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the life-changing  
magic of tidying up

the Japanese art of decluttering  
and organizing

marie kondo



TRANSLATED  
FROM THE  
JAPANESE BY  
CATHY HIRANO

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# Introduction

In this book, I have summed up how to put your space in order in a way that will change your life forever.

Impossible? A common response and not surprising, considering that almost everyone has experienced a rebound effect at least once, if not multiple times, after tidying.

Have *you* ever tidied madly, only to find that all too soon your home or workspace is cluttered again? If so, let me share with you the secret of success. **Start by discarding. Then organize your space, thoroughly, completely, in one go.** If you adopt this approach—the KonMari Method—you’ll never revert to clutter again.

Although this approach contradicts conventional wisdom, everyone who completes my private course has successfully kept their house in order—with unexpected results. Putting their house in order positively affects all other aspects of their lives, including work and family. Having devoted more than 80 percent of my life to this subject, I *know* that tidying can transform your life.

Does it still sound too good to be true? If your idea of tidying is getting rid of one unnecessary item a day or cleaning up your room a little at a time, then you are right. It won’t have much effect on your life. If you change your approach, however, tidying can have an immeasurable impact. In fact, that is what it means to put your house in order.

I started reading home and lifestyle magazines when I was five, and it was this that inspired me, from the age of fifteen, to undertake a serious study of tidying that led to my development of the KonMari Method (based on a combination of my first and last names). I am now a consultant and spend most of my days visiting homes and offices, giving hands-on advice

to people who find it difficult to tidy, who tidy but suffer rebounds, or who want to tidy but don't know where to start.

The number of things my clients have discarded, from clothes and undergarments to photos, pens, magazine clippings, and makeup samples, easily exceeds a million items. This is no exaggeration. I have assisted individual clients who have thrown out two hundred 45-liter garbage bags in one go.

From my exploration of the art of organizing and my experience helping messy people become tidy, there is one thing I can say with confidence: **A dramatic reorganization of the home causes correspondingly dramatic changes in lifestyle and perspective. It is life transforming.** I mean it. Here are just a few of the testimonies I receive on a daily basis from former clients.

*After your course, I quit my job and launched my own business doing something I had dreamed of doing ever since I was a child.*

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*Your course taught me to see what I really need and what I don't. So I got a divorce. Now I feel much happier.*

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*Someone I have been wanting to get in touch with recently contacted me.*

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*I'm delighted to report that since cleaning up my apartment, I've been able to really increase my sales.*

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*My husband and I are getting along much better.*

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*I'm amazed to find that just throwing things away has changed me so much.*

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*I finally succeeded in losing ten pounds.*

My clients always sound so happy, and the results show that tidying has changed their way of thinking and their approach to life. In fact, it has changed their future. Why? This question is addressed in more detail throughout the book, but basically, **when you put your house in order, you put your affairs and your past in order, too.** As a result, you can see quite clearly what you need in life and what you don't, and what you should and shouldn't do.

I currently offer a course for clients in their homes and for company owners in their offices. These are all private, one-on-one consultations, but I have yet to run out of clients. There is currently a three-month waiting list, and I receive inquiries daily from people who have been introduced by a former client or who have heard about the course from someone else. I travel from one end of Japan to the other and sometimes even overseas. Tickets for one of my public talks for stay-at-home parents sold out overnight. There was a waiting list not only for cancellations but also for the waiting list. Yet my repeater rate is zero. From a business perspective, this would appear to be a fatal flaw. But what if my lack of repeaters was actually the secret to the popularity of my approach?

As I said at the beginning, people who use the KonMari Method never revert to clutter again. Because they can keep their space in order, they don't need to come back for more lessons. I occasionally check in with graduates of my courses to see how they are doing. In almost every case, not only is their home or office still in order but they are continuing to improve their space. It is evident from the photographs they send that they have even fewer belongings than when they finished the course, and have acquired new curtains and furnishings. **They are surrounded only by the things they love.**

Why does my course transform people? Because my approach is not simply a technique. The act of tidying is a series of simple actions in which

objects are moved from one place to another. It involves putting things away where they belong. This seems so simple that even a six-year-old should be able to do it. Yet most people can't. A short time after tidying, their space is a disorganized mess. The cause is not lack of skills but rather lack of awareness and the inability to make tidying a regular habit. In other words, the root of the problem lies in the mind. Success is 90 percent dependent on our mind-set. Excluding the fortunate few to whom organizing comes naturally, if we do not address this aspect, rebound is inevitable no matter how much is discarded or how cleverly things are organized.

So how can you acquire the right kind of mind-set? There is just one way, and, paradoxically, it is by acquiring the right technique. Remember: the KonMari Method I describe in this book is not a mere set of rules on how to sort, organize, and put things away. It is a guide to acquiring the right mind-set for creating order and becoming a tidy person.

Of course, I can't claim that all my students have perfected the art of tidying. Unfortunately, some had to stop for one reason or another before completing the course. And some quit because they expected me to do the work for them. As an organizing fanatic and professional, I can tell you right now that no matter how hard I try to organize another's space, no matter how perfect a storage system I devise, I can never put someone else's house in order in the true sense of the term. Why? Because a person's awareness and perspective on his or her own lifestyle are far more important than any skill at sorting, storing, or whatever. Order is dependent on the extremely personal values of what a person wants to live with.

Most people would prefer to live in a clean and tidy space. Anyone who has managed to tidy even once will have wished to keep it that way. But many don't believe it's possible. They try out various approaches to tidying only to find that things soon return to "normal." I am absolutely convinced, however, that everyone can keep his or her space in order.

To do that, it is essential to thoroughly reassess your habits and assumptions about tidying. That may sound like far too much work, but don't worry. By the time you finish reading this book, you will be ready and willing. People often tell me, "I'm disorganized by nature," "I can't do it," or "I don't have time"; but being messy is not hereditary nor is it related to lack of time. It has far more to do with the accumulation of mistaken



notions about tidying, such as “it’s best to tackle one room at a time” or “it’s better to do a little each day” or “storage should follow the flow plan of the house.”

In Japan, people believe that things like cleaning your room and keeping your bathroom spick-and-span bring good luck, but if your house is cluttered, the effect of polishing the toilet bowl is going to be limited. The same is true for the practice of feng shui. It is only when you put your house in order that your furniture and decorations come to life.

When you’ve finished putting your house in order, your life will change dramatically. Once you have experienced what it’s like to have a truly ordered house, you’ll feel your whole world brighten. Never again will you revert to clutter. This is what I call **the magic of tidying**. And the effects are stupendous. Not only will you never be messy again, but you’ll also get a new start on life. This is the magic I want to share with as many people as possible.

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**Why can't I keep my house in order?**

## **You can't tidy if you've never learned how**

When I tell people that my profession is teaching others how to tidy, I am usually met with looks of astonishment. “Can you actually make money doing that?” is their first question. This is almost always followed by, “Do people need lessons in tidying?”

It's true that while instructors and schools offer courses in everything from cooking and how to wear a kimono to yoga and Zen meditation, you'll be hard-pressed to find classes on how to tidy. The general assumption, in Japan at least, is that tidying doesn't need to be taught but rather is picked up naturally. Cooking skills and recipes are passed down as family traditions from grandmother to mother to daughter, yet one never hears of anyone passing on the family secrets of tidying, even within the same household.

Think back to your own childhood. I'm sure most of us have been scolded for not tidying up our rooms, but how many of our parents consciously taught us how to tidy as part of our upbringing? Our parents demanded that we clean up our rooms, but they, too, had never been trained in how to do that. When it comes to tidying, we are all self-taught.

Instruction in tidying is neglected not only in the home but also at school. When we think back to our home economics classes, most of us remember making hamburgers or learning how to use a sewing machine to make an apron, but compared to cooking and sewing, surprisingly little time is devoted to the subject of tidying. Even if it is included in a textbook, that section is either just read in class, or worse, assigned for reading at home so that students can skip ahead to more popular topics, such as food and health. Consequently, even the extremely rare home economics graduates who have formally studied “tidying” can't do it.

Food, clothing, and shelter are the most basic human needs, so you would think that where we live would be considered just as important as what we

eat and what we wear. Yet in most societies tidying, the job that keeps a home livable, is completely disregarded because of the misconception that the ability to tidy is acquired through experience and therefore doesn't require training.

Do people who have been tidying for more years than others tidy better? The answer is no. Twenty-five percent of my students are women in their fifties, and the majority of them have been homemakers for close to thirty years, which makes them veterans at this job. But do they tidy better than women in their twenties? The opposite is true. Many of them have spent so many years applying erroneous conventional approaches that their homes overflow with unnecessary items and they struggle to keep clutter under control with ineffective storage methods. How can they be expected to know how to tidy when they have never studied it properly?

If you, too, don't know how to tidy, don't be discouraged. Now is the time to learn. By studying and applying the KonMari Method presented in this book, you can escape the vicious cycle of clutter.

## **A tidying marathon doesn't cause rebound**

"I clean up when I realize how untidy my place is, but once I'm done, it's not long before it's a mess again." This is a common complaint, and the standard response touted by magazine advice columns is, "Don't try tidying your entire house all at once. You'll just rebound. Make a habit of doing a little at a time." I first stumbled across this refrain when I was five. As the middle child of three children, I was raised with a great deal of freedom. My mother was busy taking care of my newborn younger sister, and my brother, who was two years older than me, was always glued to the TV playing video games. Consequently, I spent most of my time at home on my own.

My favorite pastime was reading home and lifestyle magazines. My mother subscribed to *ESSE*—a magazine with features on interior decorating, cleaning tips, and product reviews. As soon as it was delivered, I would snatch it from the mailbox before my mother even knew it had

arrived, rip open the envelope, and immerse myself in the contents. On my way home from school, I liked to stop at the bookstore and browse through *Orange Page*, a popular Japanese food magazine. I wasn't actually able to read all the words, but these magazines, with their photos of scrumptious dishes, amazing tips for removing stains and grease, and penny-saving ideas, were as fascinating for me as game guides were for my brother. I would fold the corner of a page that caught my interest and dream of trying out the tip described.

I also made up a variety of my own solitary "games." For example, after reading a feature on saving money, I immediately launched into a "power-saving game" that involved roaming about the house and unplugging things that weren't in use, even though I knew nothing about electric meters. In response to another feature, I filled plastic bottles with water and put them in the toilet tank in a solo "water-saving contest." Articles on storage inspired me to convert milk cartons into dividers for my drawers and make a letter rack by stacking empty video cases between two pieces of furniture. At school, while other kids were playing dodge ball or skipping, I'd slip away to rearrange the bookshelves in our classroom, or check the contents of the mop cupboard, all the while muttering about the poor storage methods. "If only there were an S-hook, it would be so much easier to use."

But there was one problem that seemed unsolvable. No matter how much I tidied, it wasn't long before every space was a mess again. The milk carton dividers in my desk drawer soon overflowed with pens. The rack made from video cases was soon so crammed with letters and papers that it crumpled to the floor. With cooking or sewing, practice makes perfect, but even though tidying is also housework, I never seemed to improve no matter how often I did it—nowhere stayed tidy for long.

"It can't be helped," I consoled myself. "Rebound comes with the territory. If I tackle the job all at once, I'll just get discouraged." I had read this in many articles about tidying and assumed it was true. If I had a time machine now, I'd go back and tell myself, "That's wrong. If you use the right approach, you'll never rebound."

Most people associate the word "rebound" with dieting, but when they hear it used in the context of tidying, it still makes sense. It seems logical that a sudden, drastic reduction in clutter could have the same effect as a drastic cut in calories. But don't be deceived. The moment you begin



moving furniture around and getting rid of garbage, your room changes. It's very simple. If you put your house in order in one fell swoop, you will have tidied up in one fell swoop. (In Japanese, the term is *ikki ni*, or "in one go.") Rebound occurs because people mistakenly believe they have tidied thoroughly, when in fact they have only sorted and stored things halfway. If you put your house in order properly, you'll be able to keep your room tidy, even if you are lazy or sloppy by nature.

## **Tidy a little a day and you'll be tidying forever**

"If you tidy your house all at once, you'll rebound. It's better to make it a habit to do a little at a time." Although this advice sounds very tempting, we've already seen that the first part is wrong. How about the suggestion that we should do only a little a day? Although it sounds convincing, don't be fooled. The reason you never seem to finish is precisely because you tidy a little at a time.

Changing lifestyle habits acquired over a span of many years is generally extremely difficult. If you have never succeeded in staying tidy to date, you will find it next to impossible to develop the habit of tidying a little at a time. **People cannot change their habits without first changing their way of thinking.** And that's not easy! After all, it's quite hard to control what we think. There is, however, one way to drastically transform the way we think about tidying.

The subject of tidying first caught my attention when I was in junior high school. The catalyst was a book called *The Art of Discarding* by Nagisa Tatsumi (Takarajimasha, Inc.), which explained the importance of getting rid of unnecessary things. I picked the book up on my way home from school, intrigued to see a topic I had never encountered before, and I can still remember the shock of surprise I felt as I read it on the train. I became so absorbed that I almost missed my stop. Once home, I went straight to my room with a handful of garbage bags and stayed closeted for several hours. Although my room was small, by the time I finished I had eight bags full of stuff—clothes I never wore, textbooks from elementary school, toys I had