

DOWNSIZE or RIGHTSIZE

The number one trick to downsizing is starting before you think you need to.

This is a task that takes longer than you expect at every turn, but offers benefits to those who persist. Don't wait for a death, illness or "scare." Taking action now means more space, more freedom and more money and not leaving this task for your loved ones to do without you.

Starting early shows you how much you own and hints at how much is ahead. People forget what's in their homes. They don't see what's hidden, such as under-the-bed boxes, under-the-eaves storage, out-of-season clothing and everything stashed in the attic or cellar.

Avoid working under extreme deadline pressure. A big issue is paper. People have shelves and drawers and boxes of notes, copies, contracts, photos and media. While entire files can often go into recycling, in other cases every single sheet is a separate decision. (Some people have to touch each piece of paper because they're afraid they'll miss something.)

Work on the downsizing while you're physically up to the job — which also allows you more control. Some people can't sort and organize, or reach the top of a closet, or sit down and work for long periods on a project without taking a nap. Start on your home while you are still strong enough to go to the basement and attic and lift heavier items.

You can conserve valuables while there's still time. Family photos or linens may become infested with moths in the attic, with mildew in the basement or mouse droppings in the garage. If you want to pass these along or sell them, get to them before they're ruined. If you have been saving Mom's china/Hummels/antiques to fund retirement, this is the time to sell.

Have time for necessary conversations. Ones like deciding who should receive your family heirlooms. Or will you keep, auction, consign or donate them? Multiply that conversation times any number of treasures.

Don't forget to account for conversations with yourself. People tend to get emotionally attached to belongings. says

You may even like the results so much, you'll stay longer to enjoy them before moving. Decluttering breathes life into your home. People often say "We should have done this years ago!"

"Just having a clutter-free, organized home is a lot less stress for people," Lawrence points out. "As long as they have the discipline not to fill it up again, when they do eventually move on, whatever's left behind will be much easier for them or their loved ones to deal with."

A Right Age to Downsize?

Is there a right age to downsize? It's never too early to start, experts agree. But there is a *wrong* age, and that's when you're too frail, too unwell or too overwhelmed to do the job adequately.