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FACILITY DRILL

Blog - 2014 - July

Spring Clean

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Spring Clean

I have just spent a couple of days turning out some wardrobes and drawers. The weekend weather was hot and humid, too uncomfortable to travel about unnecessarily, or even to sit in the garden. Discomfort with the sticky and clammy conditions turned into impatience with the untidy areas of the house, the scattered items and little piles of things waiting to be either used or put away somewhere. Questions began to crowd in, demanding an answer. "Why is that there when I don't want it any more? What is in that box, and if I don't already know, then it is unlikely to be anything that I want or need. And that item, I thought I threw that out ages ago, why is it still here? I will never wear that sun hat again, so I don't need to find a storage place for it at all." Time to put a rocket under all this stuff! I find the best way to deal with it is exactly the same as I do in the garden, "Would I buy this plant or this item, if it were not already here?" The fact that I am asking myself the question should give a clue to the answer.

The idea of a spring clean is a tradition in many countries, undertaken as soon as the weather is warm and dry enough to throw open all the windows and doors, cleanse the entire house contents and banish all the dust and grime. My recent effort was not so much a spring clean but more of a hunt for accumulated possessions that are no longer used or wanted. Unintentional clutter needed clearing and space made in the wardrobes. I used to watch the television programmes where someone is helped to clear out their possessions which had begun to overwhelm their lives. They are chosen for the severity of their problem and their inability to deal with it on their own, but the methods of attack seem to work whatever the size of the task. One particular programme included stationing a large portable crusher in the front garden, so that the person could say

goodbye to the junk forever, with no chance to retrieve it or wonder where it was in the future. This was always the point where the owner was either crying with relief, or smiling widely as they enjoyed regaining control, not only of their home but also of their habits that were dragging them down and ruining their lives.

My own plan of action is generally to sort out one small area that has become disorganised, maybe just one drawer or one shelf of a cupboard or closet. I prefer to end the day with a particular task completed, and ready for another one tomorrow, if time and energy permit. There is no need to turn the whole house upside-down, which only results in running out of energy, and ending up with things being lightly dusted and rearranged rather than sorted properly. Piecemeal clean-ups can be small and pleasantly interesting, especially when lost or forgotten items are discovered. This not only removes the excuse for putting it off, but also the pleasure of the tidy result provides the incentive to continue next day.

On the television programmes they make sorting easier by providing four big cardboard boxes, one for keep, one for donate to charity, one for recycle and one for trash. This allows the job to proceed much faster, because no decision is final until the last day, which frees the person to get on with the sorting. Having seen the gloriously clear and clean result and the difference it makes to their lives, they are then less likely to want to spoil it by reintroducing stuff. I like to follow this method in principle, but without the boxes, and it definitely gets results quickly and without hassle - as long as the unwanted stuff is sent on its way and is not allowed to hang around as a growing pile of bulging carrier bags.

Spring Clean

When I was young, we sometimes made an effort to tidy the living room. We would tell Mum that she could not come in, because we were making a surprise for her. We shut the door firmly and then scooted around the room, straightening mats and curtains, wiping up dust and stuffing things into cupboards. I am sure she could hear all this going on, but we were convinced that we were doing a good secret job. Our idea of tidy was to not have very much on show, and in the end we had merely relocated the disarray to the inside of the cupboards. Mum was finally invited back in to see her surprise, and found that the room was indeed a lot tidier than before. After our triumphant revelation of the miracle we had worked, and the statement that now no further work would be necessary for a long time, we would go out to play. She was duly grateful for our efforts and as soon as we were outside I am sure she must have done some rearranging of the contents of the cupboards.

It seems that tidying is easiest to do when someone is planning to visit and the fact that it has to be done by a certain time ensures an early and earnest start on the job. At other times it is tempting to tell oneself that a task does not have to be done just yet, but it is often countered by the alarming thought, "Supposing a surprise visitor rings the doorbell in the next five minutes?" This scary reminder usually has the desired effect, and the offending crumbs, teacups, bits of laundry, tools, and unfiled paperwork are rapidly cleared away. The disadvantage of a big clean-up is the expectation that it need not be done again for a very long time. This attitude virtually ensures that mess will be allowed to build up again, and I prefer to endeavour to keep things on the move, so that the work always remains manageable. I have not arrived at this place of glorious housekeeping perfection just yet, but I can still enjoy the immediate benefits of working towards the goal. (1040 words)