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Decluttering: The COVID-19 cleaning craze - by Laurie Nichols

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The advent of COVID-19 brought about stay-at-home orders, self-quarantine, and social distancing which altered how and where appraisers do their work. A home office is not a new concept for many appraisers, but those working in a corporate environment now found themselves carving out a niche in their home to work; and while working from home can be great – no daily commute, wearing casual clothes, and TV breaks – it also has its downside. More time in the home means more time to stress over what needs to be cleaned and noticing the accumulation of clutter, so it comes as no surprise that a cleaning and decluttering craze has swept the nation.

The pandemic has brought about a sense of being out of control. Working from home in a cluttered and disorganized environment only adds to already existing stress and anxiety. With the additional time at home, many are making the decision to clean up and take back control; time spent developing an organized and clutter-free environment is well-invested.

How does one start to declutter and organize a workspace at home? There are many ways to go about decluttering one's home. A professional organizer or following a professional organizer's methodology is one way to go about it. Almost everyone has heard of the professional organizer Marie Kondo and her KonMari method: gathering together all of one's belongings one category at a time and keeping only those things that "spark joy" and choosing a dedicated place for everything. Besides the popular KonMari method, other sources of decluttering and organization can be found in organizational books or blogs, YouTube videos, or DIY television shows.

The biggest mistake made when organizing a home is trying to get organized before decluttering. If you start with organizing the excess, you might end up overwhelmed, or spend too much money on bins and baskets to contain the clutter. The best method to take control of your home is to stay focused while cleaning, clear out the clutter one step at a time before organizing.

Unless you have a home office which no one else will use, create a designated space for working and living; have a space where you can get work done without infringing on living spaces in your home. Consider your setup and just don't move things around. Don't make the mistake of planning to organize everything in one day, instead take small steps to chip away at the mess. You don't want to have a zealous start only to burn-out during the process, take frequent breaks and reward yourself. Also take before and after shots of the area to help spur you on when your dedication wanes.

Start in one room at the doorway and work around in a clockwise direction. Don't focus on getting rid of "stuff," focus on making good decisions. As you go through your belongings ask yourself: Is it useful? Does it serve a purpose? Is it sentimental? Will I use this 10 years from now? Categorize what is left and fine-tune your categories. Focus on what you actually use and get rid of things you don't use.

Items which aren't trashed or recycled can either be given to donation centers like Good Will and the Salvation Army. Other items which you decide are sellable can be listed on sites such as eBay, Facebook Marketplace, Craig's List, Poshmark, or ThredUp.

Be smart about buying storage containers and edit your items before making a purchase of matching storage products. Consider your setup and don't just move things around; the right storage can make all the difference instead of wasting your time looking for things. Whatever is left should have a home with your most frequently used items kept within easy reach and like items kept with like.

Dig out from paper and streamline your workspace. Purge papers and manuals which you can access online. Set up a filing system for document retention that will keep your paperwork manageable. Create a binder for loose papers you need to refer to on a daily/weekly/monthly basis. Get in the habit of filing so as not to have paperwork accumulate on your desk.

Now that you've decluttered and organized your workspace, stay organized by sticking to a system. Don't add additional clutter. Only purchase what you need. If something new comes into the house, something must go to make room - no exceptions. Commit to your organizational system and your workspace will remain organized and you will discover that you are less stressed and more productive.

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