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THE LIFE-CHANGING  
MAGIC OF TIDYING

*Marie Kondo*

A SIMPLE, EFFECTIVE WAY TO BANISH CLUTTER FOREVER

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## About the Book

Transform your home into a permanently clear and clutter-free space with the incredible KonMari Method. Japan's expert declutterer and professional cleaner Marie Kondo will help you tidy your rooms once and for all with her inspirational step-by-step method.

The key to successful tidying is to tackle your home in the correct order, to keep only the things you really love and to do it all at once – and quickly. After that for the rest of your life you only need to choose what to keep and what to discard.

The KonMari Method will not just transform your space. Once you have your house in order you will find that your whole life will change. You can feel more confident, you can become more successful, and you can have the energy and motivation to create the life you want. You will also have the courage to move on from the negative aspects of your life: you can recognise and finish a bad relationship; you can stop feeling anxious; you can finally lose weight.

Marie Kondo's method is based on a 'once-cleaned, never-messy-again' approach. If you think that such a thing is impossible then you should definitely read this compelling book.

## About the Author

MARIE KONDO (KonMari) started reading housewives' magazines from the age of five and loved the order and beauty of the well-organised spaces she saw in them. From the age of 15 she started studying tidying seriously. She started with her own bedroom and then moved onto her siblings'. Today she runs a highly successful business in Tokyo helping clients transform their cluttered homes into spaces of beauty, peace and inspiration.

# THE LIFE-CHANGING MAGIC OF TIDYING

by Marie Kondo (KonMari)

**Vermilion**  
LONDON

## Preface

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. In this book, I have summed up how to put your space in order in a way that will change your life forever. Impossible? This is a common response and not surprising considering that almost everyone has experienced a 'rebound effect' at least once, if not many times, after tidying their home.

The KonMari Method is a simple, smart and effective way to banish clutter forever. Start by discarding. Then organise your space, thoroughly, completely, in one go. If you adopt this strategy, you'll never revert to clutter again.

Although this approach contradicts conventional wisdom, everyone who completes the KonMari Method 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 over 80 per cent of my life to this subject, I *know* that tidying can transform your life too.

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 housewives' magazines when I was five, and it was this that inspired me, from the age of 15, to undertake the serious study of decluttering and tidying that



led to the KonMari Method (KonMari is my nickname, taken from 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 rebound, or who want to tidy but don't know where to start.

The amount of things my clients have discarded, from clothes and undergarments to photos, pens, magazine clippings and make-up samples, easily exceeds a million items. This is no exaggeration. I have assisted individual clients who have thrown out 200 45-litre bin bags in one go.

From my exploration of the art of organising and my vast experience of helping disorganised people to become tidy, there is one thing I can say with confidence: a dramatic reorganisation of the home causes correspondingly dramatic changes in your 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.'*

*'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.'*

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

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

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

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

*'I finally succeeded in losing three kilos.'*

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 this 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, what you should and shouldn't do.

I currently offer a course for clients in the home and for company owners in their offices. These are all private, one-on-one lessons, but I have yet to run out of clients. There is currently a three-month waiting list, and I receive enquiries 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 overseas. Tickets for one of my public talks for housewives and mothers sold out overnight. There was a waiting list not only for cancellations, but also just to get on the waiting list. Yet my repeater rate is zero. From a business perspective, this would appear to be a fatal flaw. But what if no repeaters were 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 also 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 disorganised mess. The cause is not lack of skills but rather lack of awareness and the inability to tidy effectively. In other words, the root of the problem lies in the mind. Success is 90 per cent dependent on our mindset. Excluding the fortunate few to whom organising comes naturally, if we do not address this aspect, rebound is inevitable no matter how much is discarded or how cleverly things are organised.

So how can you acquire the right kind of mindset? 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, organise and put things away. It is a guide to acquiring the right mindset for creating order and becoming a tidy person.

Of course, I can't claim that all of 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 organising fanatic and professional, I can tell you right now that no matter how hard I try to organise 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 of 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 how a person wants to live.

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 disorganised 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'.

In Japan, people believe that things like cleaning your room and keeping your toilet spic 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, you'll have a new start in life. This is the magic I want to share with as many people as possible.

## CHAPTER ONE

# WHY CAN'T I KEEP MY HOUSE IN ORDER?

## You can't tidy if you've never learnt how

WHEN I TELL people that my job is teaching others how to tidy, I am usually met with looks of amazement. '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 gardening to yoga and meditation, you'll be hard put to find classes on how to tidy. The general assumption is that tidying doesn't need to be taught but rather is picked up naturally. Cooking skills and recipes are passed on 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? In one study on this subject, less than 0.5 per cent responded affirmatively to the question 'Have you ever studied tidying formally?' 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 not only neglected in the home, but also at school. Home economics courses in Japan and around the world might teach children how to make hamburgers in cooking class or how to use a sewing machine to make an apron, but compared to cooking and sewing, no time is devoted to the subject of tidying.

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 basic 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 per cent of my students are women in their fifties, and the majority of these have been homemakers for close to 30 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 conventional approaches that don't work 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 effectively 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 circle of clutter.

## Tidy once and properly

'I CLEAN UP when I realise 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.

As I grew up, my favourite pastime was reading lifestyle magazines for housewives. My mother subscribed to *ESSE*

– a lifestyle magazine filled with articles on interior decorating, how to make housework easier 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 bookshop and browse through *Orange Page*, a popular Japanese cooking magazine. I wasn't able to read all the words, but these magazines, with their photos of delicious foods, amazing tips for removing stains and grease and penny-saving ideas, were as fascinating for me as gaming guides were for my brother. I would fold down the corner of a page that caught my interest and dream of trying out the advice.

I also made up a variety of my own solitary 'games'. For example, one day after reading a feature about 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 electricity meters. After reading 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 turn milk cartons into dividers for my desk drawers and to make a letter rack by stacking empty video cases between two pieces of furniture. At school, while other kids were playing chase or skipping, I'd slip away to rearrange the bookshelves in our classroom, or check the content of the mop cupboard, all the while muttering about the poor storage methods. 'If only there was 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 letter 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