

*The Best
of
the Rest*

**THE FIVE STEPS
OF DOWNSIZING**



Doug and Judy Robinson



This e-book is part of a series and contains expanded advice, wisdom
and experiences from the book:

**The Best of the Rest:
Downsizing for Boomers and Seniors
(2010)**

All e-books in the series:

Downsizing: Lots of Choices

The Five Steps of Downsizing

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The Five Steps of Downsizing is dedicated
to our children, Mike, Sue, Andrew
and their families,
including ten wonderful grandchildren.

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Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK is to help you consider your options, organize your thoughts and ask questions before making any decisions or commitments about downsizing. Our goal is to provide you with information that can help you make your own more informed decisions. Whatever the choice, your goal is to have the best quality of life possible.

Please note that we are not providing legal advice. Given that laws vary from region to region concerning tax matters, real estate practices, elder care, estate organization and settlement, we strongly recommend that you consult the appropriate professional resource to advise you on your own situation, where applicable.

*The Five Steps of
Downsizing
(Including
"What to Do With My Stuff?")*

MANY PEOPLE EITHER WANT to move or know that they should. But their "stuff" is one enormous roadblock. They have things they have collected, things they have stored for others, things that were broken that they planned to repair, things they might "need" someday, things they feel have value, and treasures that "should" stay in the family. **Stuff can be a big roadblock to moving on with your life!**

Most people are extremely anxious about what to do with their "stuff." Women frequently get bogged down because so many things are associated with precious memories, yet they simply can't keep everything. They can usually tell you a story about each item and are reluctant to part with any of them. Children, on the other hand, tend to have more of a simplistic agenda that comes to a screaming halt when Mom starts sorting her treasures, trying to decide what to bring.

Two impatient sons were urging their mom to make quick decisions on things she would like to keep and bring to her new home. You could literally see the anxiety building up in her eyes and facial expressions. Glaring at her boys, she took a deep breath and snapped, "What if I had to decide between the two of you?"

The sons got the message, backed off, and took a more patient attitude toward their mom's "lifetime treasures."

Conversely, many men will simply say, "Shovel it out and send me the bill!" One gentleman had five university degrees and discarded all of the diplomas. He said, "They are of no use to me now."

Some men, on the other hand, do have difficulty dealing with memorabilia and other manly treasures.

I was with three different women one day who all needed HUGS. One was in her seventies, living in their dream home when her husband had a bad accident and ended up in a nursing home. She felt she should sell her large home and move on. On the day before the move she was in tears, feeling she had made a big mistake. We reassured her that many people have the same reaction and she had made a wise decision. Knowing she was bringing many of her "treasures" with her also proved to be very comforting.

The second occasion was with a daughter standing in a "tired" home that she had grown up in. She lived thousands of miles away and lamented that she didn't have the money to buy the house of her childhood and "fix it up." Finally, she compensated by keeping one chair and three boxes of "treasures" that could be stored easily in a friend's basement.

The third hug went to a widow who was ninety-five years old. One minute she felt she should move and the next she was determined to stay. Everything had a memory, including the forty or fifty empty wine bottles.

Many people who are considering downsizing are storing things for family members or friends. Contact them, tell them what you are doing and ask them to remove their items within a month or allow you to dispose of them.

FIVE STEPS OF DOWNSIZING

1. What to keep
2. What to give to family or friends
3. What to sell

4. What to donate
5. What to discard

1. WHAT TO KEEP

Although we encourage each person to keep what is *really* important, the very nature of downsizing dictates that some tough decisions need to be made. We have seen some people keep way too much, making it a very long, expensive and frustrating experience for everyone on moving day as they try to shoehorn it all in.

We usually ask people how they want to live in their new "home." This helps them decide what they want to keep.

Remember that when you are downsizing, spaces are usually smaller and large bedroom sets, sofas and big dining room sets simply won't fit.

An important first step in deciding what to keep is to take a careful look at the new residence and see what will fit. Look at windows, wall plugs, light switches, heating, and thermostat locations. Once there is an understanding of the available space, it will help with many critical decisions.

Often people make a list of what to keep. This is a great start, but over the years we have found a much more effective process that provides visible reminders of things to keep as well as a certain level of comfort: **COLORED REMOVABLE DOTS**. They are a useful tool for anyone who is downsizing. Placing the color-coded dots on things provides a level of reassurance to people while reducing the risk of discarding "treasures." For those with memory loss, the dots are a great comfort. They are less confused when they can look around a room and quickly identify what will be coming with them. For seniors, we often use **GREEN – Green is go!** It will be going with them to their new home.

TIP: Try to identify the items you are keeping before the extended family arrives to see what they would like. If there is a green dot, the item is not negotiable and moves with you or the senior.

Judy is a mom and grandma. If one of our children were to say, "I've always loved that picture," she would give it to him or her even if it were the item she

valued most and had planned to bring it with her. Her dot on it says "NO!" before anyone even asks.

Later, family members can use different colors to identify what will be given to others, sold or donated to charities. The last decision is easy: discard the rest! The dots provide clarification for family members and loved ones that can often help prevent misunderstandings or conflicts. Remember, the last thing anyone needs during this time is unnecessary "problems."

If you are relocating far away, check out the cost of moving your furniture. Some people move only their "treasures" and purchase new or gently-used furniture when they arrive because moving costs could be prohibitive. Some buy retirement homes or mobile homes that are already furnished and replace the items they don't like. The surplus can be sold or given away.

NOTE TO ADULT CHILDREN: If you are working with parents, try to make them feel that they have some control in the decision-making process. It keeps them in their comfort zone and helps them to be generally more content with their new home. You can help them by saying something like, "There is room for three chairs. Which three would you like to bring?" Narrowing down the decisions for them is helpful, but make sure it is based on an understanding of what is really important to them.

Seniors want to bring specific things for a reason. Often we don't take the time to listen to their "WHY!"

One lady wanted to bring an old curio cabinet. She explained that she had spent a lot of time in her grandmother's home as a child and this antique was a big part of her wonderful memories there. We made room for it.

Another lady wanted to bring her bed and her sofa-bed to a single room so her sister could visit her once or twice a year. Her elderly brothers were trying to convince her to leave the sofa-bed, based on the limited space she was moving to. As the family looked on with furrowed brows, Judy said, "The sofa-bed will fit...OR you could bring your china cabinet. Of course if you brought the cabinet, you could also bring some notepaper and your beautiful cups and saucers, as well as your knick-knacks..."

"I'll bring my china cabinet," she declared with a distinct look of satisfaction. (This is an example of a non-confrontational approach especially helpful for people with Alzheimer's that allows them to participate and, in some cases, feel they are still 100 percent in charge.)

Although this can be an exciting time for fifty and sixty year olds who are looking at a new life style, for seniors it can be very difficult for them and their family members. Familiar, sentimental belongings are very important in making the new residence feel more comfortable. Remember, "Home is where your stuff is!" Also, whether you are young or old, if you get rid of something sentimental or valuable, you usually can't get it back.

Bring the things that are important to you or your parent. If the daily routine involves taking a nap on the sofa, see if you can work it in. If books are important, bring a bookcase, comfortable chair and a good reading lamp. We have moved many people with Alzheimer's who no longer read, yet books are still important to them. Books are their "friends." Instead of saying, "Dad, you no longer read," say, "Books have always been important to you. Let's choose a few and make a place for them."

When gardening is important, bring some plants, a watering can and even some plant food. Some seniors' residences have raised flower boxes and encourage the "gardeners" to look after the flowers. On one occasion, after setting up a new "home", we were excited to show it to our client. Only one problem: We couldn't find her or her daughter anywhere. It turned out they had made their way up to the rooftop garden and were busy planting flowers!

If crafts are enjoyed, bring wool, material or even a sewing machine. In her 90s, Judy's aunt Mary loved entertaining and making gifts to give to her visitors, so she brought her sewing machine, computer and wet bar to her single-room retirement residence.

If grandchildren will be visiting, bring a few books, puzzles, cards or maybe a game or two. We have found it is a great way to enjoy the visit and encourage the grandkids to return again and again.

If bridge is a favorite pastime, bring cards and possibly a card table. Many women invite friends and serve simple refreshments. (We have seen this even in a nursing home.) Some ladies like to serve wine and cheese and others offer a dessert or cooked item with a warm drink.

If a computer is used, be sure to make room for it or purchase a laptop which takes up less room. If you purchase a new laptop, have a professional set it up with the software version that is familiar to the senior. For instance, Windows 10 is not our comfort zone. Windows 7 is and that is what we recently had installed on our laptop.

Swimming, birdwatching, shopping, travel – think of "lifestyle" as you make your decisions.

CLOTHING

Judy was having great difficulty sorting through and discarding some of her own clothes and realized that many women, especially seniors, have trouble parting with years of accumulated clothing. She has since come to appreciate that it's easier for people to get rid of excess clothing when they know others will benefit. This holds true for accessories (hats, scarves, jewelry, purses) and miscellaneous items such as luggage.

In our city there is a clothes-lending service for women who need something special to wear to a job interview. There are also battered women, refugees, nursing homes, street people and charities like the Salvation Army that can use them. (And realizing that the expensive ten-year-old wardrobe has mysteriously "shrunk" considerably may help in the "get rid of" process.)

Some people think their clothing can be sold, but unless they are new or retro and clean, it's not an option. We just did a house content sale for a client who moved into a retirement residence. She had lots of high-end clothing, and some had never been worn. They had labels from Paris and London. At \$5 per item, we did sell a fair amount of clothing but have LOTS left for donations. Fur coats are very hard to sell, but we work with a charity that ships fur, leather and sheepskin up north to be used to line clothing for Inuit children.

When we clean out homes, we often find clothes with tags on them that have never been worn. Again, people are so happy to know that their things will be used!

Here are some guidelines to help you make good, quick decisions on clothing:

- How do you plan to live and what kind of clothing will be needed? Will you be going to meetings?
- Will you be spending the winter in a warm climate?
- Will you be participating in sports activities?
- If the move is to a residence, avoid bringing items that need dry cleaning.
- Some coats may be in excellent condition but are too heavy to wear comfortably. Give them away.
- Some buttons and zippers are too difficult to use. Let them go.
- Some sweaters don't fit over heads easily. Out they go too.
- Women tend to keep clothes that are too small or too large, hoping to "grow" or shrink into them. Be realistic and don't keep a size 10 when a size 14 is being worn.

As you sort through clothes, focus on what to keep. Choose clothing that makes one feel good about oneself. What are favorite colors? What colors are disliked?

If you're working with your mom, you could take her shopping or bring home three or four outfits and let her choose a favorite one. Consider putting the others away for a later gift.

We put "keepers" to one side of the cupboard and leave the rest on the other side for the moment. It's quick and not as tiring as having to make a decision on each item. When discussing an item, say something like, "That is hard to put on now," or "This won't be part of my new lifestyle." A banker friend retired and called to see if I could use some of her business outfits. She is six inches taller than I am. The items that fit were taken to a professional seamstress where they were shortened for me.

If you are working with a parent, avoid saying, "I can't believe you still have that old thing!" Seniors don't see or smell as well as they used to and would be horrified at the condition of some of their clothing or if they knew how stained their clothing had become. **Sorting mom's clothes can bring out the best or the worst in people.**

Many people we work with purchase the new "thin" hangers to conserve space in the smaller cupboards. Some adult children have lovingly organized mom's cupboard so everything was color co-ordinated.

Many parents came from a generation where things weren't thrown away, and they don't realize how much clothing can cost today because they haven't bought any for a long time. Judy has taken a senior shopping and told a little white lie about prices, then discreetly paid the difference so they would buy some "special" clothing.

SHOES

We have worked with several ladies who had 50 pairs of shoes. One lady had over 500 pairs. Decisions have to be made if you are downsizing.

Often seniors are limited when it comes to choosing shoes. They need something comfortable, yet safe. Some can wear a small heel and a few can still wear a high heel. This makes sorting easier.

They also need shoes that are easy to put on. Many seniors we have worked with have shoes with Velcro fasteners. If their feet are swollen, they can still use the shoes but adjust the Velcro for a little looser fit. All shoes should give good support as poor foot wear can contribute to a fall.

We moved a special lady many years ago. She'd had a stroke and was confined to a wheelchair, so she and her husband moved to a continuing care facility. She discarded boxes and boxes of stiletto heels but kept one "memory" pair. A year later, her husband phoned to tell us her health had greatly improved and they were moving to a condo. They gave us the keys to both places and said, "We're taking the train for a holiday and will be back in three days. Move us while

we are away." She walked out of the residence in the stiletto heels! Often this "shoe" story gives hope to people who have had a stroke.

Many people keep their shoes on shoe racks or shelves, which are more accessible and prevent unnecessary bending and dizziness. I have started keeping mine in a fabric hanging rack which I really enjoy.

MEMENTOS, PHOTO ALBUMS, PERSONAL VIDEOS

Each person we have worked with has had different priorities and treasured different things. Some people wish to keep the 30 albums from trips they have taken, yet others toss them into the garbage. One lady had a tiny brown bag filled with miniature items. Her daughter felt they were garbage yet mom felt they were her "memories." We brought them and put them on a tiny shelf.

- Keep an album of the most treasured photos, selecting one to represent many others taken at the same time.
- Photos can be scanned and saved digitally or burned to DVDs. This allows easy distribution to family.
- Videos can be saved onto DVDs.
- Photos in frames can be removed from the frame to save space.
- War medals or a piece of antique jewelry can be framed to complement the décor.

Many of the things you won't use can be used by others. Donate them.

HOBBIES AND CRAFTS

Again the question, "**How do you want to live?**" Many people have often wanted to take up painting and do so after retirement. Some people want a place where they can garden or swim or bird watch. Some women desire to sew or do crafts while some men want to take up woodworking or carving. A woman friend wanted to learn to weld and got a welder's mask when she retired. Some 90-year-olds still like to bike. Many enjoy cards or a computer. Knowing which hobbies one will choose to pursue helps determine which items to keep and which to let go.

FURNITURE FOR BOOMERS

We've noticed baby boomers buying lots of new furniture for their new home. At first we thought, "Why discard nice things?" Then we remembered that when we downsized to a much smaller home, that's exactly what we did. Our large furniture wouldn't fit so we bought a smaller sofa and tables.

Rooms in adult bungalows, condos, apartments and residences usually will not accommodate large sofas, big dining room tables and king-sized bedroom sets. If *one* of these items is very important, we encourage you to choose a place that is large enough to accommodate it. At times, we use magnetic floor plans to help see where furniture could work. You can also download programs that help with placement of furniture.

Have a look at the new place and take some measurements. On occasion, a room will accommodate a piece of furniture but to move it in may be a challenge. You may need to remove a large window to get into the suite or carry the piece up several flights of stairs because it will not fit in the elevator. Otherwise it might be impossible to get it into the new residence. Doug's brother actually hired a crane to get a large four-seat sofa into his apartment.

Many people are buying Murphy beds for the spare room.

There are times when shopping for smaller furniture is necessary. Look for furniture that's on a scale that's more appropriate. If you are purchasing new furniture, remember that too many colors in a small space will make the area look cluttered. Instead, use one color and play with different shades. You can use accent pieces of another color.

FURNITURE FOR SENIORS

Beds are very important! If you are considering a smaller bed due to space restrictions, make sure you actually sleep in one for several nights to make sure it will work for you. If you are buying a new bed, consider a low profile base. We have had several clients who needed a step stool to get into the bed.

When choosing a chair, take the one that is easy to get in and out of. If it's coming from the present residence, it is probably a favorite one. If purchasing new, make sure the person who will be using it actually tries it before buying it. Some people have long legs and some have short ones. Make sure that feet can touch the floor, and that it's comfortable to sit in. We often say, "Show me how easily you can get up."

Choose a dresser that is solid and easy to open. If there is any doubt, say, "Show me how easily you can open the drawers."

Many seniors have older televisions and large stereo units. We suggest getting newer space-saving units and consider installing them on the wall to gain space. Many seniors find it difficult to watch TV from an angle so make sure they are at a comfortable level for easy viewing. And be sure the remote is easy to use!

As we age, we need to choose occasional tables more carefully. Seniors often use their arms to get up and a pedestal table would probably tip. We suggest bringing them for "decoration" but not placing them next to a favorite chair.

Art and knick-knacks can be more challenging to decide on. SPACE for them is what will help you see how much you can bring. Choose wall space wisely if you wish to bring art or shelving to hold small objects.

When working with a parent or a partner, be sensitive as to what they have been talking about. A daughter was quite hurt when she bought a new lampshade for her dad, and he said, "I don't want a new one!" Before showing him the lampshade, she could have said, "Dad, you asked me to buy a white lampshade. Here is what you asked for."

Some relatives can overreact to change. Try not to argue with them but repeat what they have said. For example: "You've mentioned several times lately that you would like a dining room set that is a lighter color. Would you like to go looking on Saturday morning?" Use their words to open the door to selling, donating, or disposing of an item or purchasing something new.

An elderly lady wanted to save her money in order to have something to leave to her children, so she was hesitant on spending money on herself. At times,

quality of life diminishes because of this strong desire. We always told Doug's mom the money she had was hers. We encouraged her to spend it. We also let her know that if she needed financial help, we would always be there to help her.

On the other hand, one of our seniors put up with the same sofa for fifty years. Her husband saved and saved and saved. After he died, she announced, "I'm going shopping for new furniture!"

Avoid saying things like, "Your sofa is disgusting. It is worn and dirty." Remember, they don't see as well as they used to, their sense of smell is diminished, and if they have gone through the Depression or a recession, they can be very hesitant about spending money.

Instead, be positive. "Mom, that sofa has served you very well. I can't believe it's lasted this long, but it's time to replace it. Perhaps you would like a love seat for your new home. It would also take up less space."

Sometimes "trading" is an option. You could say, "Mom, you have always admired my dining room set. It's quite a bit smaller than yours. Would you like to trade? Mine would fit better in your new apartment and I do have room for yours."

You could give your parents a gift certificate from a furniture store and encourage them to use it towards something for their new home.

If your parent is considering doing some room arrangements that don't make sense, don't say, "That is ridiculous!" Instead, ask why he wants to do it that way.

We lived in a small waterfront home. Our bedroom contained a large bed and two night tables. There was no dresser! WHY? No room! However, our bedroom faced the river while the master bedroom only faced the road. We wanted to wake up and see the water and the distant mountains each morning and not see and hear traffic.

Several times clients who were moving to a two-room suite have told us to put one of the beds in the living room. Why? Neither of them would have a good night's sleep if they slept in the same room. There are some fabulous room dividers

or screens that are helpful in this situation. You can choose a bed cover that compliments the room and possibly some decorative cushions.

2. WHAT TO GIVE TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

CAUTION! Lots of wisdom and understanding is required here.

We have found that things have really changed in the last twenty years. Frequently, children no longer want the large dining room sets, the silver, china or crystal. Some children, trying to appease mom or dad, do take "stuff." Often they rent a locker and quietly tell us that when their parent dies, they will get rid of all of it.

Is anything to be given to family or friends? "Stuff" can bring out the worst in some people. It can be a very challenging time for some families. We saw two brothers feuding over their father's three-hundred-dollar power tool. Perhaps the parent should have just sold it and divided the money or bought a second one for his other son. At times people want items just because they feel they can sell them for a lot of money. A suggestion is to put a monetary value on the items to help all see the fairness or unfairness of who is taking what. If need be, have art and other large dollar items appraised. Family peace is worth the fee. Some parents sell everything they can't bring with them without discussing it with their children, which upsets the family. In spite of this, money can be divided more equitably than material things.

Often a child wants a memento that is worth little. When Doug's mom gave up her home, Doug only wanted the old white enamel kitchen table. When he was a young child, the doctor came to the house and removed his tonsils as he lay on that table! It became a useful addition to his workshop.

At times, gifts such as a handcrafted item or an original piece of art can be returned to the giver, if he/she would like it back.

Some families take turns choosing an item they would like from the "what-to-gives." Each family member has a turn, then they go through the process over and over until all items are gone.

All in all, you're probably beginning to realize that the actual move is not the only stressful part of downsizing!

A POSITIVE OUTCOME!

We have seen several parents who had been alienated from their children for many years reconcile during this time. Parents sent letters to their children saying they were selling the house and wondered if there was anything they would like from the home. In these cases, "stuff" broke the ice and brought about renewed relationships.

TIPS

We strongly encourage family members to keep the seniors' home somewhat intact until they actually move, especially the area that they spend most of their time in. Seeing their home in an empty or disorganized state can add to the stress they are already feeling. Judy remembers tears welling up in her eyes seeing an eighty-five-year-old alone and forlorn, sitting on one remaining chair in an otherwise empty room. Prior to the moving date, greedy family members had jumped the gun and grabbed everything their aunt wasn't taking with her.

It is equally important to leave sufficient time after the move to deal with what is left. Carefully consider the closing date or end of the lease. This allows you (or your loved ones) time to take an additional lamp or end table to fill out the new home. It also gives them peace of mind knowing there is a "period of grace." If too much has been moved, it can be returned to the home and dispersed along with everything else.

We have emptied a large five-bedroom house in one day. All the decisions had been made and everything was effectively identified. The mover took items to deliver to family members. Next, the auctioneer and antique dealers arrived. A charity came a little later and then there was a load to landfill. It is possible when you are organized and everything is coordinated efficiently.

3. WHAT TO SELL

Now determine what items are saleable. Unfortunately, baby boomers and seniors as a demographic are typically downsizing, and the market for many things has become saturated, causing prices to be lower than they were several years ago. Many antique shops and consignment stores have closed because fewer people are interested in fine china, crystal and silver. China needs to be carefully washed by hand, and today's society is more concerned about the lead in crystal. Silverware is usually worth more for its metal content and is often sold by weight, with prices fluctuating. The market has reached the point where some items are no longer saleable, but merely giveaways.

Each city or community has reliable people with good names who will buy, consign or auction the valuable and the not-so-valuable items. But beware! Like all other businesses, there are the usual "bad apples." Check out your choices with the Better Business Bureau or get a referral from someone who has been pleased with the service offered.

Ask lots of questions such as:

- How do you establish prices for antiques and art?
- What commission do you charge?
- Do you charge to pack smaller items?
- Do you charge to transport all items?
- May we deliver the items to you?
- Do you charge for advertising?
- What happens if items don't sell?
- If unsold items are to be donated to a charity, do you charge for that service?

HAVING A SALE

In the '60s, we lived in California where so many things, like McDonald's and self-serve gas stations, got started. (One morning a friend asked Doug to go to a garage sale. Doug said, "You have a garage and I don't need one!") Returning to the East, we had the first garage sale in our community. It was a large charity sale and a great success. Of course, now garage sales are extremely common.

Sometimes, when the family, relatives, and neighbors have taken what they want, there is little of value left. Is it worth it to put in thirty to forty hours to get \$200 out of a sale? If you feel it is worthwhile, an estate, contents, tag or garage sale is another option available to you. Some people might shudder at the thought of a house contents sale, so this is not an option for everyone.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

- Is it a good location where people can stop and park easily?
- Are you permitted to have a sale in the home?
- Do you need to get a permit to have a sale?
- Is there a good, safe traffic flow in the house?
- Are there excellent hardwood floors or newly painted walls that could be damaged?

The Internet, libraries and bookstores are excellent sources for finding information on how to hold a sale and what particular collectible items have sold for recently. This is constantly changing, and something is worth only what someone is willing to pay to purchase it. Some figurines used to bring \$600 to \$700 and now may only bring \$60 if someone wants it. Framed limited edition prints may have cost \$900 and you could be lucky to get \$100. We recently came across beautiful silver plate that no one even wanted.

Frequently, a lot of what has accumulated over the years simply needs to be discarded. Dealing with the surplus is easier on elders' sensitivities after the move. After all, they have spent years collecting their "treasures," many of which have little cash value. Because of the sentiment attached to these items, they might feel they are worth hundreds of dollars when the reality is that a stranger might be willing to pay only five dollars.

If possible, don't show elders individual prices for items. Tell them what you got for several items rather than just one of them. A collector's plate could have cost \$60 and sold for \$5, yet a unique Depression glass plate found in a basement might bring \$40 rather than nothing. The total is \$45, which is close to the

expectation of what they would get for the two items. Often people are upset about the \$5 item and unappreciative of the \$40 item.

On the other hand, a lady once remarked, "I've had that vase for years and I'm not really sure why – it's downright ugly! I don't care what you do with it!"

"Do you realize that vase is worth approximately \$285?" Judy asked.

Guess what? It's now her favorite piece in her new home.

We have two accredited appraisers and an art appraiser on our team. One Inuit soapstone carving was valued at \$25,000 and was shipped to a family member. In many places you can hire someone for an hour to avoid costly mistakes.

IF YOU ADVERTISE, THEY WILL COME. Helpful hints:

- Advertise in the local paper, online, or on the community grocer's bulletin board.
- Don't put the actual address in the ad. Say only, "Alder Street – watch for signs." Often no one is living in the home, and you don't want to alert thieves. It also keeps the opportunists and dealers at bay if you are setting up the night before.
- Set a definite time; for example, "No sales before 8 a.m." Otherwise you could be inundated before you are ready.
- Use a bold heading: "HOUSE CONTENTS SALE." It's worth the investment.
- Be specific about items of value. Example: "Excellent pine furniture, many power tools, original oak dining room set with six chairs, memorabilia, some collectibles and much more!" (The tools keep the men busy while the women shop.)

SIGNS

- Use wood or heavy cardboard and permanent markers.

- Make sure the sign and lettering are big enough that people can read them as they drive by.
- The sign should give the name of the sale (e.g. estate, content, moving), date and time, street name (no house number).
- Have signs on major roads near intersections at least the day before.
- Put signs on your street and connecting streets the morning of the sale.
- Use directional arrows on each one.
- Make sure the signs are sturdy and well fastened.
- Remember to remove the signs when the sale is finished!

SET-UP

Where feasible, price and leave items where they are, as this saves considerable effort. Be careful not to place glass items up very high to avoid breakage when people try to reach for them. It is easier on you if customers carry sale items up the basement stairs. If you don't want them going through the whole house, limit the areas where they can go (e.g. main floor only, basement only) by putting "off-limit" signs on doors or barrier tape on entry ways.

Use as many tables as you can to display items more effectively. Borrow tables if you can. A colored cloth under china, glasses or knick-knacks helps make them look more attractive.

We often put many expensive items together and have someone assigned to carefully watch them. Be vigilant! People will use a distraction to steal something of value. They may drop something and as you focus on what happened, a partner "in crime" puts the item in a pocket or under their jacket. Locked display cases can come in handy.

If possible, have items priced, with nothing priced under a dollar. Instead, place several items in a clear plastic bag, staple it shut, and mark at \$1.00-\$5.00. Alternatively, you can have a whole table of dollar items.

Have change, paper, bags or small boxes and a calculator on hand. Designate someone to sit at a table at the exit with a cash box to collect money from people

as they leave. As cash accumulates, remove it to a safe location or wear a money belt. Take no checks.

If people want to go to a bank or ATM, tell them you will hold the item for twenty minutes, unless you know them or take a reasonable deposit. Another prospective buyer is usually willing to wait twenty minutes to see if the person has really bought the item they missed out on.

SALE DAY

If people arrive early, give out numbers starting an hour before you open. (They can go and have a coffee or breakfast and return.) This allows you to be fair to the early birds and also to control the number of people entering the home at a time. Just before you open, inform the people waiting that prices are "as marked." No bargaining before noon. It is a sanity saver. Sometimes people will pay \$200 or \$300 for an item and others will argue over a dollar.

If help is available and the weatherman co-operates, it doesn't hurt to put some of the bigger, pricier items out on the laneway. It says your sale is substantial and not the typical "Let's-get-rid-of-the-kids-toys" garage sale.

Have someone available to monitor the customers around small valuable items, such as sterling silver and jewelry.

STAY FOCUSED!

We have seen some families agonizing over a small table of items that didn't sell. Your aim is to empty the house and keep your sanity as well.

When you feel the time is right, remove some of the items of value as well as those you would like to donate to specific charities. You can then announce, "All remaining items are free! Take them away." It is better that someone carries an item away than having to pack it all up and dispose of it yourself.

Have fun! Enjoy the people! And when the sale is over, remember to take down the signs.

4. WHAT TO DONATE

Getting rid of long-time possessions can be a hard pill to swallow for many. There are two approaches. You can donate them to a worthwhile cause and get some satisfaction out of knowing that people are being helped. Or, if parting with the items is too much to handle at the time, consider renting some storage space for a short period of time.

Long term rental is very expensive. Two clients were renting FOUR large lockers. One woman had spent \$200 a month for 10 years (\$24,000!) for just one of the lockers, and when we finally worked with her most items went to landfill.

Many items are still useable but not saleable. At times it is even difficult to give items away unless they are in good condition. Charitable organizations are often flooded with donations, so they have to be choosy about what they take. Several times we have sent decent, serviceable furniture to various charities, only to be told to take it to landfill. This has caused us to look elsewhere for solutions.

Many charities in our area cannot take any "stuffed" furniture because of the risk of bedbugs. This includes mattresses, sofas and chairs. We have developed relationships with service organizations that know us and do take these items because we "know" they are bug-free.

We now help battered women start over with items such as pots, pans and dishes, as well as pretty items to boost their self-esteem (such as clothing, flower vases, pictures, lamps, nice towels and sheets). Wool, fabric, etc. can go to a seniors' center. Recently we gave an enormous bag of wool to an elderly group of women who meet each week to knit for babies and street people. They were delighted!

- Food can go to a food bank, homeless shelters, etc. Note: Dispose of any outdated packaged or canned foods. If you wouldn't want your grandchildren to eat it, don't give it away.
- Wigs and some period clothing can be donated to a local theater group.
- Books, CDs and DVDs can be given to a church or school for a fundraiser if libraries are not interested.

- Art supplies can go to a local art school or art center.
- Blankets, towels and shampoo can go to a shelter.
- Various charity groups and opticians will accept old eyeglasses to send to Third World countries.
- Some hearing societies refurbish and donate old hearing aids to those in need.
- Scrap metal and old vehicles can often be removed at no charge by scrap metal businesses which sell it by weight.

Recently we have dropped off art books and supplies to an art school. The people were ecstatic and gave us lots of hugs. Many would-be artists want to learn to paint and some can't afford to buy the supplies.

This is only a short list of suggestions for donations. It is really satisfying to be able to help people, but more importantly, it's great to know that the belongings will be used to help others.

A client's granddaughter gave us some of her grandmother's size 3 clothing. We gave them to a tiny elderly lady who loved nice clothing and had a limited budget. She really appreciated them and the granddaughter was thrilled.

5. WHAT TO DISCARD

Remember, before you send a box to landfill, open it and check it carefully. You might have missed important papers, such as deeds and wills. If you are going to discard papers, check for any personal information: name, address, phone number, account numbers, etc., and SHRED them. This is really important. (One day Judy was at a fast-food drive-through and a man was taking banking receipts out of the garbage. We have also seen people in apartment buildings and condo buildings going through paper "recycle" looking for personal information!)

We have found sterling silver and chicken bones in the same container! Often money is found in books or rolled up in an old sock. Rings and safety deposit box keys might be hidden in old, chipped sugar bowls (under the sugar), between mattresses, or pinned inside old clothing.

On one occasion, while working with masks and gloves, our team took many boxes of mice-infested fabric out of an attic under the ever-watchful eye of the elderly owner. We insisted on discarding it, although the man felt it was usable. He was unaware of the many dangerous viruses and bacteria (including hantavirus and salmonella) carried by mice.

In the yard were two very rusted lawn chairs. We requested that the men put them in the trailer for landfill. The elderly man insisted that the items be removed from the trailer. He was not prepared to see anything go. We knew it was time to stop.

If you are working with a parent, it is much easier to discuss what will be done, but then have the senior occupied elsewhere the day that the residence is emptied.

NOTE: Check on restrictions for garbage, recyclables and hazardous waste because each place is different. May you put furniture out with your garbage?

Once we put 400 large, empty plastic water jugs at the curb for recycling. We strung them together so they could be untied easily when they were put in the truck. In some communities, there is a hefty extra fee if you have any cardboard with your trash. On the other hand, we loaded a truck with four tons of paper from one house and, being environmentally correct, delivered it all to the paper recycler. "Take it to landfill," we were told.

At one time we could put out fifty bags of garbage. Now some cities charge for each bag. People purchase "tags," and each bag must have a tag attached to it. Some places simply restrict residents to one bag of trash every week or two! Most places have services that will take a load to landfill for a fee. Some businesses bag and remove the garbage, while others just remove it. Some recycle, others don't. Charges are calculated by weight, volume, time, and/or dumping fee.

At times people order a dumpster and load it. Remember to walk items in so you are making the best use of the space. Always close it if you are not there so a child won't accidentally get into it. Because of the cost of garbage removal, other people may put things in "your" dumpster. We usually have everything identified for the dumpster, hire "muscle" and fill it quickly to avoid this problem.

Again, stay focussed. Don't get caught up in that "Maybe I'm being wasteful" trap. **Keep in mind that the decisions made were by a process of elimination.**



DOUG AND JUDY ROBINSON retired from teaching in 1992. At that time, they downsized. As the owners and managers of Senior Moves, they have been downsizing seniors since 1996. Over the years, they have been sharing their expertise on radio talk shows, national and local television, and through many live seminars near and far.

They have three children and ten wonderful grandchildren.

Visit their website at
downsizingforboomersandseniors.com.