A FREE COMPANION TO THE DEAD DON'T NEED STUFF

The Clear-Out Workbook

Checklists, decision cards and a session log for putting The Dead Don't Need Stuff to work, one drawer at a time.



RICHARD LOWE

How to Use This Workbook

Print it. Keep it with a pen, a timer, a trash bag and a donation bag.

The Dead Don't Need Stuff is about keeping what serves your life and letting go of what doesn't. This workbook turns its methods into pages you can fill in and check off.

Before you start: what do you want from this?

What specifically changes in your daily life when you're done? Write it here and come back to it when you get tired.

The master plan in five phases

1. **Get your head right.** You're choosing what deserves space in your life. Expect weeks, not a weekend. Find one support person to remind you why you started.
2. **Pick a strategy.** Room by room if you need quick wins. Category by category (all the books, then all the clothes) if you can stand temporary chaos. Set up your piles somewhere you can close the door on.
3. **Execute, small.** Fifteen minutes, one drawer, timer on. Start with the junk drawer. Work from easy to hard. Stop after two hours no matter how you feel.
4. **Use the shortcuts.** One touch per item. Photograph sentimental things and let the object go. Give a category one container and keep only what fits.
5. **Keep it clear.** A daily ten-minute pickup, a monthly purge, one in and one out. Part 6 has the details.

Room by room cheat sheet

- [ ] **Kitchen:** used it in the past month, or a scheduled use next month? Otherwise it goes. Count the mugs. Junk drawer first, always
- [ ] **Bedroom:** try everything on. Under-bed boxes labeled and intentional. A weekly five-minute reset of the nightstand and dresser
- [ ] **Living areas:** keep decorations you notice and enjoy. Let go of the ones that have turned invisible
- [ ] **Bathroom:** two towels per person, three at most. One shampoo. Expired medicine out
- [ ] **Garage, basement, attic:** visit weekly. Split into zones by function. Two-hour sessions. Mystery boxes last

Part 1: The Emergency Purge

Do this first, in one afternoon. These are the things that could cost you your marriage, your job, your money or your safety.

Anything illegal

- [ ] Medication that isn't yours or isn't needed: a take-back site (more than 15,000 take it year round, plus DEA take-back days)
- [ ] An inherited or unregistered firearm: call your local police first, or transfer it through a licensed dealer
- [ ] Unlicensed software deleted. Fireworks soaked in water twelve hours, then discarded

Relationships, recovery and work

- [ ] Anything that would hurt your partner to find, in a box or on a phone, computer or cloud drive
- [ ] If you're in recovery: the bottle, the paraphernalia, the memorabilia. Now, not eventually
- [ ] Company equipment, confidential papers, and work files, email and passwords on personal devices

Safety hazards

- [ ] Old paint to a PaintCare store or the county hazardous waste program. Oil-based paint never goes in the trash
- [ ] Rechargeable batteries to a store drop-off bin. Dead or sparking electronics to e-waste
- [ ] Unlabeled chemicals to the county hazardous waste facility (call first)
- [ ] Anything you wouldn't want a child or pet to reach: out of the house, not just up high

Identity theft goldmines

- [ ] Keep at least three years of tax returns and the records behind them
- [ ] Cross-cut shred old statements, closed-account checkbooks, card offers, old utility bills and medical benefit statements
- [ ] Destroy expired licenses and old IDs

> **The death test**
> If your family had to go through your things tomorrow, would you be embarrassed for them to find this? Then it goes.

Part 2: Set Up the Four Piles

Five, really. Fill in the destinations and deadlines before your first session, not after.

PILE	THE RULE	MY DESTINATION	DEADLINE
Keep	You use it, need it or enjoy it now. Unused for a year? The burden of proof is high. Keep the best of any duplicates. This should be one of the smaller piles.		None
Sell	Worth the hassle. Under $20 and over fifteen minutes to list? Donate it. eBay for collectibles, Facebook Marketplace for furniture.		Listed in 30 days or it's donated
Donate	Decent condition, not worth selling. Nothing broken, stained or missing pieces. Know what your charity accepts.		In the car, then dropped off within a week
Trash	Broken, worn out, stained, incomplete. The money is already gone.		Out the same day
Decide Later	Only for real uncertainty. If more than one item in ten lands here, you're using it as an escape hatch.	A bag, not a pile	One week, then donate

My sell threshold: $_____ (the book suggests $20; lower it if you like listing, raise it if time is tight)

The three questions for ordinary stuff

Most of what you own needs three questions, not nine.

1. **Do I use it?** In the past year. If not, name the specific change that would make me use it next year. Can't name one? That's a no.
2. **Does it work?** If it's broken and I haven't fixed it in six months, it goes.
3. **Do I have too many?** Four can openers, seventeen mugs. Keep the best one.

What your piles tell you

- **Big trash pile:** you keep worn-out things out of guilt. Buy better, less often.
- **Donations with the tags still on:** impulse buying. Wait two weeks before significant purchases.
- **Sell pile full of expensive, unused gear:** buying for the person you mean to become. Borrow or rent first.
- **Keep pile keeps growing:** you're still asking “why would I get rid of this?” instead of “why does this deserve space?”

Part 3: Decision Cards

For the things that won't let go of you. Cut these out or keep the page open beside the pile.

The Emotional Audit: nine questions

Use it on objects with weight, and on digital folders, photos and email threads too.

GROUP	ASK
Memory and origin	Do I remember why I got this? Are the memories attached good or harmful? Was it an impulse buy?
Harm	Is it connected to someone or somewhere that harmed me? Am I keeping it out of obligation to another person? How do I feel about it right now, not how I used to feel?
Overrides	Does it have real value in my life now? Is it legal where I live? Would it hurt someone I'm in a relationship with if they found it?

The rule: if it holds more weight than warmth, it goes. An impulse buy with no emotional root goes too. Mixed feelings are allowed. Don't make permanent decisions in the middle of a wave of feeling: put it in Decide Later.

The tiebreaker: is keeping this making my life better, or smaller?

Quick tests

Would I buy it today?
At the price I paid, in a store, right now?

The 20-20 rule
From The Minimalists: under $20 and 20 minutes to replace? Let it go.

The fire drill
If the house were burning, would it make the short list?

The photograph
Sentimental but unused? Take a picture, keep the memory, let the object go.

Unopened boxes
Can't remember what's inside and haven't needed it in a year? Consider donating it unopened.

The container
Give a category a fixed space. Keep only what fits.

Your computer too

Unsubscribe from every list you delete without reading. Bulk-delete email you haven't opened or searched for in two years. Cull blurry and duplicate photos one trip or one year at a time. Delete the apps you downloaded with good intentions and never use. Back up, sign out and factory reset old phones before they leave the drawer.

Part 4: The Excuse Buster

The book names twenty excuses. When you hear one in your own voice, find the answer here.

THE EXCUSE	THE ANSWER
1. I might need it someday.	Not needed this past year? You probably won't next year. Borrow or buy then.
2. What if they stop making these?	You don't need to keep a strategic reserve of shampoo.
3. I'll fix it when I have time.	Not fixed in six months? Fix it now or let it go.
4. I might take up that hobby again.	If you do, you can buy new supplies. The old ones only make you feel guilty.
5. It was expensive!	The money left when you bought it. Keeping the thing only extends the mistake.
6. I paid good money for this!	A ten-dollar tool you use weekly is worth more than a two-hundred-dollar one you never touch.
7. It might be worth something someday.	Most things lose value. Storage costs money now.
8. I can't afford to replace it.	Can you afford to keep storing it?
9. It has sentimental value!	If you have to think hard to remember why, it probably doesn't.
10. It reminds me of someone who died.	Keeping everything honors no one and fills your life with sad objects.
11. It was a gift!	The gift was the act of giving. Does it have value in your life now?
12. It's a family heirloom!	If everything is an heirloom, nothing is.
13. I'm saving it for my kids.	Ask them. Save one or two things that mean something.
14. Someone could use this.	Then donate it now, while they still can.
15. It's still good!	Still good isn't the same as still useful to you.
16. My relative would roll over in their grave.	The relationship lives in memory, not in their coffee maker.
17. I don't have time to deal with it.	Deciding takes less time than moving it around for years.
18. I need to research its value first.	If it were obviously valuable, you'd already know.
19. I'll organize it better.	Organizing what you don't need is a fancier way to store clutter.
20. But look how much space it takes up!	That's exactly why it should go first.

Part 5: Session Log

One line per session. Fifteen minutes counts. Watching the list grow is part of how this works.

DATE	SPACE OR CATEGORY	MINUTES	BAGS OUT	HARDEST DECISION

Stop when you keep things because you're too tired to think, or start pulling things back out of the donate pile. That's the rescue reflex: take a fifteen-minute break before you decide.

Part 6: Staying Clear

A declutter that isn't maintained comes back within a year. These habits keep it from happening.

Every day

- [ ] Ten-minute pickup: everything back where it belongs
- [ ] Mail, bags and new things go through the landing zone by the door and get dealt with
- [ ] Clothes that don't fit go straight into the donation bag in the closet. Full bag to the car, dropped off within a week
- [ ] One in, one out. Decide what leaves before you buy

First Saturday of every month (about an hour)

- [ ] Walk every room with a donation bag and a trash bag
- [ ] Ask: Have I used this in the past month? Is it in the right place? Do I need it, or is it habit?

Every January

- [ ] What has my life become this year that it wasn't last year?
- [ ] What has it stopped being?
- [ ] What did I acquire this year that hasn't earned its place?
- [ ] Go through every closet, drawer and cabinet, and put back only what serves the life I have now

Warning signs: "just this once" piles on counters and chairs, avoiding a room again, and buying duplicates or storage instead of letting go.

> *Cleaning the house is the small part. Making sense of a life takes as long as it takes.*

The Whole Story

This workbook gives you the tools. The Dead Don't Need Stuff gives you the reasons: why you keep things, the twenty excuses that keep them there, and how Richard Lowe learned the difference between a collection and clutter over seven purges of his own.



The Dead Don't Need Stuff:
Declutter Your Life
Real Life, Handled

Get the full book

thewritingking.com/library/the-dead-dont-need-stuff/

More free books: free.coolauthor.com

Copyright © 2026 by Richard Lowe. You may print and share this workbook for personal, noncommercial use.