

'Nicola sprinkles her magic everywhere' *Gemma Collins*

Cleaning Your
Way to a Calm
and Happy Home



mind over clutter

NICOLA LEWIS



From the
creator of
This Girl Can Organise

Nicola Lewis

Mind Over Clutter

«HarperCollins»

Lewis N.

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From the creator of *This Girl Can Organise*, the ultimate guide to decluttering your home in a fun, sustainable and meaningful way. Are you drowning in clutter? Do you dread opening your cupboards because of the mess that awaits inside? Are you ready to sort out your house for good and discover a happier, calmer you? In this book, Nicola will arm you with the tools you need to clean and clear your home. With a step-by-step, room-by-room plan to get rid of clutter, recipes for natural, eco-friendly cleaning products and tips on upcycling your household items, housework and organising have never been this easy! From your makeup bag to your 'hoarders' garage, your home will be spick, span and sparkling. Nicola sprinkles magic wherever she goes and she has seen first-hand how decluttering and tidying your home can help transform your mind, bringing you new-found confidence and happiness. Filled with helpful tips and tricks, actionable insights and positive affirmations, this is the perfect book to refer to whenever you need help to tidy your life.

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Imagine going shopping in the sales at a huge bargain-basement department store. There’s stuff everywhere, but among all the confusion you find some amazing pieces. And you pick up things that would be perfect for your friends, family and charities – it feels so good to give. Afterwards, you go home, and everything is so calm and all the items you found are so beautiful and just right. You relax, but then you realise that you weren’t charged for any of them. Having TGCO has made me take a fresh look at my home and all my treasures. I don’t miss anything I’ve discarded or given away, and I feel so calm and grateful for everything I have. It’s freed my mind to be creative again.	24
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that went through her head. Through coaching around this subject, she was able to identify what it was that she needed to do, which patterns of behaviour had to be changed and, ultimately, how to change her perspective on that sock basket. Now she can laugh when it's mentioned and tells everyone she knows how coaching not only uncluttered her sock basket, but also how she now feels a new sense of confidence, resilience and optimism. It literally changed her life.	
Your Instagram feed has helped me massively, not just to organise my home but also my life. I live with my three children in a two-bedroom flat, which is very hard to keep tidy, but I've managed it with your help. It's so reassuring to know that everything has its place and the children know where to put things. It's still a work in progress but I'm getting there. Without your tips and 'before-and-after' photos I would be living in a very cluttered, messy home.	27
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Cleaning Your Way to a Calm and Happy Home

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All names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.

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Celebrity Endorsements

‘I’m a big fan of decluttering myself as I really believe it helps tidy the mind. I think what Nicola is doing is truly fantastic and her Instagram brightens up my day.’

Katie Piper

‘TGCO is like having my very own Mary Poppins. She organises the chaos that enters my home on a daily basis and sprinkles her magic, making everything calm and tidy. She’s changed my life ...’

Gemma Collins

‘After I got sober, I realised that my house was in a state of barely organised chaos. It felt like the Old Curiosity Shop. Nicola came round, and with the magic that is her mind, reorganised the space I live in, making it look like the easiest thing in the world. Now my home actually relaxes me. I feel like Nicola has got the best out of it ... and that, as a result, it gets the best out of me.’

Bryony Gordon

‘Nicola is my superhero, not all heroes wear capes.’

FERNE MCCANN

‘Nicola’s approach is relaxed, kind and, most importantly, in my opinion, achievable and sustainable. Let’s face it, someone telling you to be tidier can get your hackles up, but Nicola’s method is so different that you never feel as though you’re being judged or shamed for having a chaotic knicker drawer or a disorganised bookshelf.’

Emma Gunavardhana

Dedication

To Lottie, my beloved grandma; to Valerie, my wonderful mum and organising queen; and to Terry, the best dad in the world.



My Journey

My name is Nicola Lewis. I'm 44, married to Graham and mum to two fabulous daughters, Amelia and Francesca, who are my absolute world.

I grew up in Walthamstow, in east London, but I now live in a village in rural west Essex, and I just adore my life. I love music and lip syncing (ha ha!), kindness and having fun, and living every single day to the full. But what I'm *really* passionate about – and what makes me tick – is organising and decluttering. In fact, I enjoy it so much that I've made it my business and my life's mission. And now I want to help you transform *your* life too and enjoy all the benefits that decluttering brings. Because This Girl Can Organise (TGCO) is all about getting stuff done – with a big smile on your face.

It all started eighteen years ago when I got my first job as an FX (foreign exchange) assistant working for an investment bank in London. I was literally over the moon and loved the idea of being a 'working girl', just like Melanie Griffith in the movie of the same name. I wanted the tailored suits and designer bags, the big hair, to be independent, earn my own money and, of course, have fun in all the clubs and bars. My career and salary grew over the years and I was proud to work for some of the biggest investment banks in the City of London.

However, it wasn't all plain sailing and I encountered a few storms along the way, especially when my first daughter was born. Don't get me wrong, my career was really important to me, but so was becoming a mum and all the changes that brings. Like most first-time mothers, I wasn't prepared for this transition, and not only were the back-handed comments from some of my colleagues after I returned to work hard to digest, they also made it difficult for me to focus. Holding down a full-time job while being a parent is never easy and it was probably one of the biggest challenges I've ever had to face. It was painful and I felt constantly guilty, trying to do the right thing and please everyone, which in reality was never enough, while constantly comparing myself to others. And although everything appeared to be OK on the outside, inside I was hurting.

The worst thing was that there was nobody I could confide in. I worried that if I talked honestly to people about what I was experiencing, I'd be labelled 'weak' and 'overemotional' and would be penalised accordingly.

I remember how, on some days, I would head into work feeling really positive, fresh and raring to go, only to find within minutes of arriving in the office that I had to choose between my career and my family. I felt guilty about leaving my family at home, but nobody really cared if you had a child in nursery or you'd snatched just four hours' sleep the night before – you just had to put on a brave face, carry on, accept your lot and be thankful that at least you had a good job. Even now it makes me feel sad writing this part of my story, and I wish I could go back in time and tell the young mum I was then that there was no need to worry and it would all turn out OK. However, I guess we all have to ride these emotions at some point in our lives.

Those first few years were very tough, and I felt as though I was slowly losing my identity and sense of fun. Every morning I would sit on the train on my way to work, writing lists and schedules. This enabled me to get everything out of my head on to paper and to plan ahead for the week, the month and even the year – anything just to help me smile, feel better about myself and give me something to look forward to. Inside, I felt trapped and I knew there had to be a better way to live, but my husband had just changed careers and was starting off as a freelancer in the entertainment industry and we desperately needed my salary to pay the mortgage and the bills. I felt that I had to make some sacrifices to help build a secure future for my family.

After the birth of my second daughter, I decided it was time for a change. I needed something new and exciting – something I would enjoy doing. So I swapped my old full-time job for a completely

different part-time one as Ground VIP Customer Service Assistant for Harrods Aviation at Stansted Airport, looking after private and HNWI (high-net worth individual) clients. Yes, it was a bit random and involved a huge drop in my salary, but this career step was all about being happy and moving towards what the real me was interested in. So, I transferred my skill set from working on bustling trading floors to busy runways for the rich and famous.

For three years I enjoyed my work and had a lot of fun. I really loved meeting new people, being super-organised, professional and smart. Then one day I was approached by an old work colleague and offered a position at an investment bank in Canary Wharf with a big pay cheque and flexible hours. And it was part-time. The dream job, right? Well, actually, wrong. The moment I walked back into that open-plan office I knew I'd made a huge mistake. Yes, I had the right experience and qualifications, but I didn't have the passion or the drive. I was on autopilot, doing the job robotically, adhering to the bank's rules and regulations, and feeling miserable. What had I done?

I stayed for nearly two years and gave it my best shot. I kept trying to persuade myself that there was a place for me there and that's why I'd come back, but I guess I hadn't figured out what I really was good at and where my real talents lay. And that's the way it stayed until one blessed day when my whole team was called into the office – senior management and HR (human resources) at one end and the rest of us at the other – and it was announced that in December 2016 we would all be made redundant as our jobs were going overseas to India. And that was it! Strangely, I felt quite calm. It was almost a relief and I remember thinking to myself: this is God's plan; this is your time, Nicola, to really do something for you. You need to be happy and this is your opportunity to earn money doing what you love. I'd always told my children that we should only do what makes us happy and had never listened to my own advice, but now the time had come.

I felt liberated walking out of Canary Wharf that day and into the future. I was so excited to be leaving – finally, to have the opportunity to do something new and totally different. And although I hadn't a clue what that 'something' was, I knew that working in the City wasn't my scene and I needed a change. In my 20s it had all been about ambition, achievement and keeping up appearances, but it wasn't a healthy way to live. Now I had a family and I needed a better work/life balance. It's not always about the money and how we perceive worldly and material success. The time had arrived for me to be happy about my own life and to find out who I really was. I truly believe it was written in the stars. And since then, I've never looked back.

Taking Control

It took a while for me to find my niche, to work out what I was going to do and how to go about it. I kept asking myself: 'What am I good at? What do I enjoy doing?' My husband suggested that as I loved organising things so much, why didn't I Google what's out there? I wanted to find something I really loved, and I knew I'd found it when I stumbled across an American website called *The Home Edit*, set up by two women who got paid to go out and help people organise their homes. Eureka! For years, whenever I used to pop round to friends, they would ask for advice on what they could do to improve their homes and, before I knew it, I was decluttering and organising them to create a better and happier living space. I loved doing it, but hadn't realised that it could be a real job.

When that day eventually dawned, it was a game changer. Now I knew this was something I could do well, in my own style – and make people happy. I knew that to take control of my life I needed to set up my own business and be my own boss. I wanted to create something that could help busy people who haven't the time or inclination to declutter by themselves, and so I set up my own website, blog and Instagram account on social media to motivate and inspire others, featuring real-life examples and case histories, complete with 'before-and-after' photos and practical advice and tips.

This Girl Can Organise was founded in April 2017 because I believed in myself, my skill set and my passion for organising and decluttering. It has grown and flourished and now, for the first time in my life, I feel in control. I love my work, running my business and helping other people to feel happier about their lives. And I have more time to devote to my own family and home too – I

don't have to feel guilty any more. After all these years, I can finally feel good about myself and *be* myself. Every morning I wake up thinking: I can do this; and, what's more, I can have fun doing it.

Before I knew it, I was decluttering and organising to create a better and happier living space.

My Passions

Organising is my big passion. Even when I was a little girl, I loved to arrange things. I guess I inherited my recycling and 'make-do' skills from my nan, Lottie, and my organising and life skills from my mum and dad, Valerie and Terry.

My nan was a huge part of my life. Flamboyant, bubbly, generous and kind, she donated and recycled tirelessly in her local community. She understood the needs and hardships of raising a family and was always thinking of others less fortunate than herself. Growing up, I would look up to her with such admiration. She showed me life's 'how-to-dos' with smiles and laughter. Her catch phrases were 'cleanliness is next to godliness' and 'make do and mend'. A stay-at-home mother, she raised six children on a tight budget and always kept an eye out for a bargain when she was shopping in the local markets. She was a great multi-tasker and just thinking about her still makes me smile. Not a day goes by without me missing her.

My mother, so caring and thoughtful, is the queen of organising, and I've learned so much from her. She loves to upcycle and donate, and this has made a huge impact on me and how I live my own life. While I was writing this book, I asked my parents whether I was always this organised and they both said, 'Yes, if it was on your terms!' They never had to tell me twice to clear up my room, as I always liked it to be neat and tidy. I'd play with my post office set or Barbie dolls and would always put them away inside their boxes because that was where they belonged. I guess it was all down to respect for my environment and being in my happy place.

I grew up in a tidy home, which was filled with love, and every Sunday from the age of 10 my sister and I helped our parents with household chores. We would clean or tidy our bedrooms, get out our school clothes and lay the table for dinner. My dad always took us to the park or swimming every Sunday morning so my mum could get her chores done and cook the dinner in peace – I only understand now as a mother how amazing that must have felt. Ha, ha! Both our parents worked while we were growing up, but they were always there for us. We had a routine for work, school and after-school activities and we all supported each other.

Although we didn't have masses of toys like children do today, and there certainly wasn't a special designated playroom, my sister and I were encouraged to be creative and to play anywhere. I loved reading books and writing in diaries, playing outside for hours on end and dancing and acting at my local stage school. I wasn't brought up with lots of material possessions, just what made me happy, and maybe this is where my passion for decluttering comes from. I believe that most of us have too much stuff; less really is more.

I'm also passionate about sustainability and the environment and I want my children to grow up in a better world where we preserve our natural resources, reduce the impact of global warming and enjoy cleaner air and water. Climate change is the biggest issue of our time, and while you might think that individually you can't make a difference, even tiny changes in your lifestyle can help.

Most of us have too much stuff; less really is more.

Living in a kinder, more thoughtful way is a good place to start and I try to do this in my own life. As a family, we've taken practical steps in our home to be more eco-friendly and to live our lives more sustainably. I buy smart and use environmentally friendly cleaning products that don't contain harsh chemicals, or I make my own with natural ingredients, such as essential oils, lemons, bicarbonate of soda and vinegar (see [Chapter 3](#)). I also recycle as much as possible, wage war on plastic and upcycle lots of common household items to give them a new, useful life (see [Chapter 4](#)).

My Mission

Since starting my business, I've discovered my mission and my joy. I'd like to do some good in the world and for my career to have a sense of purpose, and I feel fortunate that I've met and

helped so many lovely people whose lives have been transformed for the better by organising and decluttering their homes.

My blog and Instagram feed are full of helpful tips on how you can declutter, tidy, organise, recycle, upcycle, eco-clean and donate, and for a long time I've wanted to write it all down in a 'go-to' way that will help, inform and encourage people. And here it is. Packed with useful information and tips to motivate you and help you think more positively, this book will inspire you to get rid of all the clutter in your life and make it much simpler and happier.

You really can achieve anything you put your mind to. If I can do it, so can you.

10 ways to . . .

be happy and feel good

It's easy to feel good about yourself and your life if you start counting your blessings, follow your dream and get organised. Here are some ideas to inspire you:

1.

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

There is a lot of truth in the sentiment that if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. If you're unhappy and can't find a new job, try to shift your focus and look for the positives in your current one. At the very least, do one thing you enjoy every day.

2.

FOLLOW YOUR DREAM

Dream big. Since starting TGCO in 2017 I have had the best time! I have met loads of incredible people, made some wonderful friends and have visited homes across the UK. I really believe that if you work hard and surround yourself with your dreams, they will one day come true (so start making that vision board – see [here](#)).

3.

STAY FOCUSED AND BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

You are already fresh and fabulous and can achieve whatever you put your mind to. Try to stay away from negativity and never forget your goals.

4.

LIVE FOR EACH DAY

Life is short, so embrace every minute. Don't be held back by what has happened in the past. Be fearless and look for new opportunities and experiences.

5.

GET UP EARLY

Those quiet moments in the morning are a great time to reflect on your life and what you want your day to look like. It also means you won't have to rush, and that will immediately make you less stressed.

6.

GO FOR A WALK

Getting fresh air is a brilliant way to clear your mind and it is also a great opportunity to think and plan.

7.

HELP OTHERS

Be compassionate and empathetic. Helping others grow is the best way to help yourself grow. Volunteering is one way to do this; or start with your friends and family and those around you.

8.

SMILE

Every day is full of endless possibilities. You are in control of your attitude, so start your days with a smile and stay optimistic.

9.

PLAN A TRIP

It's good to have something to look forward to.

10.

PRACTISE GRATITUDE

Be thankful for everything you have already. Celebrate the present and take a more active role in your life.

A person's most useful asset is not a head full of knowledge but a heart full of love, an ear ready to listen and a hand willing to help others. I believe these are the main qualities of TGCO. Kindness is free, and it really does make the world smile.

– Anonymous Client



1: Tidy Home, Tidy Mind

I love to have a clear, clutter-free space. Getting rid of all the clutter really is transforming and helps to clear my mind as well as the room I'm in, making me feel calmer and more relaxed; so 'tidy home, tidy mind' makes a lot of sense to me.

Decluttering gives you more time for yourself and your family and leads to a healthier and more balanced you. And although a clean environment won't necessarily solve all your problems, it can have an enormous impact on your emotional wellbeing and outlook and make all the difference to your life.

What is 'Clutter'?

Clutter means different things to different people, but it's basically all about filling a space with an untidy and chaotic collection of things. It might happen for a positive reason, such as when you're moving house or you're decorating or renovating, or it may build up almost imperceptibly over time. If you find that you have to move things around in your home to accomplish a simple chore, or you feel that you're drowning in 'stuff' and overwhelmed by all the space it takes up, then the likelihood is that you have a clutter problem.

Clutter and Mental Health

Your surroundings can have a dramatic effect on your mood, negatively impacting on your mental health – especially if you're stressed, under pressure or just struggling with the daily grind. Having unnecessary clutter lying around can act like a visual noise, each item potentially triggering an alarm bell in your head. The truth is that most of us have so much stuff either lying around in full view or shoved inside cupboards that it's sometimes impossible to find what we are looking for when we want it. With so much to do – laundry to wash, meals to prepare and paperwork to organise – it's no wonder that sometimes we feel overwhelmed when we're faced with the endless 'to-do' lists of life.

Studies in the United States¹ have looked at the causes of clutter and how it impacts people's emotional wellbeing. The researchers found that cluttered homes can be stressful to live in. Yet many people avoid reorganising their things and throwing out even unused or unwanted belongings, especially if it's time-consuming or unpleasant. Consequently, they sometimes end up living in a chaotic state, surrounded by mess, which can trigger a physiological response, usually in the form of stress and raised cortisol levels. Cortisol is the body's main stress hormone and when it increases it can lead to a variety of health problems, such as anxiety, headaches, fatigue, insomnia, memory lapses, concentration problems and even depression. When they declutter, however, even with small steps over a period of time, people can start to feel less anxious and better about themselves.

I know this is true from my own experience, from working with clients and from the feedback I get online in response to my blog and Instagram feed.

Elizabeth, a busy department manager who was diagnosed with depression and anxiety when she was 26 and had been off work for six months, struggled to stay on top of even basic everyday tasks like showering, cleaning the kitchen or vacuuming the carpets. She wrote to me:

One day my mum offered to help clean my house and I was offended. Had it really got that bad? It made me realise I was truly debilitated by my illness. I felt so useless, but I know now that a lot of my untidiness was linked to self-worth and I didn't see myself as deserving of a clean and well-ordered home.

What Elizabeth learned from TGCO is that cleaning and decluttering needn't be a chore; it can be a pleasure if you approach it in the right way. You can make it more fun by including your family or turning on some music. Elizabeth saw it as her opportunity to catch up on her favourite podcasts and audiobooks and she felt so much better for getting up and moving around. She also valued the support of the TGCO community on social media:

Talking to people online about depression and anxiety has been a lifeline because I tend to isolate myself when I'm feeling low. But scrolling through Nicola's feed gives me a friendly nudge in the right direction and makes managing my home feel so much more attainable. There's no unrealistic standard to try to achieve, just moral support and helpful advice.

Elizabeth now looks forward to decluttering:

The biggest thing I learned is that I don't have to tackle mammoth tasks all at once, and that's very comforting. I don't worry about getting the whole house tidy. I just pick a small space and see where it takes me. Doing a little every day is much more powerful for my sanity, as well as my home organisation.

The Power of Decluttering

I've witnessed many times the powerful effect that decluttering can have on my clients' state of mind. When I arrive at people's homes, they are usually very excited to see me (always a good sign!). Sometimes they tell me that this is the moment when they breathe out and start to relax; the task they've been dreading is about to be sorted once and for all.

You see, not everyone likes to declutter and get organised all by themselves. It can be, for some people, sheer drudgery if they don't enjoy doing it or are too busy to set aside the time. And it can be quite traumatic if people become over-attached to some of their personal possessions and find it hard to let go. I can help to reassure my clients by smiling, taking control of the situation and trying to make the process more fun for them. We will have a chat and a laugh together as we work. I encourage them to tell me what makes them feel relaxed when they're at home, and then, if they become overwhelmed, I can do something positive to help lighten the mood and take the stress out of what we're doing. It could be lighting a soothing candle, listening to the radio or a favourite playlist, enjoying some background cooking aromas, or just taking a break from the job in hand and sitting down for a chat with a cup of tea and some biscuits.

It's not rocket science – really, it's just about what makes you happy and what transports you to that happy place. And so decluttering becomes a part of your self-care routine and a way of taking care of yourself and your home.

It's not rocket science. It's just about what makes you happy and what transports you to that happy place.

Asking for Help

Asking for help can sometimes be embarrassing or even scary. How many times have you said to a friend or relative: 'Let me know if there's anything I can do to help', but you never heard back from them? I guess some people see it as a sign of weakness or they feel insecure allowing someone to do something for them. There's no denying that we feel stronger and more in control when we fend for ourselves, but it's important to note that we are even stronger when we work together as a team.

When I started my business, I wasn't fully aware of the immense and transformative power of decluttering. I knew it worked for me, but I hadn't seen the wonderful effects on other people's lives.

One day I received a call from Sarah, who was desperate for my services and couldn't believe she had found someone who did exactly what she had been looking for. She was extremely emotional on the phone and I remember trying to reassure her and saying, 'Well done, you've just cleared your first hurdle by recognising you've got a problem and asking for help.' I couldn't wait to lend a hand.

Sarah and her husband both worked for a large law firm in the City of London and every day they both left the house just after 6am and didn't return until around 9pm. They loved their jobs, but the pressure was high. Sarah became increasingly anxious when the weekends came around and she opened the kitchen cupboards and wardrobes. Along with the bathroom and the living spaces in her house, they were full of stuff and she knew she had to sort it, but the problem seemed so immense and insurmountable that she couldn't psych herself up to tackle it. It was so overwhelming that it was even starting to affect her relationship with her husband and how she felt about herself. She compared

herself unfavourably with some of her work colleagues who were in a similar situation but, unlike her, they just seemed to get on with it and sort out the mess.

Sarah's main reason for inviting me into her home was that she couldn't do it all by herself and she needed help. Together, we came up with a plan of which areas were in most urgent need of decluttering and got down to business. To her immense surprise and relief, we had so much fun. While we worked, she played songs by Prince, her favourite artist, and she sang, danced, cried, hugged me and stepped back in amazement – all because she could feel her worries disappearing as a huge weight was lifted off her mind.

This was when I truly realised the huge impact that decluttering can have and it made me excited and motivated to help even more people.

There's no need to feel guilty or harbour a sense of failure because you're asking someone else to help you declutter. It's often much more effective to hand a problem over to someone who isn't personally involved and can tackle it more dispassionately. It's all too easy to get sentimental and overemotional when you have to make decisions about ditching your belongings.

Comparing yourself to others is a natural thing to do, especially when things aren't going your way and if you have friends who appear to take it all in their stride. But you need to remember that we all lose our sh*t at times, and some of us just hide it better than others. As my grandma Lottie always used to say, 'The grass isn't greener on the other side; it's greener where you water it.' And how right she was! So let's all do our best not to compare and to embrace what we have. Be happy and never be afraid to ask for help or to offer to help others who need it. Most importantly, always be kind to *you*.

Getting Started

Of course, you may not need me on hand to get started. You may feel that the time has come for you to roll up your sleeves and have a go yourself. So once you've decided to take the plunge, the key is to analyse the problem, figure out a plan and work through it gradually, one task at a time, embracing the process and going about it in an orderly, methodical way.

- 1 Grab yourself a pad of paper and a pen and begin by writing a to-do list for every room in your home, noting down all the items you'd like to declutter from each one (more about this in [Chapter 2](#)).

- 2 If you feel you need help, ask a family member or a friend. Feeling supported and getting a second opinion is beneficial and makes the whole process much easier.

- 3 Once you've decided on a plan, set aside an hour a day or however long you can spare for decluttering and tick the jobs off your list as you go along, tackling one room at a time.

One step at a time

Don't try to do too much too soon. If you do, at some point the task will overwhelm you and that could put you off continuing. Starting small is better than not starting at all. So take it a step at a time and celebrate the little 'wins' and positives as you go along. Don't rush it – this is a long-term, lifelong process, not a quick fix or makeover. Decluttering can radically change your life and lead to better, more sustainable habits and a new mindset.

Big challenges can be intimidating, so turn them into measurable goals – say, 30 minutes a day – and you'll be blown away by how much you can achieve. Start to self-love and self-praise: tell yourself you're doing your best. Then nothing is impossible.

TGCO Top Tip

Don't be disheartened if it takes longer than you expected. Remember that even one tick is better than none. Decluttering can take time and there's no need to rush.

Take Back Control

By using my simple method you'll soon start to feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction as you take back control of your life and introduce more order into your home. This, in turn, will motivate you to move on to the next task or room and the time you spend decluttering will become a pleasure rather than a chore. My mum always says that it refreshes your home, your mind and your overall wellbeing, and she's right: you'll feel much happier living in an environment that isn't crammed with clutter and items you don't use. It's liberating and empowering to purge the stuff you don't want or need any more. It makes you want to smile and gives you the space to breathe, to be calm and to focus on what's important for you.

We all have too much stuff, and removing or reducing the number of items that no longer have any purpose and don't make you happy will give you untold satisfaction. It feels great to be happy with what you have and not feel the need to accumulate. Getting rid of personal belongings can be tricky, especially if they are associated with good memories, but there's no point hanging on to something just because you 'might need it some day'. If you haven't used it or worn it for years or it still has the original labels and tags attached, it's time to chuck it, even if you feel an attachment to it.

Start to self-love and self-praise: tell yourself you're doing your best. Then nothing is impossible.

Saving things 'for best'

How many times have we all used the phrase, 'save it for best', whether it's fancy underwear, expensive shoes, a posh dress or the finest champagne flutes? And how do you know when 'best' actually is?

I've seen so many items in people's homes, especially designer handbags, shoes, belts and clothes, that don't get used or worn on a regular basis because they are being 'saved for best'. And when I ask my clients what that actually means, their answers usually focus on the items' cost.

When we're out shopping for 'best' items, we get excited about the whole experience: the location, the styling of the store, the service, the wrapping, handing over the money and the luxurious branded bag. These are all part of the company's plan to make us feel special and to enjoy our new 'best' item. However, once we bring it safely home, it all too often gets stored in a bag on a shelf in our wardrobe. Out of sight and out of mind.

Change this next time you treat yourself to something special: gaze at it and smile ... you've had a wonderful experience and now it's time to enjoy your purchase and show it off to the world. Every day should be your 'best' day, so use the good stuff you've worked hard for; have fun and enjoy wearing or using it to the full. As Kate, one of my clients, put it:

Imagine going shopping in the sales at a huge bargain-basement department store. There's stuff everywhere, but among all the confusion you find some amazing pieces. And you pick up things that would be perfect for your friends, family and charities – it feels so good to give. Afterwards, you go home, and everything is so calm and all the items you found are so beautiful and just right. You relax, but then you realise that you weren't charged for any of them. Having TGCO has made me take a fresh look at my home and all my treasures. I don't miss anything I've discarded or given away, and I feel so calm and grateful for everything I have. It's freed my mind to be creative again.

It's OK to have a wobbly day

None of us is immune to a wobble – even TGCO has the odd moment. Life is full of highs and lows, but a wobbly day doesn't mean you're going down again. On the contrary: it's *just* a wobbly day and they happen to us all from time to time – you're not alone. Talking to someone (close friends and family can be very supportive), shedding a few tears or writing down how you feel can all help (as does my favourite – lemon meringue pie!). But try to keep things in perspective and remember what's important, and things won't seem so bad.

Don't wait for a better today, make today better.

TGCO Top Tip

If you can't allocate time every day to clean and tidy, don't worry. Find a decluttering solution that works for you and your daily routine. For example, tackle the small, achievable tasks first before moving on to the more difficult or time-consuming ones. Working in this way, you'll be able to tick more jobs off your to-do list and you'll feel really good about yourself and the progress you're making. You'll be back in control and you'll love living in your tidy home.

Talk to a Life Coach

A cluttered life often brings lots of debilitating and negative emotions, including stress, guilt, confusion, shame, anger and self-judgement. It's disheartening if you feel like this every time you open the fridge, a cupboard or a drawer; or even when you look at your computer desktop or email inbox. We all live such busy lives and our mental load is hard enough to carry without these additional problems. In this chapter, I've made some of my own suggestions, but if you feel swamped and need help, talking to a life coach and working with them could make all the difference.

As Mary Meadows, an experienced life coach and NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) practitioner, says:

Many of my clients choose to take part in decluttering. Whether they choose to declutter their phones from unused apps or their sock drawer of holey socks, I have yet to coach someone who hasn't uncluttered part of their life. A recent client shared with me that her sock basket was her nemesis: every morning when she looked inside it and found more pairs of socks needing sorting she thought, I am a bad mother. Every day those words were among the first things that went through her head. Through coaching around this subject, she was able to identify what it was that she needed to do, which patterns of behaviour had to be changed and, ultimately, how to change her perspective on that sock basket. Now she can laugh when it's mentioned and tells everyone she knows how coaching not only uncluttered her sock basket, but also how she now feels a new sense of confidence, resilience and optimism. It literally changed her life.

Decluttering a small area, whether it's a cupboard, a drawer or just your handbag, will support your mental health by not only giving you a sense of accomplishment, which is so important, but also creating space inside your head – space to let the good stuff in.

And it really can be a life-changer, as one of my online followers, Jennifer, can testify:

Your Instagram feed has helped me massively, not just to organise my home but also my life. I live with my three children in a two-bedroom flat, which is very hard to keep tidy, but I've managed it with your help. It's so reassuring to know that everything has its place and the children know where to put things. It's still a work in progress but I'm getting there. Without your tips and 'before-and-after' photos I would be living in a very cluttered, messy home.

Remind yourself that it's OK not to be perfect.

The positive impact of decluttering

Fiona Thomas, mental-health blogger and journalist

In a study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* in 2009,² women who said their homes felt 'cluttered' were found to have higher levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) than those who described their homes as 'restful' or 'restorative'. Although cortisol is required for good health, excessive amounts in the body are associated with mood swings and irritability, which puts some people at a higher risk of suffering from depression and anxiety. They are less able to regulate common behaviours like concentration, decision making, judgement and social interaction, and although the link between depression and elevated stress levels is complicated, there is definitely a benefit in trying to reduce stress in order to improve overall wellbeing.

As a mental-health journalist, I encounter hundreds of people, online and offline, who are struggling to deal with depression and anxiety, and one of the universal problems is an inability to deal with an ever-growing list of things to do. Whether it's paying an overdue utility bill, mailing a letter or renewing a passport, many seem to find these everyday tasks near impossible. I know this is true because I've been there myself. I've worn dirty clothes for days because I can't bear to make a dent in a month's worth of laundry. I've shoved piles of unwanted books, shoes and mismatched bikinis under the bed and shamefully snuck under the duvet at two in the afternoon. I've let credit-card debt spiral out of control because I can't bear to pick up the phone to sort out my finances. It's a well-known fact that depressed people find it difficult to take care of, well, anything. And it's taken me years to realise that all of this clutter, mental and physical, can be tackled successfully in small steps.

In fact, taking that first tiny step in the right direction can give you the momentum to take the next one, and then the next, until, eventually, balance is restored and, before you know it, you'll have conquered a mountain of boring tasks, such as cancelling that out-of-date insurance policy and vacuuming behind the sofa.

The positive impact that decluttering can have on our minds should not be underestimated. This doesn't mean that a well-organised home will lead to infinite happiness, but taking control of your surroundings will most likely help you to feel more in control of life in general. Not only that, but studies have found that people who do simple tasks such as making their bed each morning are 19 per cent more likely to get a good night's sleep.³ Depression is often the cause of sleep problems, and insomnia can make anxiety substantially more difficult to manage, so let me tell you first-hand that good-quality sleep is one of the simplest ways to address low moods at the onset of anxiety.

However, don't just take my word for it. I speak to people every day who have found taking control of their clutter has had a tangible impact on their mental wellbeing. For instance, one woman recently told me that tidying for just 10 minutes helped calm her mind and that putting each item back in its rightful home is representative of the mental burden she carries around all day. The act of having

clear physical surroundings helps her mind feel just as organised. I've also spoken to psychologists who champion the soothing effect of clearing out when it comes to managing the symptoms of mental illness. One told me that the weight of responsibility we feel when we're overwhelmed is lightened, and it gives us a sense of mastery, action and pleasure which can alleviate the air of hopelessness that often accompanies depression.

Unfortunately, knowing that decluttering has an elusive healing power doesn't automatically mean that people with depression and anxiety can easily get on board. Feeling sluggish, tearful and unable to get out of bed is hard enough, so the seemingly small act of reaching for a duster can take days or even weeks of self-motivation to put into action. In the same way that exercise, a balanced diet and talking therapy can aid in recovery for mental illness, I can say with confidence that tidying up is just as important.

The great thing about TGCO is that there are no unrealistic standards to live up to. If all you managed to do was take out the bin today, then that's OK, because small steps lead to more steps and before you know it, you'll be standing in the light, feeling organised and ready to take on the world.

Starting small is better than not starting at all.

10 ways to . . .

a tidy and calm you

Successful decluttering is all about being relaxed yet organised. If you feel in control and chilled about all the jobs you have to do, the task will not only be much easier, but also more enjoyable. Here are some tips and hints on how to have a tidy house . . . and mind:

1.

MAKE YOUR BED FIRST THING IN THE MORNING

It's a small accomplishment, but it will set the tone for the rest of the day. Your bedroom should be your sanctuary and a made bed will make it look put together and tidy. This will help you declutter your space and, in turn, your mind.

2.

PLAN THE WEEK AHEAD EVERY SUNDAY

When you have a plan, you'll start each day with focus. Planning can reduce stress and will make you more productive. You'll feel more in control because you won't have to worry about what is happening tomorrow or the next day.

3.

DO AN INVENTORY OF EVERY ROOM

You should know what you have in your home. While you're decluttering, make a list of everything important that is left in each room; that way you'll know when something isn't where it's supposed to be.

4.

CHECK YOUR CUPBOARDS AND DRAWERS

It's so easy to stuff things into a cupboard or drawer and forget about them, but that is how clutter starts to build up. Carve out some time on a regular basis to get rid of anything old, expired or unnecessary and you won't feel as nervous when you open up that junk drawer.

5.

IF SOMETHING DOESN'T MAKE YOU SMILE, THEN SAY FAREWELL

Surround yourself with things that make you happy. That dress that is two sizes too small and makes you feel bad every time you see it? Not worth keeping.

6.

IF YOU NO LONGER HAVE A USE FOR SOMETHING, DISCARD IT

Raise your hand if you have chargers in your house for items you got rid of years ago . . . Don't hoard things that you don't use regularly or even at all – they just take up space.

7.

PUT EVERYTHING AWAY NEATLY AND TIDILY

Don't rush. Even though the mess may be overwhelming, you'll be glad in the long term if you give yourself time and work in an orderly manner.

8.

PLAY SOME RELAXING MUSIC OR A PODCAST

If you dread a task, it helps to incorporate some fun into it, so that it feels less daunting. Dance around the room and act silly while you're tidying up and it will be over in no time. I love to lip-sync!

9.

REMEMBER THAT ONE TICK ON YOUR TO-DO LIST IS BETTER THAN NONE

Break up your list into easily achievable tasks. There is a great sense of accomplishment when you cross things off, so make sure that you finish at least one thing each day, even if it's just making your bed.

10.

PLAN YOUR REWARDS AND GIVE YOURSELF SOME 'ME' TIME

You can't take care of other people if you don't take care of yourself. Make sure you give yourself time to do things that make you happy and incentivise you. For example, reward yourself with a bubble bath after you've organised your kitchen.



2: How to Declutter: Room by Room

Your home should tell the story of who you are and house a collection of everything you love. It can inspire you to go out into the world and do great things, and then welcome you back into a calm, relaxed and happy place to recharge your batteries.

To start the decluttering process, I want you to walk around your home, room by room, and get inspired. Look carefully and critically at each room and ask yourself:

How can I improve it?

Can I manage the available space better?

Is it working storage-wise?

How can I declutter it?

What sort of atmosphere and mood do I want – more spacious, effective and functional; exciting and motivational; or cosy, relaxing and calming?

Your overall objective is to create a calm and happy space that you feel good about coming home to – one that works for you, so you live happily ever after. Make the most of each room and it will make you smile every time you walk into it. Good things really do come from a tidy, decluttered home. By getting rid of the things and clutter you don't want and need, you can embrace the belongings that bring you joy.

Analyse the rooms individually, while remembering that they all fit together into a bigger picture. Think about the sort of mood and environment you want to create in your home as a whole.

It's Easy Peasy

The TGCO Decluttering Plan is simple. You need to declutter first to organise later. Here are the four essential steps to transforming your home – and your life.

1. Remove

Collect all the items in the room – and I mean *all*.

2. Sort and purge

Place the items in four piles:

Keep

Donate

Bin

Sell

Review all the items in each pile and only keep the ones you use on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, plus those you really love. This is the time to be ruthless and to let go of all the broken, old things you've stuffed into a cupboard or drawer, out of sight and out of mind. And get rid of the stuff you bought on sale because it was a 'bargain' or 'might come in useful one day' but has never been used. If it's still in the original wrapping with the label or tags, the chances are you don't need it, so get shot of it now. If your cupboards and drawers are filled with unused surplus items, it will be impossible to stay organised and soon the mess will be everywhere, and you'll have to start tidying up all over again.

3. Clean

It's now time to clean the room and remove all traces of dirt and dust from the whole area. And don't just focus on what's visible on the outside; attack the cupboards, drawers and those high shelves, too, that are usually invisible. Pull out furniture and clean behind and below it. You want everything to be really clean before you start work on the next step.

4. Organise

Once the room is clean, it's time for the final step: to put things back and start organising. When your belongings are stored and tidied away your home will be more appealing. It will look clean, neat and calm and that will make *you* feel happy.

You'll feel great

Whenever I go through the decluttering process with my clients I compare it to an exercise class. You start off really energised and raring to go, then you hit the middle part and that's when you start to check your watch and wonder when it will end and why you started. But by the time you get to the end, wow: you feel great, you're blown away by what you've achieved and you want more!

Keep the items that make you smile and discard the ones that don't ... it's that simple.

How Often Should You Declutter?

Well, it's up to you and how messy your home is, but I recommend you make lists of what you need to do every day, once a week and once a month, plus seasonal and annual tasks. For example, you'll need to do things like making the beds every day; but some jobs, such as cleaning the bath, may only need to be tackled once a week, and others, like sorting out your spring, summer, autumn and winter wardrobe, can be done on a seasonal basis. This will make your life a lot easier and will dramatically reduce the time needed when the next tidying-up job arises.

TGCO Top Tip

There are lots of great ways to get rid of the items that you don't use. You could donate them to charity, sell them on an auction site, pass them on to someone you know who will benefit, or simply dispose of them. Decluttering these items will make room for the ones you do use.

Declutter Your Bedroom

The perfect bedroom should be a sanctuary where you can unwind and escape from the daily grind. It should be a relaxing space, free of clutter, with no clothes strewn across the floor or piles of paperwork, gadgets or kids' toys. If you want your bedroom to be peaceful and tranquil, you can do without these distractions. They need to be tidied away, moved to another room or discarded.

A stylish aesthetic, while keeping the mood calming and gentle, will make you smile every time you open the door.

Getting started

Your bedroom will feel more spacious and welcoming if it's clutter-free and everything has its own place. It will be easier to keep clean and tidy too, so you'll spend less time on household chores. It's a special and very personal room in your home that often gets overlooked because you (and your partner) are the only people who go in there. Because it's not on show and may only be used for sleeping, there's a tendency to think it doesn't matter as much as other rooms in the house. I think that's wrong. If you can create a stylish aesthetic while keeping the mood calming and gentle, it will make you smile every time you open the door. You'll feel more relaxed, less stressed and sleep will come much easier.

Following the four steps of my Decluttering Plan (see [here](#)), start off by clearing out anything that doesn't belong and bin or donate any items you no longer need. Focus on what you want to keep and how best to store it all in your wardrobe, chest of drawers or bedside cabinets.

Every day

Some tasks can't be put off for later or tomorrow. I make my bed first thing every morning. I see it as the first achievable task of the day. I enjoy plumping up the pillows, smoothing out the creases in the sheets, shaking the duvet and misting it all with some soothing aromatherapy linen spray. This may sound like a lot of work, but it takes me all of five minutes, it makes me feel good and I always smile seeing it looking so calm and inviting when I come home in the evening at the end of a long day's work.

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