

The Joy of Recycling

Contributed by Barbara Hemphill
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I have always been an advocate of recycling.

Even though I am not always convinced of its financial viability, I am thoroughly convinced of its value as a means of increasing public awareness of the cost of our consumerism. In the 20+ years I have been in the organizing profession, I have never heard anyone complain that their problem in getting organized was that they didn't have enough "stuff."

It doesn't seem like getting rid of things should be such a difficult issue, but in my own experience and in the lives of clients, it often is. I have spent countless hours listening to clients justify why they need to keep clothes they haven't worn in ten years, utensils they aren't sure how to use, appliances that need repair, artwork they don't even like -- and, of course, old magazines they're sure to read some day!

If you have enough room and if you're willing to pay the price in space and energy, it is possible to keep everything. But if you can't find what you need today because you're tripping over what you might need tomorrow, the price may be more than you should be willing to pay. Recycling is often a great solution.

It's amazing how many ways you can find to recycle the things you aren't using. Towels and bedding are desperately needed by homeless shelters. Pre-school programs can use calendars with pretty pictures. Local schools are often delighted to have used computer equipment. The Lions Club collects eyeglasses for people who cannot afford to purchase them. (How many pairs do you have in your dresser drawer?)

My mother had an enormous pile of overalls which my father no longer used, but she didn't know anyone who needed them. She just couldn't bring herself to toss them, so she put them in a box in the attic. One day she heard a woman on the radio say that she wanted to buy overalls because she used the bib tops to make jumpers which she sold to raise money for her favorite charity. She didn't even care if the overalls had holes in them, because she covered them up with decorations and trim. My mother was elated to find a home for the overalls -- and get a check for \$10 besides! (One note of caution: Don't fall in a trap of looking for the perfect recipient -- organizations such as Goodwill Industries can use almost anything, and will give you a receipt for a tax deduction!)

© Barbara Hemphill is the author of Kiplinger's Taming the Paper Tiger at Work and Taming the Paper Tiger at Home and co-author of Love It or Lose It: Living Clutter-Free Forever. The mission of Hemphill Productivity Institute is to help individuals and organizations create and sustain a productive environment so they can accomplish their work and enjoy their lives. We do this by organizing space, information, and time. We can be reached at 800-427-0237 or at www.ProductiveEnvironment.com