



TRANSCRIPT

Episode 15: When Decluttering Doesn't Bring Visual Progress

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Welcome to the Get Organized HQ podcast. I'm your host, Tasha Lorentz. Every week we share practical strategies for less stress and more peace as we dive into all topics, life and home organization. I'm so glad you're here for this week's episode.

YOU DON'T SEE VISUAL PROGRESS

So if you've done very much decluttering, then you're probably used to the really classic before and after, the dramatic transformation of a space whenever you get a ton of stuff out of that space.

But today I want to talk about what do you do when you've put in a bunch of time and effort to declutter a space and you don't see that visual progress? What does that mean? How do you work through that?

And actually, I wanted to talk about this because I actually had that experience recently. So if you've ever experienced that, then this episode is definitely for you.

And even if you haven't run into that yet, I'd encourage you to tune in because I think this is something that pretty much everyone is going to encounter from time to time as they work through decluttering their spaces. And it is not a sign of failure, but it can really catch you by surprise and be kind of discouraging when it happens.

TASHA'S OFFICE SHELVES

All right, so here's what happened in my situation. I was decluttering my office shelves. So I know a lot of you are listening to this on audio only, but if you happen to be watching it on the Get Organized HQ Podcast YouTube channel, yes, I am talking about those shelves right behind me with all of the baskets on them and the little wooden labels.

And I knew that those baskets had gotten kind of stuffed full of stuff. And so a couple weeks ago, I sat down and I just went through and decluttered. I got rid of a bunch of cords and cables. Like, cords and cables in the 21st century. These are a struggle because you feel like you need to keep all of them because you don't know what they go to and you might need them someday.

But I haven't used them in I don't know when. And so I finally got rid of a bunch of them. And I also realized I don't need nearly as many backup cords as I think I do. Like, we need the phone chargers, but I do not need 7 different USB to mini USB chargers. We're not charging that many things on mini usb. And so I finally decluttered some things like that and all sorts of other things that I was ready to either trash or donate and get rid of.

And here's the thing. You can go back and watch some of my very first episodes of the Get Organized HQ podcast. Like, go to the very first

video where I'm interviewing Diane in Denmark, and I can tell you, the shelves behind me, they're going to look almost exactly the same.

And that was before I decluttered. You can't tell looking at my shelves. I mean, if you really compared and you started to do, like, a spot the difference type thing, you might be like, oh, well, if I peek into the top of one of those bins that I can kind of see over your shoulder, there is a little bit of improvement in difference. I see that there's less stuff in there, but, like, no, no, this is not a dramatic before and after, okay.

Nobody is going to be super inspired by seeing the before and after pictures of my decluttered shelves because they look almost exactly the same. And in my shelves specifically, a big part of the reason for that is because of the baskets, but there are so many reasons that you might encounter this.

CHOOSE VISUAL SPACES

It may not be in a space that has a bunch of baskets like mine does. And so I want to talk about what to do when you encounter that. And before we dive into that, let me kind of caveat by saying that, first and foremost, if you are just starting out on your decluttering journey, make sure that you are starting with visual spaces.

I would not necessarily start with shelves that have a bunch of baskets like these if the baskets weren't overflowing. Now, if your baskets are overflowing and there's stuff all over the shelves and it's all cattywampus and all of that, then totally start with that. This is a space. Like, if you're working, this is my home office. So this is a space I see pretty much every day.

But if you have spaces, they are behind closed

doors. You're not really going in there that much. Or whenever you first open the cabinet and look at it, it doesn't give you that, like, feeling of, I've got to do something about this. And I feel like it's all about to fall out on my head. Don't start with those spaces.

BUILD MOMENTUM

Start with the spaces that are going to make a really big difference, because that is what builds momentum. And I always remember Dawn Madsen from the Minimal Mom at one of the Get Organized HQ virtual conferences. She talked about how momentum is actually better than motivation.

I think the words she said was that motivation is a lie. We sit around waiting for, like, some magical feeling to come over us that, like, I suddenly really want to go and declutter or clean or organize. But actually, the thing that is going to make you want to do it is having already done it. It's going to be the momentum and seeing the progress that you've made.

A SPACE YOU INTERACT WITH DAILY

And so I highly, highly, highly encourage you. When you're starting out on your decluttering journey, make sure that you're starting in spaces that you are going to see and interact with every single day. And when I say a visual space, it doesn't necessarily mean that it cannot be behind a closed door or cabinet, but it needs to be a cabinet or door that you're opening every day. Right?

So your makeup drawer, you may open that and interact with it every single day. And yes, you can slide the door shut and not look in there, but you're going to open it every day. And so that's a visual space. That's somewhere you're

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going to interact with.

But the guest bathroom linen closet, that is not a space I'm interacting with every day. Maybe I interact with it occasionally. And I'm not saying we'll never get there, but start with the spaces that you are going to see every single day so that you can build that momentum and see that your work is really making a difference.

HIDDEN SPACES BRING STRESS, TOO

All right, so we got that caveat out of the way now. Maybe you've already worked on the visual spaces, and you're really left with like, yeah, but I've got a bunch of spaces to declutter, and they're not the visual spaces. Okay.

And that's going to happen as you declutter. You're going to have gotten through the kitchen cabinets, the makeup drawers, your wardrobe, those kinds of things. They're already going to be decluttered, and you're going to come to these more hidden spaces. And the very first thing that I would say is, recognize that hidden spaces, they do still bring stress and mental weight.

Even though I would never recommend starting with your hidden spaces, it does not mean that you can't have a positive impact whenever you declutter those spaces. If you know in your mind that a drawer or a basket or a closet is absolutely stuffed full and you're walking past that shut closet door and thinking, if I open that door up, stuff is going to, like, fall out on my head, well, that can really still nag at you in the back of your mind, knowing that there is clutter there.

Okay? And so just because you're not visually seeing it doesn't mean that there's not a ton of mental load and stress that we can take away

by decluttering that space.

So if you're coming upon decluttering a space that you just quite literally are not seeing very often, and that's why you're not seeing the visual progress, realize that your effort is still completely, completely worthwhile. It is still contributing to a lifestyle of less stress and more peace, all right?

CELEBRATE WHAT'S BEEN REMOVED FROM THE SPACE

But there may be some other spaces that you declutter. Maybe it's somewhere that you do see more often. Something like these office shelves behind me. And you've done the work of decluttering, and it just doesn't have that pizzazz that the normal decluttered space has.

There are some spaces that they are just set a certain way and they're going to more or less look the way that they look no matter how much or little stuff you have in them. And so if that is the case for your space, the first thing I'd recommend that you do is celebrate how much stuff you removed from the space.

And so when you think about, like taking a before and after picture, instead of the before and after picture being of the actual space, so in my case, instead of it being of those shelves behind me, the before and after picture is of my empty floor and then my floor with a trash bag full of stuff and a pile of donations. Focusing on how much is coming out of the space and celebrating that as a huge milestone instead of focusing on what the space itself looks like.

Because it is still a huge accomplishment that all of those things are leaving your space. They are no longer your responsibility. They're not things that you have to do maintenance on or

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keep track of or clean or anything like that. And so that is still worth celebrating.

WEIRD SPACES

The honest truth is there are just some weird spaces in our homes. Okay? So a lot of us did not get to like, custom build our home the way that we wanted it. And we moved in and it was like, I wonder what they were thinking that they were going to do with this very custom built section of this house. I really don't know what to put there.

I mean, most houses that you encounter are going to have some personality quirk like that. I think about Laura's pantry. It is heavily subdivided. You walk into her pantry and she has a nice big, walk in pantry. And that sounds great, right? And it is, it's awesome.

But there are tons of vertical dividers dividing all the horizontal shelves. So it would be awesome if it was just a pantry of all these horizontal shelves where you could keep all these things. But for some reason, they felt the need to be like, no, we need to make these, like, cubbies. Like, we need to put in these hard vertical dividers.

And this is the owners before Laura and her husband, they moved into the house like this. And it's built in, like, I don't think those vertical dividers are going anywhere unless you gut and redo that whole pantry.

It's weird. Okay. Like, I'm just going to say it. It's a little bit of a weird setup. And I don't know if they had some very specific kind of food storage container that I have never seen the like of that fit perfectly in those cubbies and it was awesome for them.

But I can tell you the storage containers that Laura has in there, they don't fit perfectly. Like, there's some wasted space. And it's just kind of like this is not ever going to be an absolutely Pinterest perfect pantry just because of how the space is.

And I share that to say that everyone has spaces like that. Okay. And it's what gives our houses personality and character and we have to get creative.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO THE SPACE?

And the other thing that you can do in that case is just take a look and see if there's anything that you can do to the space, anything at all. Is it looking really dark and cramped? Could you just paint it a lighter color? Could you put less baskets in there?

So if it's a space that is just the way it's designed, it's gonna look cluttered, you might need to have even fewer things in that space in order to get that feel of a really uncluttered space. Just trying to think outside the box. Is there anything design wise or visually that you can do to make you like the space?

THERE'S NOT A LOT TO REMOVE

Now another reason that you might not see visual progress while you're decluttering is it is actually possible that you will encounter some space and there's not going to be a lot to remove from the space. And this is just kind of the nature of living. Right.

I think everyone has certain things that they lean more into just acquiring more things or just different life circumstances that cause them to have more things in certain categories than in others. And so you might come to some

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spaces in your home where you're like, wow, we actually really are using everything that we have here.

And so maybe you've decluttered your wardrobe and gotten rid of tons of clothes you aren't wearing anymore and decluttered your kitchen and gotten rid of tons of different kitchen gadgets and utensils that you aren't using, and you come to your game closet, and you think, we only have, like, a dozen games, and we really enjoy and use all of these.

A SIGN OF ALREADY BEING DECLUTTERED

And so that is just a sign that that space was already super, well decluttered. You might have innately already been curating that collection of items to be only things that you love. And that is awesome.

But it can actually kind of come as a surprise whenever you've been doing all this work of decluttering, and you're used to decluttering tons and tons of stuff, and you're like, wow, there's like, three things to remove from this space.

But that is still worth celebrating saying, oh, wow, that was a really quick win. And that space is done because we're actually using the things that are in that space.

IT'S STILL WORTH DOING

The other thing I would say about only having a few things to declutter from a space is that it's still worth doing. So even if you only fill half of a trash bag or take out three items that you want to donate, clearing out those small things, little by little, being consistent and doing that work, you are preventing a big clutter problem from

popping up later.

So it's still worth it to do that work of decluttering, even if there's not tons and tons of stuff to take out of the space, because that's how you prevent tons and tons of clutter down the road, is by continually making sure that you only have the things you truly want and love in that space.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Now, this next one can be really frustrating because it is very possible that you've gone through a space, you've decluttered, you use everything, you need everything that is left in the space, but it still feels cramped.

This is where I'd encourage you to start thinking outside the box. Is there anything else that you could do with the things in that space? So I'll tell you that for my kitchen, in my pantry, I just have, like, cabinets as my pantry, and I don't have enough space to be able to keep all of the bulk food items that I would like to keep.

WHERE ELSE COULD YOU KEEP IT?

And so some things, they go out in a cabinet that was already there in our garage. It's just like a random cabinet. I have no idea what was stored in it before we moved into this house, but it's right by the door to the garage.

And so if it's something that would be safe to keep in the garage, I put it out there in that cabinet, and it keeps it from cluttering up and making my inside kitchen pantry space feel really cramped. I could probably manage if I had to put it all in the house, but it would be really cramped. I would not have the breathing room that I wanted.

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And so starting to look outside the box and say, where else could I keep this kind of thing? Is there another space I've decluttered where I actually have extra space now? And some of those less space, frequently used items, those are a great candidate for being stored somewhere else.

IS THERE ANOTHER WAY TO STORE IT?

Another thing to think about is, is there another way to store the items that are in that space? And so I think pantries are notorious for this. There are so many food items that are like 3 inches tall. Right. They do not take up very much space. And so how can you make use of vertical space so that you're not covering all of your horizontal space?

Can you put things into baskets? Right. I think that bags of chips, if they're just contained in some sort of basket, they look better than when they're spilling out all over the shelf in the cabinet. Right. And so looking for a different storage solution for your items so that everything can kind of look uniform and you can also make use of more of that vertical space.

RECONSIDER A MAYBE ITEM

And then the other thing to consider, if you have a space and it's just looking way more cramped than you want it to look, was there anything you put back in the space that was really a maybe item? You were thinking, maybe I should get rid of this, but no, I guess I'll go ahead and keep it. Now might be the time to consider, do you definitely want to keep that item?

If you get rid of a few more things, it might free up some more space. And so that might

be really good motivation for going ahead and decluttering a few more items if there were some things you were on the fence about anyway.

There's no right or wrong when it comes to that. You don't have to get rid of more things just because a space is feeling more cramped and cluttered than you would like for it to be.

But I think just realizing that you have that as an option, you could kind of do a second glance through and see if there's anything else you want to take out of the space. Because if you're in this situation, it probably means you want that decluttered space, you want the breathing room in your spaces, and so that might be motivation for you to declutter a few more items.

RESULTS AREN'T ALWAYS DRAMATIC

So I know this has been a little bit of a shorter episode this week, but it is really just important to remember that decluttering is not always going to bring that dramatic before and after of visual progress. Sometimes it does. It's awesome when it does. Those are really exciting moments. But if it's not bringing you the visual progress you were expecting, it does not mean that you did it wrong.

It might just be the nature of the space, and it may require you really getting creative in thinking outside the box to make the space into something that you love.

IT'S STILL WORTH IT

And I just want to wrap up by saying that it is absolutely still worth it to declutter those spaces. Even if you're not seeing the visual progress. Like I said before, you are preventing

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clutter overwhelm down the road.

And that is a huge win and something that you will probably notice as time goes on. The more you declutter, the less dramatic your before and afters are going to be.

And so I've said it many times. I've said it on this podcast. I will say it again. Decluttering is iterative. It's something that you're going to come back to over and over again. But that next time that you come back and declutter the same space, there is going to be less stuff to take out of the space.

And five years down the road, when you're coming back to that space a third time, there's probably going to be even less stuff to take out of that space. But things are constantly coming into our homes, right? We're always managing inventory of what's in our homes.

THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING TO DECLUTTER

And so my guess is most of the time when you go to declutter a space, there's something there to declutter. I have surprised myself so many times. Condiments in the kitchen door, they shock me all the time. I will think there is no way that there is a single expired condiment in the kitchen door. I declutter those all the time.

There is. There's an expired condiment there. If I didn't declutter that fridge shelf like last week, there's something there that's expired and it's going to take me by surprise. But that is how you prevent it from becoming a big problem down the road. And so it's totally worth it.

Don't become discouraged if you're not seeing huge visual progress. Trust the process. Trust

that you are now doing the work of maintaining your spaces and keeping them decluttered for the long haul. And that is really good work. And you are protecting your peace and the peace in your home by doing that. So keep up the great work and I'll see you next time.

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