

# A really simple way to reduce stress – just put away as you go

Robyn Pearce

I learned something as I unpacked my bags recently. I'd just returned from a three-day corporate-sponsored time management roadshow that had taken me to regional towns around New Zealand. I pulled out some items I needed immediately and then caught myself thinking, "I'll finish unpacking later."

"No you won't. You'll do it now!" said the little voice on my shoulder.

With a brief flutter of resistance my procrastinating self crept back into her hole. Within five minutes the job was done, the room was tidy, and I knew I could come back into the room later without that awful sinking feeling of "Darn it, I've still got to put all this stuff away!"

I noticed something else as well. It's easier to shift a moving object than a stationary one, it generates higher energy and it's less time-consuming. It's when we have to go back to something that we end up in a muddle, we slow down, our energy becomes sluggish, procrastination becomes a familiar companion and tidiness feels like a harder and more challenging chore.

I've been helping people with time-related issues now for nearly 18 years, and I can tell you, when people learn better habits about management of their 'stuff', the stress just rolls off their shoulders. And once they've learned how to not only clean up their environment but also to maintain the good habits, their lives change for ever! This is the fastest stress reducer in town.

One of the hardest parts is the decision to act. Next time, as you're tempted to head down the grey tunnel of 'slob-it is', whether it's your classroom desk, your office if you work away from the classroom, in your home or garage, or as you get out of the car, try one of the following strategies:

- ◆ See yourself coming back into your environment with nothing shouting "You've still got to put me away!"
- ◆ Hear the congratulations of your surprised work colleagues if it's a work situation, or dearly beloveds if it's home space or the car you need to improve on.
- ◆ If you're a classroom teacher, you might imagine the comments of your students. If there's a major change, they probably will say something, especially juniors.
- ◆ Feel your delight and joy as you connect with the freedom of no clutter. Think back to the last time you did put things

away quickly. Remember your thoughts and feelings, the mental pictures and the sounds attached to that positive memory. Build them big in your memory and let the positive energy attached to that memory impel you forward into action now.

Once you've completed, reward yourself, especially if this is a new habit you're establishing. It might be as small as five minutes to sit and look at the view, take a walk outside, or enjoy a short break in the staffroom before getting back to your after-school preparation. At home it might be to sit down for a few minutes with a relaxing book or magazine, talk on the phone to your best friend, have that chocolate you've hidden from yourself – whatever lights you up.

#### Next time, when you:

- ◆ Complete a task at work – put away tools and paperwork
- ◆ Return from a trip – unpack everything immediately, including the contents of that conference bag
- ◆ Eat something or make a coffee – clean up after yourself
- ◆ Get out of the car – take everything loose with you (unless it really does live in the car).

Most teachers are good at getting the children to do these things with shared equipment, but a surprising number don't apply the same process to their own personal space. And what about the offices of the secretary, principal and senior executive team?

And if you're stuck and need help, check out the information elsewhere in this issue of ET about our regular webinars. (I love webinars as a method of helping people in diverse locations. The last one had participants located in Brisbane, Auckland, Wanaka in the Deep South of New Zealand, a rural secondary school in the Far North of New Zealand, and Brenda from Bangkok.

The photos you see in this article are Sheri's office – she's a school secretary. Both she and her principal are fizzing with enthusiasm – their small investment of time and money has given them a huge long-term payback in reduction of stress and increased efficiency.

#### Action starters

- ◆ What's clutter? Just something in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- ◆ Space and clutter stragglers just stop too soon – the job's not done until it's all put away. Just shift the finish line.



Before and after

- ◆ Why make it hard when it could be easy – all for the sake of another two or three minutes?
- ◆ Capitalise on your existing momentum. Do it now!
- ◆ Remember, it's faster (and a lot easier) to shift a moving object than a stationary one!
- ◆ Every piece of paper or equipment lying around is a symptom of a decision not made or an action not completed.

If you're stuck with anything time-related, check out Robyn's webinars – the fastest and most cost-efficient way of getting help. [www.gettingagrip.com/training/index.asp](http://www.gettingagrip.com/training/index.asp).

