

“Your eyes were bigger than your stomach!”

Like many of you, I was raised to eat everything that was on my plate. So when I took ‘a lot’ and couldn’t finish it I clearly remember hearing my mom say (not in a good way) “your eyes were bigger than your stomach!”

Today I’m a Move Manager helping people to move, typically from a home they have been in for many years to a smaller space....a condo, a retirement residence, or a care facility. For most of my clients it is difficult to part with many of the things they have accumulated over the years. But there just isn’t room for it all, so I try to counsel them and assist them with the downsizing process. And sometimes my mom’s admonition echoes through my mind, particularly when the client doesn’t listen and takes so much that their new home is full to overflowing with furniture and furnishings.

If you are planning to move to a smaller space, or if you are finding your condo to be more cluttered than you would like (or is safe), here ten tips to guide you through the downsizing process.

1. Act sooner rather than later. Why? Most of our things don’t appreciate. In fact, the laws of supply and demand have caused a dramatic decline in the value of household items over the past decade mainly because so many ‘boomers’ are downsizing that there is an immense supply of used furniture available. On the demand side, buyers of used furnishings are also living in small spaces and often place a premium on small, simple and functional.
2. Start with the easy things. Attack the medicine cabinet and take all expired medications back to the drugstore. Throw out expired food cans. Put old magazines and newspapers into the recycling bin. Get realistic about how many “things” you will need in the future.... plastic bags, elastic bands, clothes hangers, mason jars.....and par down your collection.
3. Bring in a good friend (or professional) to help you sort. It can be a difficult and emotional process to downsize and it can be useful to have someone who is more impartial with you, someone who will help you make the tough decisions.
4. Check your assumptions. I often hear people say that “the kids” want or will take something, only to discover later that they have no interest (or room in their own home) at all. This is particularly painful when furniture etc. has been in a costly storage facility waiting for young Mark to go to University, but Mark would prefer a little IKEA sofa to his grandparents’ used chesterfield.
5. Identify your very special treasures. One of the benefits of decluttering is that you have a better chance of properly displaying your most cherished belongings. Too often these get lost in the clutter, or the back of cupboards. Having them within easy eyesight can brighten every day for you.

6. Sharpen your selling skills. We've said that it is a tough market for selling used home furnishings so you want to make your items stand out. Many consignment shops, purchasers and auctioneers will want to see good quality pictures of each piece before deciding whether to work with you. In the GTA check out Frontier Sales (www.frontiersales.ca) or Of Things Past (www.ofthingspast.com).
7. Get generous. Reality is that it could be difficult, timely and costly to sell used household items. You can avoid the hassle by simply deciding that you got good value using those things for several years, and now you are willing to just give them to those in need in our community. Furniture Bank picks up (for a cost recovery fee) and gets furniture and furnishings to women and children coming out of shelters, new immigrants and refugees and the homeless trying to re-establish their life. Go to www.furniturebank.org or call 416-934-1229 for more information.
8. You are allowed to buy one thing. A shredder. Keep tax records for only seven years, and copies of paper bills can usually be destroyed after they are paid and reconciled to your bank account. Take advantage of technology as much as possible to
9. Resolve to stay uncluttered. Invoke a new rule for yourself. If you buy something new then something old must go out. This works particularly well for clothing closets and shoe racks.
10. Take your reward. Plan a reward for yourself when you have finished a difficult room or closet. But it has to be something that doesn't take up permanent space. Try a movie, dinner out or attending a special concert.

Take it one step at a time. But trust me. You will feel better when you have rid your closets, your drawers, your home of all the clutter. No more looking at that plate of yet more food feeling full. You will feel light and airy, and relieved at the weight that has been lifted off your shoulders.