

Clutter-Buddy Linda Ely Can Help You Get Organized in 2020

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By Eileen Moon

As the tidings of the holiday season recede and the new year waits at the door, many of us survey the happy chaos of the past few weeks and decide it's time to make some changes.

Along with signing up for a gym membership and enrolling in a weight loss program, one of the most popular resolutions that people pledge at the start of a new year is getting organized, notes organizing professional Linda Ely, owner of OrganizingMatters.com.

Ely, an Ocean Township resident who will be speaking at the Eastern Branch of the Monmouth County Library Jan. 16, is eager to help you do it.

Having come to the profession via her own frustration with the chaos in her life, Ely approaches her work with the goal of putting herself out of a job by helping her clients master the principles of organization that Ely adopted to de-clutter and de-stress, minus the monk-like purity of organizing minimalist Marie Kondo, author of "The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up."

Ely's own journey to organizational sanity began more than 25 years ago while living in Oklahoma. With two children at home and a full-time job as the youth ministry director at her church, Ely began to realize that her lack of organization was adding unnecessary stress to her family's busy lives.

With the internet still in its infancy, Ely turned to her local library for help. Her search turned up a book called, "How to Have More Time for Sex, the Organizing Guide for Busy Couples."

"It really was about organizing, but I couldn't check that out," she laughed.

Bea Arthur Impersonator Entertains

The librarian probably didn't go to her church, but the town was small enough that she probably knew a lot of people who did. It was far from scandalous, but as youth minister of her church, she decided discretion was in order.

Instead, Ely ordered it online, along with a few other books that gave her the courage to tackle the chaos at home. Among the most helpful was Don Aslett's book, "Clutter's Last Stand," Ely said.

"This book did a brilliant job of explaining why I had so much stuff and why I had so much trouble getting rid of it. It really helped me understand myself and my power to let go of stuff."

She decided to dedicate a year of her life to getting organized. After tackling her house from basement to attic and custom-crafting some basic principles of organization that fit her family's way of life, Ely also had a new career.

"It made my life a lot better," she said. "Did it make it perfect? No. That's not the journey."

Describing herself as a "sharer," by nature, Ely was soon helping others address their own particular issues with organization and clutter.

Sometimes, it's simply dealing with the daily clutter of living that becomes an emergency when company is coming. "It's the stash and dash," says Ely. But eventually, that method can turn the closets into a disorganized archeological dig with the pair of boots your looking for at the very bottom.

"In the worst cases, it gets out of the closet, it backs up onto your front porch, it's in your garage. It's in your car."

A Lusty Christmas Eve Tradition

It can be hard for someone to ask for help, she notes. First, the task of getting your life under control can seem overwhelming. And it can be embarrassing to admit that stuff – virtual stuff, paper work stuff, and/or just plain stuff – has invaded your life, escaped your

closets, occupied your basement and is messing with your head.

“Number one, it’s scary,” says Ely. “You’re feeling overwhelmed, like the job is too big for you.” Number two, she continues, is fear. “It’s embarrassing. It’s ‘I don’t want people to see my stuff.’ ”

Ely is happy to help anyone who may be approaching their wit’s end in the fast lane. “We can really begin with a little therapy,” she says. “One of the things I do is bring that job down to size. I’m your clutter-buddy.”

She is not the kind of organizer she describes as a “drill sergeant.” “Drill sergeants were born organized. This girl you are talking to was not born organized. Do you want a drill sergeant, or do you want someone who ‘gets it?’ ”

But if the drill sergeant type is more your style, Ely says, she can give you some contacts.

Her Jan. 16 talk at the Eastern Branch will begin at 1 p.m. While she can talk about clutter for hours, this particular presentation will offer the basic organizing principles that are the foundation of her work.

But don’t expect to be bored. “People have a great time at my presentations,” she said. “They will go home so inspired and so prepared, and they will know why they’re going to let this (clutter) go.”

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