

The 10 Steps of Downsizing

1.) Write a list of all the items you love and can't live without; it will help you bid adieu to things that didn't make the list. It's hard to persuade people they can't take everything with them, but by keeping what's on your wish list, you won't be upset about the things you can't keep.”

2.) Start thinning out your belongings at least three months before the move. Take some time each day, or one morning each week, to go through that jammed coat closet or overflowing filing cabinet. Paper is the real killer, so tackle it one box at a time. The same goes for photos, which require a lot of attention.

3.) Get a feel for the size of your new rooms by comparing them to rooms of similar dimensions in your present home. For instance, your living-room-to-be might be roughly the same size as your current bedroom. You may think you can squeeze in two sofas, but this kind of reality check could help you realize that only one will fit comfortably.

4.) Heavily edit areas with items that don't have as much sentimental value. Take the kitchen, for example; most people don't need 10 mixing bowls and won't get teary-eyed over losing a second spatula. If you're downsizing from a house to a condo, target the garage. Snow shovels, the lawn mower, ladders - you won't need any of them.

5.) Don't throw anything in the garbage. Recycle, reuse, sell and donate instead. As tempting and easy as it is to pitch wire hangers, musty clothes and shabby furnishings, be environmentally responsible and find a home for everything. A can of Comet with a few shakes of powder left could make another person's sink sparkle if you don't want it. Consider

giving supplies to a shelter, neighbor or cleaning lady.

6.) Label 3 bins: Keep, Sell & Donate. (bins should be manageable when full). For the average downsize, keep only one-third to one-half of your belongings.

7.) Get an objective opinion. If you can't decide whether to keep or kiss that dusty '70s-era sewing machine goodbye. It's good to have someone who'll say, 'Oh, please, you never use that!'" It might just be the kick you need.

8.) When selling your goods, try an auction for high-end items. Look for reputable estate sale specialists and antique and secondhand dealers. Often, they can sell or buy all of your wares or put you in touch with booksellers and other specialty dealers. Some dealers will come to your home, take what you don't want and even drop off the charity stuff. That way you won't be trudging all over town. If you can't sell an item, donate it to a shelter.

9.) Use floor plans to prearrange your furniture before the move. This is another useful reality check. To start, draw plans if you don't have any, and sketch in a furniture layout. Then look at the plans realistically; if you've crammed in side tables, armories and chairs, you need to edit more. Don't wait until after you move to contend with furniture you'll just end up tripping over.

10.) Once you get to the packing stage, use a color-coded system to organize all of your boxes. Choose a color for each room and mark the boxes destined for that room with a coordinating color sticker. You can also do the same thing numerically; for example, if room No. 1 is the kitchen, then all boxes marked No. 1 will go there. This is a simple and efficient organizing idea to make the move that much easier!
