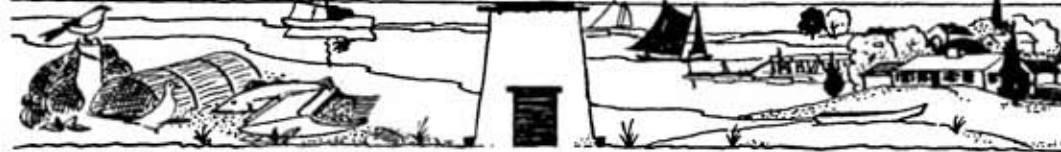


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2 Sections

Downsizing

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF A MAJOR LIFESTYLE CHANGE

After 50-plus years of living, many of us have accumulated an impressive amount of stuff. But what do we do with it all when we make the decision to downsize to a smaller home or condo? Especially since condos in today's market are likely to have one-third the closet and storage space of the homes in which we raised our families!

While the idea of downsizing may seem formidable, many of us will opt to do it sooner or later. With thoughtful preparation and the proper supports in place, this major life change can actually be smooth sailing. Here's a secret: Bring a professional organizer on board to help you whittle down and organize your belongings, plan and coordinate your move, and settle you into your new digs.

NAPO-New England (New England Chapter of the National Association of Professional Organizers) is the region's "organizing authority" and a great resource for finding professional organizers in your area. The Web site (www.napo-newengland.com) lists organizers by their cities and towns, and includes their various specialties. Almost half of NAPO-New England members specialize in working with empty nesters and seniors, and 60 percent specialize in downsizing.

Downsizing inevitably involves letting go of things you are attached to. Experienced organizers understand that this is not always easy to do. Professional organizer Annie Taber of All's In Order (allsinorder.com) in West Yarmouth says, "Moving and relocating is a very emotional thing. This generation of today's seniors is one that has had a whole lifetime of collecting possessions that they have brought with them from home to home. They are

very different from their parents, many of whom were immigrants who had to leave everything behind when they came to this country."

To help you decide what stays and what goes, some professional organizers advise asking yourself the following questions: 1) Do I currently use it? 2) When was the last time I used it? 3) Will it cost me money if I do not have it? 4) Could I get it back if I needed it? Organizers are great resources for what to do with the things you won't be taking with you. Furniture, high-end clothing, glassware and decorative items can be brought to consignment stores for resale. Charitable organizations accept donations in a variety of categories. Antique stores may be interested in purchasing your antiques. There are also

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Web sites you can access, like eBay, Craig's list, and freecycle.org, which will allow you to auction off, sell or recycle items.

Digital archiving is an emerging trend because it both preserves important papers and allows for their compact storage, getting rid of clutter and freeing up space. NAPO-New England organizers who specialize in this area will organize, chronicle, scan and archive documents as well as photos. Most people keep archive copies in remote storage as a safeguard in case of a disaster. In the aftermath of a fire or flood, for example, this will make it possible for you to re-establish your identity, file emergency insurance claims and replace your possessions.

Professional organizer Heidi Solomon, of P.O.S.H. Consulting in Brookline, has two clients for whom she is creating digital archives. For one client with art and antique collections, Solomon photographed every item, chronicling important details about each, including its appraised value. Another client, who is charged with keeping track of her family's treasure-trove of photos, is having them digitally archived for posterity - so she'll be able to pass the family history along to her children and grandchildren.

Professional organizers also manage moves. They'll pack you up, coordinate the movers and unpack your belongings.

Many organizers provide space planning and design and will work closely with you to ensure your new home is set-up with optimum comfort, safety and functionality in mind. And before you unpack your clothes, why not install your dream closet?! Organizers are up to date on the latest closet and storage systems on the market, and

will help you improvise if you have to do it on a budget. They are also pros at setting up attractive and practical home offices and creating filing systems that will allow you to work productively and stay organized.

Eva Julius of HOME (HomeOffice Made Easy) says, "Whether the decision to move has been decided or still being pondered, the earlier one starts sorting through one's belongings, the less overwhelmed one may feel. More time can make for an easier transition in every aspect of a move. While living in your home it is highly beneficial to routinely go through and 'pass on' what you are no longer using or needing. Having previously worked with a company designing closets, home offices and entertainment systems, the importance of efficient use of space cannot be underestimated. Finding solutions in items that do double duty is most helpful."