

MIND MATTERS: Creating Space

Sometimes it seems that everyone is struggling with the same issues. In the last few weeks nearly every client I met seemed to be groping with clutter in their lives. For example, one discovered that his boss wanted him to stop doing everything for his team, and that insight allowed him to let go of some duties he was performing because he thought he was supposed to. That freedom, while always there even when he wasn't aware of it, opened his eyes to new opportunities and allowed him to make a decision he's been pondering for over a year.

This is what I mean by "creating space". It's the conscious examination of what's happening in your life, the analysis of whether it's necessary or just clutter, the realization that you can change the situation, and finally, the choice to take action in clearing out that which is no longer important.

Mental clutter, or even habits of survival carried over from childhood, such as an excessive need for control seen in children of alcoholic parents, is what keeps most of us stuck in unproductive behavior. In childhood each of us develops behaviors in order to fix something broken in our lives. Often these aren't overt behaviors, but patterns of thinking that lead us consistently to the same conclusion. Because these behaviors or thoughts served us in the past, we assume they'll work in another situation. Over time we generalize them and begin applying them to more and more situations, to the point that we're practically stereotyped by those behaviors.

The problem, however, is those behaviors we learned in childhood no longer serve our adult needs. Where precision earned us good grades in school, it labels us perfectionists at work. Where teaching helped our toddler learn right from wrong, preaching scares our teenager away. We must learn new behaviors to become who we want to be, but only after we've de-cluttered and made space for them.

We de-clutter by examining, exploring, probing and questioning. We look at our behaviors and ask ourselves, "Is this working? Am I helping or hindering? Is this a remnant of the past?" Ask those around you, as well; they'll certainly let you know!

Open your eyes to your clutter. Let go of that which no longer serves you, like the 8-track you no longer can play. You don't need it, you don't want it, and when the space is finally clear, then you can begin to add back EXACTLY what you want. While the clutter remains, however, there'll never be room.

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