

The Quick & Easy DOWNSIZING Guide for Seniors

Tapley Garrison Baxter

Real Broker, LLC

Ten Tips for Cutting Back the Clutter

So you've decided to downsize--whether it's for a move to a new house or senior community, or just because you're tired of tripping over golf clubs that haven't seen a course in a few decades. Downsizing doesn't have to be a negative thing. Even if it may not be the most enjoyable way to spend a few weekends, the end result will give you more freedom and efficiency, save money, reduce accidents, and can increase happiness by knowing that some of your neglected treasures have happy new homes. Let's get started!

1 Hire Help

If the idea of even getting started is too much to handle, hire someone else to do it! Call a few professional organizing or senior move managers and find one that is the best fit for you. The investment of their expertise will absolutely pay for itself throughout the process. You'll still very much have an active role in making decisions on what goes or stays, but a professional who knows how to keep the process moving smoothly and efficiently can be worth their weight in gold. If you still want to handle it all yourself, at least consider hiring help to handle heavy boxes or move items up and down stairs or the attic.

2 Think About Your Next Move

If you are downsizing because of a move, take a good look at the floorplan, the closets, and the storage areas. Quite simply, if it won't fit, you can't take it! If you were attracted to a certain house or apartment because of how open and organized the model was, keep that in mind as you plan for larger pieces. If someone else has taken over hosting the family holiday gatherings, is it necessary to have a dining table that seats 12? Even if your new space can accommodate what you currently own, one of the fun things about moving is getting to discover new styles and update older furniture.

3 Plan for Your Future Self

Hobbies and lifestyles change over time. If you haven't used these things in the past year, it's time to sell or donate:

- Sports equipment - especially if it's something that can be easily replaced (tennis racket) if you decide to play again later.
- Exercise equipment - older equipment may not be equipped with necessary safety features, and many senior centers have fully stocked (and free) gyms to use.
- Hobby supplies - senior centers, schools, and even libraries would be thrilled to have fabric, paints, sewing materials, old cameras, telescopes, musical instruments, etc.
- Home maintenance equipment (tools, mowers, etc.) - if you've used a lawn service for years already, keep a few tools for small jobs and let go of the rest.

4 Go Digital

Books, old papers, drawings, school work, cookbooks, recipes...these things can all be so precious and instantly evoke memories and experiences. But they can also be heavy and take up so much space. Consider hiring someone (a savvy teen) or using your own smartphone to take photos of as much paper as possible and only keeping the truly treasured pieces. Once photos have been taken or items scanned, you can easily create albums (online or printed if you must) to keep your items in mind but with a fraction of the storage space. Books can be so hard to part with, but do your best to keep only a small percentage of your favorites or the most valuable and pass the rest to a library or younger booklover for safe keeping. Learning to use a digital reader (like Kindle) can keep your favorite authors at hand, and allow for easier reading with larger font and brightness options.

5 Start with the Easy Stuff

Do yourself a favor and gain momentum by starting with the 'easy' stuff. That might mean a guest room or bathroom, unused holiday decorations, or the portion of your attic that is storing your children's grade-school belongings. Start making the calls and setting a 'claim by' date for their stuff. Schedule a day when family is home for the holidays and let them know that their keepsakes are now theirs for the keeping. Consider only keeping a few sentimental items that you're saving for special occasions (birth of a grandchild, college graduation, etc.). Take photos of items that you want to be able to 'see' again from time to time.

6 Shred Some Paper

Consult with a tax attorney or your financial advisor (or just google 'what to keep'), but there's a big chance that you have a large amount of paper that you can toss or securely shred. What to do with what's left? Aside from a few original documents that are best kept as paper, scan the rest to a secure digital file on your computer or to a dedicated storage device. Tip: Once you have your most important paperwork organized, tell your power of attorney or a trusted friend where these are stored in case they're needed during an emergency.

7 Don't Tackle it All at Once

Starting early and going room-by-room, or even a closet or a drawer at a time, can keep the process from feeling overwhelming. Starting 'fresh' a few times can also help avoid decision fatigue and keep you focused on the goal. And it's okay to go back to the same area a few times. If you have 15 minutes to sort though a drawer, do it--don't worry that you don't have time to tackle the whole kitchen. Designate an area in the garage or an unused bedroom to keep ongoing donate /sell/toss boxes for quick cleanouts or if you come across an item that you know immediately can go.

8 Establish Criteria

Do you love it? Do you need it? Do you use it? For areas with a lot of items (closets, kitchens, collectibles, jewelry), use the OHIO method: Only Handle It Once. Hold it up, ask yourself those first three questions and then immediately sort into Keep / Donate / Sell / Toss boxes.

9 Acknowledge Emotions

Downsizing can come with a lot of emotions, including sadness and guilt. Allow yourself (and your loved ones) to acknowledge how the process or an item makes you feel. Try to keep in mind the reason you're downsizing, focus on the positive outcomes, and know that you'll still have the memories and the sentiments even after the objects themselves are gone. As you take photos of items, or pass them along to loved ones, write down or share some of the stories and memories that they represent. You'll not only have a record for yourself later, but you'll help to create important new memories and sentimental attachments for younger generations.

10 Celebrate Success

Celebrate along the way--each cleared room, each excited person or organization that you donated to, or the travel money you earned by selling something valuable. Take pride in your newly organized spaces and enjoy the relief and calmness that you created. You did it!

Want more information about your senior move?

Contact me for a free copy of:

- Senior Guide to Estate Planning
- Senior Community Visiting Guide
- Preparing for your Senior Move
- Having the Senior Talk with your Parents
- Aging In Place Safety Guide
- And More!

Brought to you by your Senior Move Specialist:



Tapley Garrison Baxter

@TAPLEYBAX

@TAPLEY.BAXTER

TAPLEYBAXTER.COM

TAPLEY@TAPLEYBAXTER.COM

843-345-8277

Real Broker, LLC