

Clean Your Closet, Change Your Life

By Rick Wright, Executive Coach

When one's life and/or career become too complicated and stressful, and their desire is to simplify, my coaching is 'clean your closet, change your life'. Here's the exercise: Go to your master bedroom closet, throw out everything that's not useful and keep everything that is useful. The criteria for 'useful' is that you've used the object or article of clothing during the past year, it's not broken, torn or shabby in any way, and you feel positive about it.

It amazes me how many people can't do that. The truth is, if we can't let go of things outside of ourselves that aren't useful to us, we'll never let go of thoughts, behaviors and attitudes that aren't useful inside of us.

When you go to throw out an old jacket, and choose to keep it instead, you have an emotion. Perhaps it's a result of a fond memory when you last wore that jacket, or maybe it's your all-time favorite despite moth holes or missing buttons. Basically, that object reflects something deeper within you. That's why people accumulate 'stuff' at home or in the office. We forget that the quality or memory represented by the object is always within us.

When you let go of what's not useful, clarity of mind occurs. Your life becomes simpler, there are fewer steps, everything is easier to see, and more open, and ultimately your impact is greater. The process actually allows you to see your true authentic nature. (It also lets you see fears, shortcomings, and obstacles, so it's not for the weak-hearted. Perseverance is essential).

The same technology for inner transformation applies to organizations. I believe organizations and systems can only transform as the people within them transform. And, the CEO must be more willing than anyone else to change within to effect change in an organization. If you don't expect, or at least strive for, simplicity and authenticity within, how can you expect the organization you lead to achieve streamlined operations towards its mission and vision?

Consider this: What objects do you think are important and surround yourself with? Some CEO offices have tons of paperwork. Others hardly any at all, and there's a big difference. The one without the paperwork is likely BEING a leader. Another CEO wants to hold on to all the information, perhaps because somewhere they inherently believe that's where the power lies, rather than within them.

Take a look around your office. Clean it out. Get rid of everything that's not useful. Cut away the drag. Throw out all those post-it notes that don't make sense. How about that stack of projects you never seem to get to? Why not pass it off to a staff person? (You haven't gotten to it anyway. Nothing's happening. It's only a wish).

The greatest benefit people derive from simplicity is a strong inner life. They don't grasp for so much. They're content, inspired and happy. Their quality of life is good. Want some? Go clean your closet.