

Daniel Hall Presents



Episode 64

How to Declutter Your Workspace So You're More Productive & Profitable

With Rita Emmett

Welcome to this episode of the Real Fast Results podcast! Today, Rita Emmett is in the house! Rita is an expert who helps people overcome their tendency to procrastination and to become more efficient. Last time she offered her [advice on this show](#), it was so well-received that she was invited back.

Not only does she help guide people with their problems through her work, but she is also a bestselling author of four books. The first is called *The Procrastinator's Handbook: Mastering the Art of Doing It Now*. This was the topic that she covered on the last show she was on. The second book was *The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off*. One of her most recent books covers the topic which will be discussed today. It is *The Clutter-Busting Handbook: Clean It Up, Clear It Out, And Keep Your Life Clutter-Free*.

Promise: Being a Clutter Collector is a Habit not a Personality Trait

The promise we can make today is that we will help you understand being a hoarder, a pack rat, or a clutter collector is not a personality trait that we're born with. It's not a character flaw. It's not like, "Oh, this is how I am, and this is how I'll always be." It's a habit, and that habit can be broken.

Why should you listen today? Well, if you have plenty of space, the clutter doesn't bother you, and there are no emotions involved, you probably don't need to listen. But, if you would like to get rid of some of your clutter, if you would like to feel like you're in control of it and on top of it, then you'll want to listen. **I feel like most of us have discovered that if you have clutter and chaos in your workspace and living space, you have clutter and chaos in your mind and in your heart.**

It's really, really hard to think when there's clutter around. It's hard to find what you want, and a lot of times, when you can't find it, you go out and buy another one. I used to be close to being a hoarder. There were paths through my dining room, and when I started to convert, I went through my kitchen cabinets and found seven little bottles of green food coloring, each one missing a couple of drops. Each time I wanted it, I went out and bought more because I couldn't find it. So, when we get rid of clutter, not only can you find things and know where to put things, but those feelings of embarrassment, and chaos, and shame decline as well. You lose the feeling that you don't have control.

It's typical for people to feel like they can't let anyone in their office or in their house because things are just awful. These types of feelings go away when you de-clutter, and they are replaced by excitement. Another reason why you might want to listen to this is because I believe clutter sucks the energy out of the marrow of our bones. Have you ever said, "I'm going to de-clutter the office," and you get to the door and decide that you really need a nap? You just get so exhausted thinking about it that it's hard to attack. We become more productive, and more energized, and clearer thinking when we keep things uncluttered.

The Way You Think about Clutter

What is the big picture? Well, first of all, I think we need to understand a couple of things. **Most of us do not have clutter-busting skills because there has never been a generation that has as much clutter as we have, and it doesn't matter what age you are.** Six year olds in the past have never had as much clutter as six year olds today. Teenagers, adults, grandparents have never been hit with this much clutter before. Doesn't it seem like, with the beginning of the 21st century, we have been flooded with more clutter, more paper, and more information than ever, ever before. It's almost accelerated, what's happening. So, that's part of the big picture.

Here's one of the important things. **I believe that we could give you all of the tips in the world, and they don't help unless you change your way of thinking.** In the past, we could have room for this, and we could have room for that. Do you remember people saying that by the year 2000 we would be paper-free? Before that, we did have room for all of our paper. Now we don't. So all of the tips in the world won't help unless we change the way that we think. How do we do that? We are moving towards some specifics, but the basic way, the realistic way, is to start asking real questions and start giving realistic answers.

Think about when you keep something. Sometimes we say, “Well, I’m going to keep it in case I need it,” or in case someone needs it. But, when you need it, you forgot you had it. That’s the real answer, anyway. Even more realistic is, you think you might have it, or you are pretty sure you have it, but you can’t find it under all your clutter. So, to keep something that you don’t need or use now, that you might need or use in the future, is... We need to change that way of thinking.

Why Do I Keep It?

There are lots of answers to the question, “Why do I keep it?” One thing you might do is try to save things that still seem to retain value. For instance, you might save an old camera even though you have just bought a new one. That is so unique to the 21st century. Really, before this century started, we didn’t say, “Oh, this gadget still works, but I’m going to get that new camera, or phone, or computer because it’s got more bells and whistles.” Another layer of that is, “I spent a lot of money on this, so I just can’t get rid of it.”

So much about clutter is trying to be realistic because we have to put boundaries on our stuff. I want to go back to the point about spending money on it, but I want to comment on boundaries. Any kind of clutter that you have, whether it’s electronic, or maybe you sew and you buy fabric, or you have a collection, when it starts to get out of hand, we need to set a boundary. If you have a box for it, and the box fills up, you don’t need another box. One of the most popular quotes from *The Clutter-Busting Handbook* is, “**When you don’t have enough room for all your stuff, you don’t need more room, you need less stuff.**” Again, that’s unique to the 21st century.

I want to go back because, when you talk about gadgets, well, a lot of times it cost a lot for that old camera or that old phone. Now you may have a new one, but the other one was so expensive, but, you’re never going to use it. So, what you need to do is find ways to pass it on to somebody who will use it. Our police station collects old phones. You just drop your phone in a box in the hallway. You don’t even have to go all the way in. They pass these on to homeless people, or women in danger, like abused wives. They don’t even need to pay for any service in order to hit 911. I didn’t know that. They can hit 911 even if they can’t make a call or text.

As you look around, you’re going to find someone that’s going to want your old stuff. Some people will actually pay for it, but I don’t have time to discuss eBay and stuff like that. But, we do have areas where you can bring your old printer, your old computer, etc. Otherwise, we would have stuff stacked up to the ceiling, but the reality check is, “Why am I keeping this?” And, it may be because you paid a lot for it. A lot of the time, the reality is that you might have needed it for one thing, but you’ll never use it again.

We have a friend who had a gadget that converts video tapes to DVDs, and he just told everyone he knew, “Don’t buy one. Borrow mine. I only use it once in a while.” I

thought that was smart. And, we have neighbors down the way that have a shed, and the three houses in a row nearest to it pitch in for one snow blower, one wheelbarrow, etc., and I think that's something that we need to do when it's a gadget we know that we aren't going to need often. As a professional speaker, a lot of use swap microphones all the time. "Oh, you need this, I got one. Here, use this."

Lots of times, we say, "Oh, it's still good," or "It's too good to get rid of." **But, by donating it, someone who would really love it could have it.**

Sentimental Clutter

Sentimental clutter is also something that needs to be discussed. That's a big thing. And, first of all, we have to recognize that our memories are in our minds and in our hearts, not in the velvet, sequined Elvis pillow from Vegas. **So often, we keep stuff for the memories.** I was going through a big box with a friend named Patty, and she had a lot of playbills. I said, "What's this about," and she said, "I don't remember." I asked, "Well, who did you go with?" She still said, "I don't remember," so I asked, "Patty, what kind of memory is this bringing back, really?"

So many of the things we keep for memories are in a box packed away. We don't see it, and we don't remember we had it. When my mom passed away, what we did was, everyone picked one or two things that we wanted. Each of us them out. Our son has a cross, and when you walk in his house, it's the first thing that you'll see, and he'll say, "Oh, that's my grandmother's." My daughter has a jar of seashells that she and Grandma collected as they walked along the shores of Florida. I have her bible. Each of us has one or two things that are out, and we do have memories, but if we had a ton of it, it would be packed away.

This woman told me a story that really matters a lot. Her mother collected salt and pepper shakers. She had 123 sets of salt and pepper shakers. She actually went to a thing like a conference, or a convention, of people that collect salt and pepper shakers. Well, Mom loved her salt and pepper shakers, and she passed away. This woman, Ginger, had these, and she didn't want to put them on display like Mom did. They were like the focal point of the corner of Mom's dining room, and she didn't know what to do. As she fell asleep thinking about it, she realized, "Mom loves me. She would not like this thing, that she loved, to become my burden. Mom would not want me to keep this and be burdened by it."

Ginger had a wonderful time giving these away. She had a couple of granddaughters, and they wrapped them and put them all in an assortment of little bags. The girls gave them to their teachers at school, and their scout leader, and their doctor's receptionist. Then, she gave a big stack of over 60 of them to a friend that was going to have a table at an exhibition hall, and when people came to look at her products, she'd tell them to take a salt and pepper shaker. One woman said, "I can't decide. I wish I had them all," and she said, "You come back at the end of the day, and anything that's left is yours."

People took and loved the stuff that Ginger was burdened by. **I think it's important for us to get realistic about the memories.** Do those eight boxes of things in the closet really bring back the memories they are intended? Do you even remember what's in those boxes? We could go over a lot more questions if we had time, but do you understand the example? If you ask a question, give a realistic answer, instead of, "I don't need it, but somebody, somewhere, some place in time, in some spot on this planet, might need it." Like it's your job. One guy's answer was, "Well, the reason I keep it is because I've had it for 30 years." And, I was like, "That's your reason? When you move, was it a hassle to have all of these boxes of *National Geographic*?" He said, "It did, but I have had them for 30 years."

We need to get more realistic with our answers because we have talked about how all of this clutter impacts our emotions and our minds for clarity and for space. And, getting rid of it is such a freeing feeling, isn't it? You just feel lighter. There's no way to guarantee this. We can't make this part of the promise, but some people say, as they get rid of their clutter, they feel an internal clutter leaving them. They feel like their mind is clearer and their heart is clearer. One woman said, "Honestly, I feel like I got rid of my grudges when I got rid of the clutter." We can't promise that. I don't think that happens to everyone, but it has really happened to a lot of people. It's kind of cool.

Tips on Getting Rid of Clutter

I could give a few favorite tips, if you want a couple. Number one comes from a woman named Joanne in Toronto. **If it takes less than three minutes, do it now.** That sounds so simple, but it changed my life. It could be, "There's a coffee cup here. It's not mine, but I'm on my way to the kitchen and I'll take it with me." Almost everything that you take out of the medicine cabinet, whether it's your toothbrush, your toothpaste, whatever, it takes less than three minutes to put back. It's not enough to make you late for work, but it makes a profound impact on the bathroom. So, the bathroom is no longer a mess. That's one of the best ones I've heard.

There's one that I've mentioned already. **If you don't have enough room for all of your stuff, you don't need more room, you need less stuff.** If you can make that something that you live by, it's fabulous. Another one is, besides the realistic answer, is if you don't have a place for it. It's kind of like what grandmothers used to say, "A place for everything, and everything in its place." If you don't have a place for it, maybe it doesn't belong in your house. When you go through your papers, if you don't have a place to file it away, you're just going to do the clutter shuffle. You're going to move the papers from here to here, and you're still going to have a stack.

I remember when I first started, I started putting my receipts, bills, and warranties in shoeboxes under the bed. I'm big on shoeboxes. Then, I moved to a friend giving me boxes from work that the copy paper came in, and files fit in there. Then, for real cheap, I got a hanging file, and then I got a cabinet. It was a two-drawer filing cabinet that I

had gotten at a garage sale, and I stuck it in my dining room. It didn't look like it belonged, but it was life changing for me to have a place for my papers.

One other thing that's pretty simple for paper... Maybe we should do a whole program on paper clutter... A lot of people think of their wastebasket as an evil monster that gobbles up all of their important stuff. We need to change our attitude again and think of it as a friend, a sweet friend that needs to be nurtured and nourished, so we need to feed him. We need to feed our waste basket. **Feed Your Wastebasket!!** Those are just, kind of, a few beginner's tips. Just those little changes, like if it takes you less than three minutes do it now, and have a place for it, and if you don't have room for all your stuff, you don't need more room, you need less stuff... Just those three little things can be life-changing.

One other thing is, I really believe that because clutter-busting involves making decisions... See, I didn't understand that. I used to think that clutter-busting meant take everything out, shake it, and put everything back. But, it involves decisions, so with that, I believe we should all clutter-bust for an hour at a time. Then, take a break. Otherwise, your decisions are gone. I mean, you'll hit a point where you are like, "I can't decide now. I'll decide later," and you're just moving stuff from here to there. So, limit yourself to an hour and take a break, and during that break, give yourself a little bit of a reward.

Phone a friend that lives out of state, or go for a walk. You might not think you have time for a walk, but go for a walk – You just put in an hour. Read a book or a magazine guilt-free because you just put in an hour. That makes a big difference. A lot of people say, "I need a whole Saturday to clean out my garage." Why don't you take an hour every Saturday. You'll be amazed at what you get accomplished.

What if I Have a Job That's Really Big?

Chunk it down. I've got a great example. Before *Procrastinator's Handbook* came out, a doctor in Nova Scotia started sending me an email every Monday morning, telling me how he did on last week's goal and what this week's goal was. I never met the man, and I never asked him to do this. I do not know why he did this, but he did it, and that's fine. One day, it was to clear the paper clutter off my dining room table. Then, on Tuesday I got an email, and I had never gotten one on Tuesday; they always came on Monday. It said, "Revision of Yesterday's Goal," and the whole text was simply, "Clear the northwest corner of my dining room table." I thought that was so cool because he's absolutely right.

You don't want to attack the whole closet, just a part of the floor. Don't do the whole bathroom, just a shelf. Not the whole kitchen, just one part of your counter. Not the whole desk, just a drawer, or just the top of a file cabinet, or something. Break it down and just attack little parts of it because success breeds success, and if your goal is

to de-clutter the whole house, or the whole office, you're not successful. But, if the goal is to just clear out this drawer, well, eventually, after an hour here and an hour there, it will be cleared out.

The other thing is precious pockets of time. **Every once in a while, we find ourselves, waiting to get into a conference call, or something of the like, and you don't have time to start a whole project, and you don't have time to make a phone call, but you have time to go through a few papers and file them away.** Instead of pulling out the phone and playing a computer game, you can get a lot done in a minute or two. People will say, "Oh, I spent all Saturday afternoon de-cluttering the basement, and I didn't accomplish anything." That's because they were so overwhelmed that they really didn't get anything done. They just moved boxes from here to there.

When you break it down and put one hour into one small area, and then give yourself a reward at the end of it, clutter-busting kind of becomes fun. A lot of people report that they hated it at first, but now they enjoy it because of the satisfaction that you have a clear space, and you know where your stuff is, and you know where to put stuff. You know, lots of times, people ask me how I get myself to love doing a job that I hate, and I feel like, a lot of times, you never will. Some people will never enjoy housecleaning, but if you have a reward at the end of an hour, there is so much power in that reward. A lot of times, people will do anything to get to that reward.

I love coffee in the morning, and I'll have one cup. The night before, I'll put six things on a Post-it that I want to do. And, my first hour of the day... Sometimes I can do a whole thing, like it's just a quick phone call. Sometimes I can just do a portion of a project, but then I can have all of the coffee I want. A lot of times the reward is something I used to do, like I loved reading Westerns and mysteries, but now I've got so much professional stuff to read. So, it may be something you love, like going to the movies, and now you can do it guilt-free because you just put in an hour. Most of the time it's something... I could have had that coffee anyway. It's taking a discipline muscle and exercising it, and it's kind of hard at first. Like, when you go to the gym, it's hard.

It gets easier and easier, and won't have my second cup until I've done my hour. A friend told me that he loves to come home, grab a beer, put his feet up, and turn on the TV. Then, he told me that he had workout weights, and he said that he was going to work out for 20 minutes every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I asked, "What's your reward going to be for doing that?" He said, "I'll pat myself on the back," and I told him that's not going to be enough.

A couple of weeks later, he told me that he worked out like he said he would for two weeks in a row. I asked him what he had used as a reward because I knew that he wouldn't have kept doing this without one, and he said it was being able to grab a beer, put his feet up, and watch TV. He wouldn't let himself do this until he put in that 20 minutes. Again, he could have done it. It's a game. Procrastination is a game, and clutter collecting is a game. So, we're just talking about using a reward as a mind game to counteract it.

Do You Think This is a Way That I Can Retrain Myself?

Yes. There's a lot of neurological research going on about brain patterns and how we can actually have a pattern that says, "I just have to set it down and not put it away. That's just how I was born." For me, this was not easy to do at first, but now, anything that takes less than a minute or two, I just do it right away. It's a habit. My brain is retrained in that habit.

The rewards are very interesting because a lot of times the reward turns out to be something they've always wanted to do, like getting back to playing the piano, or get back in touch with a friend that moved out of state, or work on that hobby that they loved before they had kids. It may be just be taking a walk in nature. It's something that they loved to do, but they didn't let themselves because they've got to be an adult or whatever. Now, it becomes part of their life. You work and then you reward yourself.

We've been watching DVDs a lot, but I love watching a comedy at the movies when everybody is laughing. "Let's treat ourselves. We attacked the grudge this week. Let's do it." It becomes a joy. You start bringing back stuff in your life... One woman emailed me and said, "Rita, I want to call you. One of our rewards could be something that we loved to do as a kid. I loved coloring books." I told her to call me, and I was thinking, "Wouldn't it be cool if she took a watercolor class or an oil color painting class and discovered an artistic streak in herself." The reward she just discovered was that she just colored eight books. She just filled in eight coloring books, that was it. But, she loves coloring books and never let herself do it before now.

This was a couple of years ago. Now, it's trendy to do this to relieve stress. But, you know, people say that they wish they could do yoga, they wish they could exercise, they wish that they could meditate. They'd like to do that, but they don't have time. All of the sudden, now you're making time because you just did something fabulous. It's a whole new use of time, a whole shift. The changing of the brain is absolutely part of it, yes.

Recap

I wanted to share with you that I have finally become aware of what a big deal it is. It's really common, at conferences, that I would open up the conference with a talk about procrastination. Then, I would also do a breakout session on clutter. If there were 100 people, and they had five breakout sessions, I'd be told to expect 20 people. Now, I have to warn the meeting planner at the conference, because we get an inordinate proportion. Invariably there's standing room only for clutter, so I warn them now. It's something that nobody seems to be addressing, and so, when people have a chance to

spend an hour learning about it, they flock to it. So, it's a bigger deal than one might think.

Okay, let's recap. **The first thing, I think, is that you must realize you have to change your attitude.** It would be nice to keep all of this stuff, but one of the fastest-growing industries in the United States are storage units, and I think that's preposterous. You spend almost \$100 to put stuff in there that you don't remember that you have. This is stuff that you don't use, you don't need, you never visit, and you forget about. That is just horrific.

We need to start changing our attitude. We are getting more stuff, and more paper, and more info coming into our lives. We have to make some changes, and the biggest one is to start asking serious questions about, "Why am I keeping this," and then give a realistic answer. "I don't need it, but somebody might." Well, then instead of keeping it in the garage because somebody might, give it to Goodwill, or to the Salvation Army, or to people who really do need it now and let them have it now.

So, we need more realistic answers, and again, if you don't have enough room for all of your stuff, you don't need more room. You need less stuff. You have to start realizing. Even with little kids, we have to teach them that as more stuff comes into your life, you have to start getting rid of it.

Connecting with Rita

My website is RitaEmmett.com. I have a free tip sheet on there that you can sign up for. It is delivered via email once a month, and it's always focused on procrastination, clutter, or stress. You can turn around and use it in a blog, use it in your newsletter, and so on. That's one way. I know that people learn in different ways. So, I have these books that were mentioned, I have online courses, and I have audios, and DVDs, and I'm a speaker. My email address is remmett412@aol.com.

Resources

Rita's Books:

The Procrastinator's Handbook: Mastering the Art of Doing It Now

The Clutter-Busting Handbook: Clean It Up, Clear It Out, And Keep Your Life Clutter-Free

[The Procrastinating Child: A Handbook for Adults to Help Children Stop Putting Things Off](#)

Interview:

[Turbo-Charge Your Content Production & Crush Your Procrastination With This Simple 5 Step Formula With Rita Emmett](#)

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