society, but as Joshua Becker put it, “It’s an intentional way to live.”

One way to change is to stop buying the things that don’t align with your priorities. If you engage in some form of shopping therapy, consider the approach Dr. Przeworski uses with her clients. “We may have a client go to a store where they often find bargains and we will have them practice leaving the store without having bought anything. This will cause them distress, but again, this distress will lessen over time if they continue to practice not acquiring objects even when they are faced with desirable items.”

Admittedly, a minimalist lifestyle may be more difficult for those with children. However, it is certainly not impossible: Becker was able to do so with his family. He remarked, “[Becoming a minimalist] is more difficult with kids, but it’s also more important, because kids are watching you and learning from you.”

RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO FILL ALL YOUR EMPTY SPACE.

Once you’re on the journey to becoming a minimalist, you’ll soon find more and more space where there once was stuff—and that can be a challenge if you’re not used to it. If all that empty space is leaving you a bit anxious, consider the 2011 Ted Talk titled, “Less stuff, more happiness.” Writer and designer Graham Hill, founder of the websites TreeHugger.com and “Life Edited,” lives in a 420-square-foot apartment. While it may not be your life goal to live in such a small space, Hill points out that in today’s society “we’ve got triple the space (of previous generations), but we’ve become such good shoppers that we need even more space. So where does this lead? Lots of credit card debt, huge environmental footprints, and perhaps not coincidentally, our happiness levels have flat-lined over the same 50 years.” He continued, “less stuff and less space are going to equal a smaller footprint. It’s actually a great way to save yourself some money. And it’s going to give you a little more ease in your life.”

Perhaps not coincidentally, there does appear to be at least an anecdotal connection between minimalism, “stuff” and money. As Becker puts it, “Owning less did not provide us with more money (except for the items we sold), but it did provide us with more opportunity for our money. Once we became attracted to living with less and the hold of consumerism on our checkbook was broken, our money could be used for more valuable purposes than the clearance rack at the local department store.”

>>>



While the idea of “minimalist living” may conjure up austere images of ultra-modern/contemporary living spaces, the fact is that millions of Americans are embracing the simple notion of “less is more.” You don’t have to have a Frank Lloyd Wright home, or own lots of Mid-Century Modern furniture to begin your pursuit of minimalism or decluttering.

BEGINNING THE JOURNEY

If you’re taking those beginning steps to leading a life with fewer possessions, it’s important to resist the urge to re-fill the spaces as you are able to open them up. Open spaces don’t mean a lack of possessions, they mean you’ve purposely made a conscious choice to put nothing in that space—and that’s OK.

Minimalist Kyle Quilici of the blog NewMinimalism.com recommends “filling storage spaces to only 50% of their actual capacity—think your closet, your utensil drawer, your entry closet. By doing so, you leave space to see what you have, can easily access what is there and can easily put things away when you are finished with them. I think the movement towards tiny living, and multi-unit, dense living is a nod toward minimalism. We realize that we don’t need a ton of space to live a fulfilling life, and oftentimes a big home means more time spent towards managing just that. There has to be balance.”

So, if you are ready to take on the challenge of becoming a minimalist, whether it’s because you just want less stuff, you want to help the environment, or you want to fight against the consumerist nature of our society, it’s time to truly take a look at what’s holding you back. Can minimalism make you happy? Maybe it can help, but it isn’t a “one size fits all” lifestyle and it isn’t a cold turkey type of journey. At least, it doesn’t have to be. Consider the advice of the experts, and maybe one day, you can finally learn to let go.

Writer Nicole Pyers hails from Portland Oregon and wrote this article exclusively for 44691.

“A MINIMALIST
LIFESTYLE...[IS]
ABOUT CLEARING
THE CLUTTER FROM
YOUR LIFE AND
ADJUSTING YOUR
MINDSET SO YOU
CAN LIVE WITH
MORE PURPOSE
AND PEACE.”

—MAKESPACE.COM/BLOG/POSTS/MINIMALIST-LIVING-TIPS/



They're calling it the "Marie Kondo effect." Thrift stores nationwide are reporting that the immense popularity of Japan native Kondo's Netflix show is filling their shelves. It started with her book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, which led to the Netflix show. And while many people choose donating their items to thrift stores, there are other ways to re-home items you've decided you can live without.

The most obvious choice for many people is to hold a garage sale, and that can be effective, as well as provide a little extra cash for your efforts. But if haggling over your possessions with strangers isn't your idea of a fun Saturday, consider making a (tax-deductible) donation of your items.

For 44691 readers, several obvious choices top the list:

The Salvation Army

437 South Market Street
Wooster, Ohio 44691
neo.salvationarmy.org

The Salvation Army accepts furniture, household items, toys and clothing. In some areas, pick up may be available. Call 330-264-4704 or 800-SA-TRUCK (728-7825)

OneEighty

one-eighty.org
330-264-8498

The name is a result of the rebranding of organizations that includes STEPS and Every Woman's House. With a two-county reach, OneEighty helps people in substance abuse recovery and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. In addition to in-kind donations of money and new items (such as diapers and hygiene-related consumables) OneEighty also accepts donations of some furniture items that are provided to individuals who are transitioning back into their own housing.

People To People ministries

454 E Bowman St
Wooster, OH 44691
<https://ptpm.net>

With a long history of serving people in need, People To People offers a wide range of assistance, much of it for people in crisis situations. They accept clothing, toys and household items. If you have more than a few larger items, they request you call 330-262-1662 to make an appointment.

Goodwill Industries

149 W Milltown Rd
Wooster, OH 44691
<https://www.goodwillconnect.org>

Thrift shopping is very popular right now, and one of the leaders is Goodwill Industries, which operates many stores including one in Wooster's North End. In many cases Goodwill can pick up items at your home! Call 330-262-7196 for details.

NOTE: To the best of our knowledge, no organizations still accept older tube-type TVs. In most cases, the best bet is to recycle them.

Recycling:

At some point your journey of "living more with less" will most likely find you staring at paint cans from decorating project years past, unneeded cleaning products, and other hazardous waste. Paint that has solidified can be disposed of normally, while most waste haulers prohibit paint in liquid form. For other chemical-based products please resist the urge to simply place those items in the trash! Residents of the **Stark, Tuscarawas and Wayne Recycling District** have a year-round dropoff location available for many hazardous items.

Additional information on disposing of large, bulky or hazardous items is available at the Stark, Tuscarawas and Wayne Recycling District's website: timetorecycle.org. And, although it was published in 2017, the district published a truly comprehensive guide to all of the above and more, which is available at: timetorecycle.org/about/resources/publications/

Best rule of thumb when considering any donations or recycling:
If you're in doubt, call ahead.