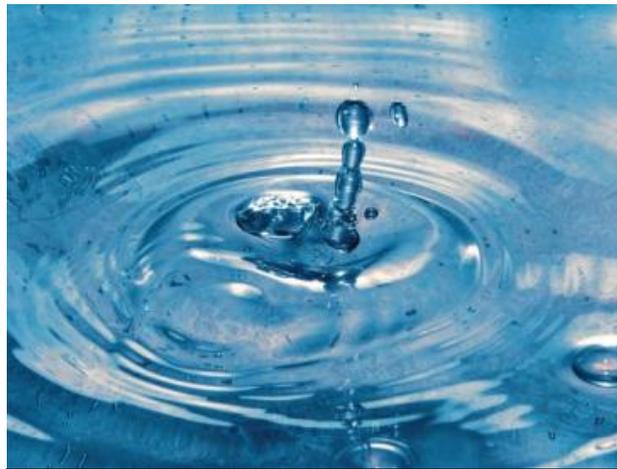


## Do Your Surroundings Become You?

You can read several meanings into this title, can't you? Do your surroundings inspire you? Or do they bring you down, with more clutter than you can tolerate? Does the clutter reflect how fast your life is passing by? Do your things bring you comfort or is it more like protection from something else?

If you've been through a **big life change** lately - of your choice or not - then your surroundings really *may not* become you. Perhaps a parent or spouse passed away. Your relationship splits up. You choose to leave corporate for another career or to go out on your own. You or someone you love is facing major surgery or treatment. You decide you want to move and downsize.

**When the dust settles**, you may find yourself surrounded by your past—your belongings or home reflect who you were before your transition, but now things have changed. You may be feeling this already - that some of your belongings are no longer in sync with the person you are *becoming*. They really feel like ... **clutter**.



*What are the ripple effects of clutter in your life?*

### What to do ?

**Approaching life in chapters allows you** to close the door on the past (while still honoring it) and fully embrace your present. When you live this way, you give yourself permission to declutter so you'll be more comfortable with choices you make. You'll keep the best or the essence of the past and bring it forward, while making room for your next chapter's experiences.



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**What is “organized enough” to you?** Only you and your household members are the judges of what is “organized enough.” If you try to organize to someone else’s standards, the systems will be harder to keep up with because they were not designed for your lifestyle or ways of thinking and remembering. And so the clutter returns in these cases. Find your own answer.

**Your values relate to organizing.** Values help you figure out which belongings you really need in your life. Love to learn? Weed out and reorganize something else, not the books. Keep what you love, what gives you joy, sustains and motivates you.

**Decluttering and reorganizing systems** plays a big part in keeping our calm. If we hold onto the ways we used to manage life and our things, and yet this life change has occurred, it's harder to accept what is and move on.

Suddenly these systems work against us instead of with us, even if they once fit beautifully into our lives. New systems for new times. Systems do outgrow their owners, especially as we experience life's changes. A parent moves in, you adopt a child, add a puppy, or are widowed: in each case, your systems need to shift as your circumstances change, so that you keep up (and keep calm!).

**Declutter - internally:** Internal clutter includes old ideas, attitudes, beliefs and reactions which no longer serve the person you are. They may be hold-overs from how you were raised or from a past relationship -but there's the point - these are in the past. You may believe what others say about you, just because they've always said it (distracted, not creative, not with it). But these gremlins, too, can be decluttered. New chapter, fresh start.

When we declutter, the mental and physical space **we create** by letting go of things that belong in our past gives us **new energy** for our next chapter. Our focus is forward, with respect for what’s behind us— because what’s behind us is a large part of who we have become.