

Ep #80: Declutter Your Space with Kelly Sakmar



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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle Podcast* with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 80.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my friends. I have a special guest for today's podcast. My guest is Kelly Sakmar. She is owner and professional organizer at ClutterLESS. She helps busy families create homes with less clutter and more time. She's a member of the National Association of Productivity and Organizing professionals. And holds a specialist certificate in residential organizing and household management.

I invited Kelly to come on the show because inside Epic You we are talking this month on how to reduce clutter, all forms of clutter. We are talking about reducing our physical clutter, our mental clutter and our emotional clutter and how they're related.

So, as you are listening to this conversation you will hear that there are studies out there showing that if you have an extremely cluttered home you're 77% more likely to be overweight. And that clutter in our physical space can translate to feeling emotional clutter and mental clutter in our minds. It can raise our cortisol levels. It can cause us to have this low grade fight or flight response where we feel we need to be upregulated even in our homes because of our spaces that we live in.

And just think about it visually. Visually when you see clutter like laundry not put away, things not being done, how that can take an emotional toll on you, that can make you feel discouraged and signal to your brain that life is chaotic. There's so much to get done. There's so much work to be done. It's never going to be all done and we can't rest and relax. So, when we have a lot of physical clutter or emotional clutter and mental clutter a lot of

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times we just want to tune out with a drink. We want to tune out with food. We want to tune out with scrolling on the internet.

And what we don't realize is that these coping strategies of tuning out really, allows us just to avoid the real problem instead of taking care of the root cause. So, enjoy this episode where Kelly and I walk you through how to declutter your space.

Sherry: Well, hello my friends. I am so excited to have this discussion today with Kelly Sakmar. And she is a professional organizer. She has her own business and she's the owner of ClutterLESS. And we are so excited to talk about how clutter in our life, physical clutter, emotional clutter, mental clutter. All this clutter weighs us down as women particularly and really has some dramatic impacts on our health, impacts on our wellness. And I can't wait to have this discussion with Kelly today. So, welcome, Kelly to the show.

Kelly: Thank you, Sherry, I'm looking forward to it.

Sherry: So, Kelly, I'm so excited you're here. And I really want to dive into this topic because here's what I find. When we are overwhelmed with physical clutter, with mental clutter, with emotional clutter it's easy to want to just tune out of your life. It's just easy to want to overeat, overdrink because those are ways that you can instantly feel better in the moment. They are avoidance strategies. They take us away from the problems that are really lurking in our lives.

And being home these last few years, some us have really been in these environments and maybe we have amassed a bunch of clutter. We haven't gotten around to doing the decluttering. And we, just seeing all that as you have mentioned and we've talked before, that has some real physiologic things that go on inside our body, like the cortisol we talked about. And so, I'd love for you to talk about when we have all this clutter in our lives, how that plays on us emotionally, and physically, and physiologically.

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Kelly: Sure. So, it's not in your head. If clutter stresses you out it is legitimate. It raises your cortisol levels. So, when you have visual clutter, when you have, even tasks on a task list that you're like, "I am just not making progress on this." So mental clutter, emotional clutter, that is when your cortisol actually rises. And that is what controls stress in your body. That can cause a low grade fight or flight response to be constantly happening in your body just by what is sitting out in your home or what is weighing on you mentally.

It can even lead to a greater risk of type 2 diabetes or heart disease. I have seen studies that – and I think you mentioned this in your last newsletter too, that people with extremely cluttered homes are 77% more likely to be overweight. Women in physically cluttered homes or kitchens, snack more, whereas if you have a tidy home it can be a better a predictor of physical health and increased activity levels. Bedrooms that are in disarray can lead to difficulty falling asleep.

So there truly is correlation between the physical, visual clutter in our lives and the stresses it puts on our body physiologically, mentally, emotionally.

Sherry: Absolutely. And I find that when my house is in disarray I just feel more spastic, I feel like oh my gosh, overwhelmed. I can't focus. I want to multitask. I want to clean this up and it weighs on me when I go into my workspace. So, I am a type of person that just thrives when things are in their place.

Kelly: Agree totally.

Sherry: Yeah. So, take us through how you begin to work with somebody. What are some common rooms that you tell people to start with or a process that you walk them through? Because I know when I first started just decluttering my closet it can feel overwhelming, it's going to take hours to do. I'm not going to want to part with some things even though I haven't worn them. So, I'd love to hear some of the tactics that you use with your clients.

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Kelly: Rights. So frequently people will come to me and have a space that's really weighing on them. But if I were to just give general organizing advice I would say start with the lowest hanging fruit. So, what is impeding your daily activity the most, whether that's maybe the setup of your kitchen or just even a drawer in your bathrooms. I like for people to start small and have quick wins and then keep the momentum going.

So, a closet can be overwhelming for sure to start with because some of that is – we talk about emotional and physical clutter. Some of that is both because it's reminding you of a time that maybe you did fit into that dress. Or a past life whether you chose to leave the corporate world or if it was chosen for you. You just have all these stories wrapped up around what these clothes mean. And it can be hard, or actually it can be more – I call that sentimental clutter. It can be hardest to address that.

So, I would rather you start somewhere where you have no emotional attachment to the items, like a junk drawer. Where you can say, "Jeeze, I really don't need 500 rubber bands." Probably about 20 to keep on hand would be reasonable. And you get that immediate win. So just like you have the cortisol, I'm pretty sure you get dopamine when the space is cleared out. So, you're fighting it physiologically also. And then that propels you forward to continue to make more wins.

So that's just generally where I would recommend starting. And then I basically have the same process to follow regardless of what space it is. So, if it's a closet, if it's a whole room, if it's a drawer. Someone who is tackling this on their own I would again caveat start small and be realistic about what you can accomplish in the time that you have set aside for this project. So maybe only have an hour to chunk while kids are at preschool or something like that. Start with just a section of the room versus the whole room, or a section of the closet versus the whole closet.

But basically, my process is always to clear out the entire space. So, if you're doing a drawer, you empty that drawer out to the bottom. That's a good opportunity to then wipe it down or do a quick vacuum or whatever so

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you're starting with truly a clean slate. And then you take those items. I always say it gets worse before it gets better, you take those items that were in the drawer and you sort them into categories. After you've done that this is your chance to review and edit down.

So, your goal then is to eliminate excess and duplicates. So again, you probably don't need three or four different spatulas. You probably have your favorite one or two and that will do just fine. And so then at that point you're sorting the items into items to keep, donate, store maybe in another location of your home, or recycle and trash. So, I generally like to have a couple of trash bags along with me to designate these different options. Some helpful questions to ask if you're getting bogged down on whether you should keep an item or not.

I always like to think if you were moving would this make a cut to come with you? When was the last time you used it? I'm sure you've all heard that if you haven't used it in a year it's time to move on except for very specific scenarios. Sometimes it's even six months, if it's more of a seasonal item. And then once you're done with those processes this is where the fun part comes. You get to systematically organize and you can label if you choose. Or if there are going to be multiple people using a space I would definitely recommend labeling.

But you systematically organize the remaining things and if at this point you feel that you need different bins or organizational products to really keep the space in tiptop shape, that's when you go buy the bins. I always laugh when I get clients come and they're like, "I have all these bins", and they're not really being utilized. They're just, we buy more things to try to make us feel good about organizing the things that we have.

Sherry: I love that. That's so good. And I was forced, thankfully forced into this process when we redid our kitchen. And a kitchen remodel, when you go through it, it just forces this process upon you which turned out to be delightful. Because you empty everything out, you put it in boxes, or storage, or whatever and you just work off of what you truly need for the

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time period that your kitchen's getting redone. And then when we had all new cabinets, and all new spaces I said, "Never again am I going to have Tupperware where I can't find the top."

And it really has made just cleanup, storage just so much easier when I have gotten rid of extra pots and pans that I wasn't using, lids that I no longer had the bottom to. Like you said, even with rubber bands, having a daughter we went through the crayon and the marker phase. And there's just random crayons, markers without the same colored top. That stuff, everybody knows I have a bit of OCD to me and that just drives me nuts. So, I'm like, "That's it. We get rid of all these markers that aren't working or that are mismatched tops." And just buy new markers. It's just clean.

Kelly: Yeah, and start fresh.

Sherry: Yes. And that really, now when I open my junk drawer it doesn't feel like a junk drawer. It's not overwhelming with just all this random stuff that you don't know, or keys that you don't know what it went to. And then crumbs get in your drawers. And it just started to be a mess. So, it feels so good now to have everything has its own place, it looks aesthetically pretty when you open the drawer.

Kelly: Which the brain likes.

Sherry: Yes. And it just feels so clean. And so, I just move throughout my kitchen now with so much less effort, and emotional clutter. It just doesn't weigh on me emotionally. And I, when I did this to my closet a few years ago I just started with my sock drawer. I'm like, I could get a quick win just with my sock drawer.

Kelly: That's a great place to start. Usually, people aren't emotionally attached to socks in any way, shape or form. If it has a hole in it, it's stained, it doesn't have a match, it is time to go.

Sherry: Right. And so, I just felt, okay, let me get that quick win. And in that, whatever, 20 minutes I think it took because I went and paired them,

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and fold them, and stack them nicely. And I did want to buy bins for more of the dress socks versus more of my casual socks, or athletic socks.

Anyway, once I did that I was like, “This feels so good.” And so, it motivates you to keep taking that next step.

Kelly: Addicting in a good way.

Sherry: Yes. And then just what I did was break my closet down to chunks. So, I like to have my articles of clothing color coded. So, I would just go through all my black shirts. And then I'd pull out all the black tops. And say, “Okay, which ones do I wear? Which ones haven't I worn? Which ones do I love?” And I go through that process that we talk about. So, the three questions I ask myself is, do I need it? Is this a need? Do I love it? Do I like how it looks on me? Does it look still in good condition? So, do I love it? And do I actually use it or wear it?

Because like you said, if you haven't been using it in the past six months to a year maybe it's time that you just move on from it. So, I love those questions.

Kelly: I also love those questions. Because I mean some of the things we need we don't necessarily love. But I think it's an important question.

Sherry: Like you need toothbrush.

Kelly: Exactly. Over the last couple of years, toilet paper. We had no idea how much we needed toilet paper. But I don't know that it brings – maybe it does, maybe it does bring some people joy now to have it.

Sherry: Yeah. I mean when you have the toilet paper, it's good. It's when you don't have it that you feel bad.

Kelly: Exactly, yes. I digress.

Sherry: So, I find that when we clean up this physical clutter. And I was expressing in just one room of my house now how it's just so much easier to move in the kitchen to find things, to know everything has a home. And

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we went through our pantry and got rid of all these dressings, and spices, and things we just weren't using. We needed it for a recipe five years ago and just haven't used it.

Kelly: Went expired, yeah.

Sherry: Exactly. Let's just let it go. It's fine. And just to not have to go through so many spices to find the one spice you need. All these little increments of improvement free up so much more of your time. I didn't realize what times favor this could be. Now when I walk in my closet, most people say they wear five to ten percent. I wear more than that. And it just feels nice to look at the clothes and say, "Yes, I can wear that. I can wear that." Rather than going saying, "One day I'll fit back into that."

Kelly: And you're thinking, you feel bad and shaming you.

Sherry: Yes. And I have just a small percentage of those, just a small. Do I? Actually, I don't, Kelly. Let me take that back.

Kelly: I will say that I have a section of more formal wear. If I get invited to a party and I need something dressy to wear which over COVID I kind of culled. And now that we're coming back into society I'm realizing that I might need to purchase a couple more pieces. But that's okay because the trends change, your style evolves. I'm not losing major sleep over having gotten rid of something that I could have worn to whatever event it was.

There's usually something else I can find that will work just fine or it's an excuse, you have an actual reason to go shopping versus just shopping to fill the void in your heart. And then accumulating more clutter in your home and that's just another way of numbing.

Sherry: It is, shopping, over-shopping, overspending.

Kelly: Over-shopping, overdrinking, overeating, it's all just kind of in response to these stressors that we have in our lives that we don't need to.

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Sherry: It's inviting more problems in instead of solving the real problem. And I think that's where the work that you do is really helping people, okay, let's get rid of this clutter. And also saying, "What else can be going on?" Let's look at all of your habits and see where they're stemming from. What is the things that we're wanting to avoid?

Kelly: Yes. Like you said with your kitchen, it's not just you no longer have the drawer full of stuff that you don't need. It is speeding up your efficiency and making your day more pleasant. You probably enjoy cooking a whole lot more now than you did when you had to sort through 60 different spices or whatever it might be. That's where I get, again, the low hanging fruit, the most impactful spaces are the ones I would say I love.

I love a good kitchen organization because it just really, you're in it so many times a day. You're making meals there. You're connecting with you family there and people say it's the heart of the home. If that is not functioning well it's going to just slow down your whole process and weigh on you more.

Sherry: Yes. And I love that the space now is inviting. And what I put on display are healthy foods, they say to put on display the apples, and the bananas. And we gravitate towards those kinds of foods because they are visually out. And if they're visually out it's signaling to the brain, that's a healthy snack to have. And so having these visual markers around your house really does cue your brain to fall in love and desire that stuff. Rather than having bottles of alcohol out, or some Cheetos, or Cheez-Its.

And so, I really pay attention to how I'm signaling my brain by my visual environment. And so, we talked about when we were in the Facebook group, if you want to workout you pull out those clothes the night before. You have that visual cue to say, "Hey, we're going to be doing this tomorrow." So, you're setting up your life to get the life that you want to lead, the high quality life.

Kelly: The results you want, yes.

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Sherry: Exactly. And so, you're putting that forward in a visual sense which really helps with the brain to take the action that you want to be taking.

Kelly: Right. That's part of the value system for our family. We do not value things over people. So, if our home were to be overrun with things, I mean I have kids, I know. There's a certain amount of stuff that comes along with kids. But that can be kept within reason. And really it's like the Christmas morning toy of hey, you open it up, it's exciting for a little bit. And we're late March now, how many people are still playing with those Christmas mouse hats? But I mean my kids are at school right now.

If I'm on a work call, or on the phone, or I'm distracted, or whatever it is. How badly do my kids just want to be with me and play with me? So, when we don't have that overwhelming amount of stuff we can focus on the principles in our lives and the people in our lives that are more important. And that is going to be way more satisfying to the brain and our physiological state than any amount of clutter numbing, overeating, overdrinking, whatever it may be.

Sherry: Yeah, that's a great point. And I love how we had this conversation going in our Facebook page with the ladies there. And I'd love for you to just mention it here on the podcast, which how do we go about cleaning up the space for our kids? Is that our responsibility? Is that their responsibility?

Kelly: Yeah. I think it totally depends on your child, and the age of your child, and the temperament of your child. My older daughter is eight and a half and my younger daughter is five and a half. If I were to tell my five and a half year old, "Go and declutter your room", she would be like, "Okay mommy." And just go off and do a puzzle or something. There would be nothing that comes through there.

But on the same token I can easily go into her room and say, "Okay, she's outgrown these clothes." And I just put them in a bag and there's no emotional drama about it from her standpoint. Or she's got too many books in there, I bring them back down to where they go in the library or what have you.

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The eight and a half year old would be a totally different scenario. She has tabs on every little piece of something in her room. There are things that are special to her that will never be special to me. So, we really need to work together when it comes to decluttering her room or I need to give her very clear assignments. On the Facebook page I had suggested, again, depending on the age of the child and you know your kid best. You know what's going to work for them.

So, I have seen success in giving a child a bag and saying, "Okay, can you fill this with things that you no longer need and we can bless other children with them that don't have the same amount of toys or as many books that you do." And then you drive it to the donation center together. And maybe you even promise ice-cream afterwards. It's a family decluttering session. And you can be at the same time modeling that behavior and working in your room at the same time as you assign them to work.

So, I think it depends on your parenting strategy. I think that it's very individual. But I also think that – I mean you're the parent. My uncle always likes to ask me, "Who's the parent here, Kelly?" So, it is our job to tell and teach our children how to act in this world. And some of that includes taking care of your physical things, taking care just like we're teaching them to take care of their emotional and psychological health, how we teach them to take care of their body.

We live in a world where we have things, we need clothes, we need school supplies, we need all these things to get us through a day. And if they don't have the organizational skills to work on that then it's just going to perpetuate the clutter cycle and that's not helpful for anyone. So, I do think it is our job as parents to give children boundaries and to help teach them how to live, organize and efficiently.

One way that we can do that is by providing designated spaces and limits to how many toys or items can fit in a certain space. So, if you have a bookcase or bins, those are really good visual cues that children can understand and even adults can understand. Once this shelf can no longer

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fit any more books it's time for us to take a look and see if there are any books we have already or done with, or that we might even just want to pack away for another time.

There's a concept called toy rotation which can also work with books where you only really have half of your toys out at one time. And by the time you get bored with those toys or the children do rather, you then swap out the bins and put out the other half of your toys and then it's always kind of that new Christmas morning feeling without having an overwhelmed space.

Sherry: Yes, I think that strategy works so well for little kids. And as kids age I think what you mentioned is key, is having boundaries and explaining those boundaries, and why they exist so that we can start training and forming their brain to what is appropriate and what is just excess. Because if we get our kids used to having excess all the time, as we know, excess in the physical realm could be excess weight emotionally, excess weight mentally, excess weight on our bodies.

So, in working with my daughter, I noticed that she can't part with anything. I ask her to give away even any kind of toy she doesn't play with, clothes that don't fit anymore, she likes it for the sentimental value. She is very much – I think she might be older or later on in life but teaching her the principles of why we do it, why it's important to move on from it. And not get so emotionally attached to stuff. We could get emotionally attached to people or have a few of them.

So, we do have this rule that if it's not at least at her level of reading. So, she in sixth grade so if it's a book that's not at fifth grade or higher we like to donate them. We do make exceptions. We do make exceptions like her Dog Man books. She has every single one. She loves the illustrations. She's a comic book kind of reader so we do make the exception. But we put those and that's a collection item, so we call it a collector's item. So, we do have boundaries and then we might make an exception here and there.

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And I find that strategy works really well for her to understand and why it's important to stay at that book level and read at that level. Because otherwise you're not going to be advancing your brain.

Kelly: Right, exactly. And if I can get on my soapbox for a little bit here. We are at a moment in history where we are obviously on the other side of the industrial revolution and when you could just process things newly and quickly. And that's, I would venture to guess that most of your listeners are in the same age set as you and I are. And we had all of the toys and our parents were showering us with gifts.

And now we are the parents and we are ending up in these cluttered spaces and overwhelmed because that was never really what it was about anyway. That was never really what was going to make us truly happy. And looking at again the cortisol versus the dopamine. Stuff doesn't make us happy. Having too much of anything does not make us happy. It stresses us out and then we go into the numbing section where we're overeating, over-shopping, overdrinking, whatever it may be.

And that's then bringing us down another level and upsetting us even more. So, we have to break that cycle.

Sherry: Absolutely, Kelly, I couldn't agree with you more. And I love the quote that we both love as we were talking before we got started on this podcast recording, is the quote by Joshua Becker. "The first step to crafting the life you want is to get rid of everything you don't." And that could be an overdrinking habit. That could be a storage habit, a clutter habit. This all blocks us from feeling free. You can feel like your stuff owns you. You can feel like your drinking habit owns you. And you don't feel free.

So, when you strip away and do less, consume less, eat less, drink less, all of that, you start acting more free. You start enjoying your space more. You feel like you can think and you're not spinning out in all the overwhelm, of all the things around you. You just have more clarity about your life. It just feels good.

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Kelly: I totally agree. I totally agree with that, yeah. And that's been my experience living this way.

Sherry: Yeah, me too. Me too. Well, Kelly, this has been amazing. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast. And as we close here, please let us know, how can the listeners find you if they want to work with you?

Kelly: Absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. And if you would like to connect with me please do. I would love to see you over at my website. It's clutter-less.com.

Sherry: Excellent. And I know you have a free printable for the folks listening to this podcast. And we'll link everything in the show notes. And again, Kelly, thank you so much for coming on the podcast.

Kelly: Thank you, Sherry.

Alright ladies, I hope you enjoyed that episode of Kelly and I and I look forward to seeing you next week.

Thanks for listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle*. If you're ready to change your relationship with alcohol, check out my free guide, How to Effectively Break the Overdrinking Habit at sherryprice.com/startnow. That's sherryprice.com/startnow. I'll see you next week.