

Reflect, prioritize, declutter, repeat

How Swedish death cleaning can make your life easier.



BY SALLY MOE
Times Total Media Correspondent

Do you have multiples of certain basics like scissors or reading glasses, but can't find one pair when you need them? Are there items in your kitchen pantry that date back to the Bush administration? Do you have a room in your house that nobody's allowed to see because it's just too much of a chaotic, embarrassing mess?

All of that extra unused stuff is taking up space in your home — and in your mind. Yes, it's overwhelming. But if you don't deal with it now, at some point in the future, a loved one

who's sorting through your effects after you pass will have to deal with it and will feel even more overwhelmed at the prospect than you ever did!

Enter the practice of Swedish death cleaning. At first, it sounds a tiny bit morbid, but it's actually focused on making life easier and celebrating a life well lived. First introduced in a book by **Margareta Magnusson** called **"The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Free Yourself and Your Family from a Lifetime of Clutter,"** Swedish death cleaning is a floor-to-ceiling decluttering approach designed to simplify your life and — after you pass — make it easier for loved ones to take care of what you leave behind (including your home, debts, assets, pets and memorabilia). The process encourages reflection on the events of your life and focusing on what really matters to you. At the same time, you decide what to sell, recycle, throw out or give away

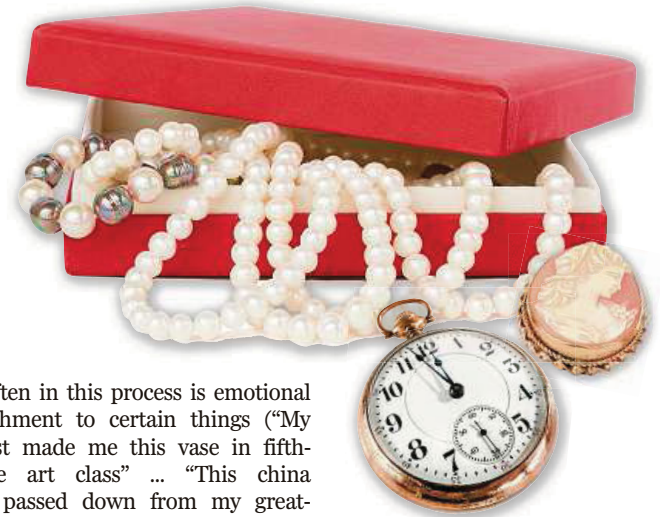
— and how and where the stuff you keep should be stored, from financial records and computer passwords to beloved mementos. When to start? Magnusson suggests around age 65, because you want to still be physically able to do it, as well as have the time to invest.

For pack rats and procrastinators in particular, this process can be a bear. But it's less daunting (and less likely to be put off) when you have professionals guiding you through the steps, such as **Pathfinders Downsizing Solutions**. **Renée Brunelle Matthews**, co-founder of Pathfinders with **Janeen Salzgeber**, has been doing this kind of work for years, and says that while every situation is unique, the first question is often the same: "Where do I begin??"

Her advice: "Start with the unemotional stuff." Matthews explains that what stymies people

so often in this process is emotional attachment to certain things ("My oldest made me this vase in fifth-grade art class" ... "This china was passed down from my great-grandmother"). Start with the things that aren't emotionally weighted: financial papers, canceled checks, old textbooks and magazines, expired medications, etc. Go room by room, space by space. When it comes time to deal with the things you feel attached to, enlist the help of a family member if you can. They might want one of those special family heirlooms. But if they don't, items like dated furniture or clothes, china, or pots and pans you no longer use can go to a deserving nonprofit, where they will enjoy a new life of usefulness and be much appreciated. More valuable items can be sold by auction or consignment, or set aside for an estate sale.

Take before and after photos of each room. The before picture will help you see the room's problem areas in a more detached light, giving the clutter less emotional pull and making it easier to pare down. The after picture will reinforce what you've accomplished.



If you're downsizing to move into a smaller home, a tiny house or a retirement community, there is experienced local help available for you as well. As a member of the Seniors Real Estate Specialist group along with many local senior affiliations, **White Glove House**, led by **Rande Friedman** — a Realtor with Future Home Realty and a certified probate/estate and senior real estate specialist — has focused on this niche area for the last 15 years and finds it important and deeply rewarding. Every project has taught him something new about the process and the people he assists. He agrees with Matthews that downsizing can be very emotional, so he recommends including family members sooner rather than later. When you're planning to downsize, Friedman says, "Prepare yourself for the emotional aspect."

Remember the saying, "One man's trash is another man's treasure?" It goes both ways. What is valuable to you for sentimental reasons doesn't necessarily translate to financial value, or even to sentimental value among other family members. With that said, during the later stages of downsizing, Friedman reaches out to appraisers or evaluators who will rate the more valuable items that remain to determine which avenue is preferable for getting the best possible price (i.e. auction, estate sale or consignment). For whatever is left that can't be sold or donated, he will arrange for trash removal. Martha Stewart would surely agree: Fewer headaches during an already stressful time = a very good thing.





“A loved one wishes to inherit nice things from you, not all things from you.”

~ The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning

Do you have stacks of unsorted documents, junk mail, letters and other papers in random piles throughout your home? While they might not be emotionally weighted, you still could find it difficult to know which of these to shred, which to keep and the best way to store what remains so they’ll always be easy to find. This aspect of decluttering is an area of focus for **Ann-Eliza Musoke Taylor**, a probate estate attorney with **Older, Lundy, Koch & Martino**. Taylor has been helping people organize and prioritize their papers and deeds for 15 years and has one bit of advice: Start small and start early, when you’re not pressured by a deadline. Give yourself plenty of time to take this on and do it right.

Starting small helps build momentum without triggering that deer-in-the-headlights feeling. (She suggests assigning at least a month for the project.) Remember that not every treasured drawing has to be saved; you can scan or photograph them and store them in your computer or display the files in a digital picture frame — and you’ll probably see them more often that way! Taylor includes a document retention “cheat sheet” for her clients, to help them know which papers are important to keep;



she also recommends clients have a “document custodian.” This person could be an attorney or a trusted friend or relative who would keep copies of important documents in case of emergency.

If you see yourself as proactive, consider one of the following books to get you moving in the right direction. **“When I’m Gone: Death Planner Organizer”** and **“I’m Dead, Now What?: Important Information About My Belongings, Business Affairs, and Wishes”** are planners to record all the details — contacts; legal matters; health info; property info; financial affairs; what to pay, close and cancel; etc. — that your survivors will need to know in the event of your passing. Such books can be helpful while you’re still kicking as well. They can help you decide whether to organize your thoughts and address gaps in preparation or to inform loved ones of your wishes if you are ever incapacitated by a stroke or other illness. And finally, for eight hours’ worth of inspiration, check out the eight-episode show inspired by Magnusson’s book: “The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning,” narrated by Amy Poehler, is available on Peacock or Apple TV.

Times Total Media is the sales and marketing division of the Tampa Bay Times. Contact timestotalmedia@tampabay.com with questions.



Downsizing, rightsizing, decluttering – whatever you call it, it’s a daunting process.

Thankfully, you don’t have to do it alone! There are people in our area who are experienced in this process and will share the burden with you, saving you time, stress and uncertainty. Renée Brunelle Matthews of Pathfinders Downsizing Solutions suggests the following steps to get started:

- 1. Determine what you are downsizing to.** That can inform choices for the new space plan (i.e., what larger furnishings won’t fit).
- 2. How big is the new closet/storage space?**
- 3. What items will you really use in your new “rightsized” lifestyle?** This is very important with respect to kitchens and closets.
- 4. Take a critical look at what you REALLY use in your bathrooms.**
- 5. Pare down bedding and towels for what you will need in your new smaller space.**
- 6. Digitize family photos and gift them so all can be shared.** Photo frames are also great gifts!

Remember: If you throw something away, and then need it later, simply buy a new one. **Don’t hold onto items for “just in case.”**

Renee Brunelle Matthews, Co-owner

Janeen Salzgeber, Co-owner

Pathfinders Downsizing Solutions

pathfindersdownsizing.com | 813-220-9580 | 850-445-4447

Rande Friedman

Certified probate/estate and senior realtor specialist

whiteglovehouse.com | futurehomerealty.com | 813-943-2677

Ann-Eliza Musoke Taylor, Attorney

Older, Lundy, Koch & Martino

olderlundylaw.com | 813-254-8998

Sources: aarp.org, smartliving365.com, whereyoulivematters.org, nasmm.org, pathfindersdownsizing.com, whiteglovehouse.com