

Let's Talk Trash

Dump, Donate, Sell or Give it Away? Why & How.

First, we should strive to eliminate waste in our lives! The less waste we produce, the more efficiently we are managing our lives and the less negative impact we have on others. Where do we start?

Shop at Home!

If you can't find it, even if you know you have it, you have to buy it—again!

Organization is the golden key that can make a difference and slow down the spin cycle of consumerism and waste. You should be able to see at a glance not only where it is, but how much of it you have. Resist that urge to run out and buy new. Stop. Think. Reuse. Shop Smart. Start your shopping experience in your home—not in the stores. Today's toys, gadgets, clothes, furniture, electronics etc. become tomorrow's trash—sooner or later; it is inevitable.

You have control over a finite amount of space in your life. Part of making the most out of your life is also making the most of your space. Wouldn't it be great to leave this world as you came into it? Perhaps even in better condition? To come anywhere close to that, we have to think about the wake of trash we leave behind as we choose to sail or motor through our lives.

Cull the Crap & Clutter!

Now that you've decided to deal with the excess, what do you do with all this stuff? When you're ready to let go, the question becomes how to let go. We need to think about keeping items out of the landfill for as long as humanly possible. An item reused or recycled is one less item in the trash—for now.

And if your motives aren't as green or as liberal as your neighbor when it comes to thinking about the earth and the environment, then consider this. Garbage used to be cheap—for many of us, practically free. Those days are over. Waste disposal is becoming an increasingly expensive commodity. Residential waste fees continue to climb. Fees for dumping specific items are on the rise. Commercial companies that will come to haul away your stuff charge you a hefty fee for the disposal—even if you think your 'junk' has value. Restrictions on what can be thrown away continue to tighten. Recycling programs expand and require more sorting and care as well as restrictions on what can be recycled.

Decisions, decisions

Is the item still new or usable? What is its true market value today? Can it be used or reused by someone? You can:

- try to sell it yourself,
- have someone else sell it for you,
- donate it to a 501(c)3 charity,
- give it away,
- pay someone else to decide and deal with it for you, or
- dump it.

Sell It Yourself

Is it really, truly worth the effort to sell it? Most people significantly overestimate the value of their used goods. What you paid \$500 for a few years ago, might only net you \$5 at a garage sale. Garage sales can be good if you have a large quantity of items and especially a large quantity of in-demand items typically found at garage sales. For example, baby clothes, young children's clothes, or mountains of costume jewelry for which you'll be able to get a good volume of nickels, dimes, quarters and dollars. For better, bigger ticket items, you should consider placing an inexpensive ad in the local paper, or sell it online at Craigslist or eBay. However, you really need to assess if the possible sale price is worth the effort of time in taking good digital photographs, composing and uploading the ad, dealing with inquiry emails and phone calls, talking and meeting with prospective buyers, and logistics on moving or shipping larger items.

Let Someone Else Sell It For You

Another option for certain items is consignment. There are a number of consignment store options for items such as furniture, antiques, jewelry, and clothing. Again, the market value of your item must be excellent, because consignment stores typically only pay you 40 to 60% of the price they get for the item and you may have to pay them to come pick it up for you.

Donate It to a 501(c)3 Charity

If you itemize your taxes, donating the stuff you unearthed in your latest round of spring cleaning could be more profitable than the average yard sale. A \$500 contribution would spell a \$135 tax break for someone in the 27% tax bracket! However, do keep in mind that you still only get to deduct today's fair market value of the goods you are donating—not the price you originally paid! And most charities have become quite fussy on the items and condition of items that they will accept. Not sure how to estimate the market value of your items? For an excellent guide to the FMV of items typically donated, please see this great chart by the Salvation Army.

Forewarned is forearmed. It can be a rude awakening to arrive with a carload of goods, only to learn that a large portion of the cargo suddenly becomes an unpleasant venture to the dump or back to the closets. Usually charities cannot accept anything broken or with any kind of tear or soiling. Good Will Services and St. Vincent de Paul do not accept toys—surprisingly enough. They accept most types of books, but no type of periodical. Magazines should be recycled along with any kind of paper or cardboard. Battered women's shelters (at least in certain locations) can accept most women's things like cosmetics—new or used.

Give It Away

- You can try giving your item away to friends or family or co-workers.
- You can try giving it away to a stranger online: freecycle or craigslist. (When appropriate, pictures help significantly)

Pay Someone Else to Decide and Deal with it for You

Once you've decided which items to let go, rather than decide whether to donate or dump, you can pay a company like 1-800-got-junk to come and take it away for you. They state they try to recycle or donate as much as possible. The rest goes to the dump. Regardless, you are charged based on how much and what type of material they are removing and it is not tax-deductible and it is not a small, nominal fee, but a considerable charge.

You can also hire your friendly, full-service professional organizer to help you with as much or as little of the process as you need. Declan is usually much more affordable and provides a more complete and tailored experience. In addition, to the in-home organizing, Declan can help you determine which items should go where. He can help you determine which items to donate, their value, take them to the best-suited charity or charity of your choice and return an itemized receipt to you for your tax records. Declan just charges his normal hourly rate.

He can also assist you with a garage sale—if that's the route you want to go. Declan is also adept at placing online ads for goods if you want to sell or give it away privately. At the end of the day, any items destined for the dump are quickly loaded on his "magic truck" and he's off to the dump for you, leaving you with a renewed home and living experience.

The Dump Experience

The minimal charge (admission fee) at the dump is about \$20.00. Then the actual fees are dictated by the admissions person based on a subjective assessment of the volume and type of trash you are dumping. A basic truckload can be range from \$30 to \$80 depending on the content. They charge \$20.00 per cubic yard, but again, it's really based on one person's experienced assessment. There are additional charges for mattresses (any size), TV's (proportionate to size) and PC's, to name a few, and for volume of "greens" – all garden related debris. And some things are not accepted, such as hazardous materials and pet waste.

The dump drop-off stations are basically huge warehouse buildings. Everything gets dumped onto its respective pile – general trash, greens, construction materials, etc. There is a massive grid system overhead for lighting and for spraying water on the trash piles for air quality control to keep the dust (and God knows what else) down. The staff wears protective clothing and face masks. There are all kinds of directional, cautionary and warning signs. It is quite something to see, especially when the sprayers are activated because it looks like a massive gas chamber giving one the sense of being "chemically treated" in addition to sensory experience of overwhelming "fragrance."

"Get in, unload, get out" is without question the name of the game here, and fortunately the facilities and staff are organized well enough to streamline the whole process, but it is always a time-consuming activity and requires a minimum of one hour of scheduling. Recycling closes earlier than the regular trash area, so getting to the dump before 4pm may need to be factored into a schedule. There is almost always a line of trucks waiting to get in. It's definitely an experience that you want to leave to others.