

# KonMari and My Messy Desk, or “Sparking Joy” at the Office

Take a look at your desk. What do you see? Chances are, a lot. If your office space is as cluttered as mine, I welcome you to my tribe. But it’s time for a change, and I am ready for some KonMari in my life to help me get to – and keep – a streamlined, simpler office environment.

I’ve never had a tidy office for any length of time. It’s a known fact to my family (I work from a home office) that my attempts to maintain a zero-item desk never last for long.

But hey, aren’t messy desks supposed to be a sign of genius? After all, Albert Einstein, who famously had one, said, “If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk a sign?”

When I started reading more about Japanese organizational expert Marie Kondo and how her [KonMari method](#) has launched a declutter revolution, I was intrigued. Kondo has written several bestselling books, done countless news interviews and taken social media by storm with her Netflix program, “[Tidying Up With Marie Kondo](#).” It seems that I am not the only one afflicted with piles of papers and random stuff.

Research validates the many reasons why it’s important to work in a clutter-free, or minimized, zone.

## Increasing Productivity

A recent [Newsweek](#) article about the Kondo craze noted that “The visual distraction of clutter increases cognitive overload and can reduce our working memory.”

Science indeed confirms that more clutter leads to more stress, inability to focus and even depression. [Princeton University researchers](#) found that clearing the clutter from both home and work environments will make you more productive, less distracted and better able to process information.

Kondo reinforces this principle in her comment, “[When your office space is organized](#), it will result in increased efficiency because your use of time becomes much more productive.”

## Taking Control of Your Workspace

Too much visual distraction causes competition for your attention and is energy-draining and disruptive. It’s easy to get overwhelmed by the stacks of papers, files and miscellaneous tchotchkes picked up at numerous conferences that take up space on your



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desk. The resulting anxiety and stress get in the way of being intentional and doing what needs to be done, adding to the “cost” of clutter.

## Removing Mental Clutter

I am a huge fan of Ryder Carroll’s [Bullet Journal](#). His approach to managing excessive to-do lists and keeping track of multiple facets has been a game-changer for me, and I gladly share his tips with everyone I meet. I gain immense relief from clearing out the “mental clutter” of trying to keep track of various clients, deadlines, projects and requests. Using a bullet journal allows me to customize and organize my workflow so I can rest assured that nothing will get lost in the clutter.

Applying this approach to simplifying office space to bring clarity and perspective, and better time management, is an obvious next step.

## Avoid Negative Perceptions from Co-workers

Research also shows that a cluttered workspace causes others to perceive that the desk owner has one or more [negative personality traits](#). This perception can signal potentially undesirable qualities and may change the way co-workers and others interact and behave with that employee.

## Time to Tidy Up!

Kondo recommends these steps – some of which could be considered unusual to the Western mindset – to get tidier results:

1. Tidy by category. Categories in an office include books, papers, miscellaneous and sentimental items. Gather everything together in these groups.
2. Hold every single item for a moment.
3. Ask yourself about each item: Does it spark joy? “Sparkling joy” is the frame of reference to help you decide whether that item must be kept or has outlived its usefulness. One KonMari- and office-related [article](#) suggests asking these questions instead: “Does this make me more creative or more productive?” and “Does it foster a more-successful and harmonious team?” Keep the focus on deciding what to keep, as opposed to deciding what to throw out.
4. Discard immediately what doesn’t spark joy, make you more creative or productive, or foster a stronger team. Give each item a moment of gratitude to thank it for serving its purpose, and toss it out.
5. Find the right storage for what stays, keeping similar things together. Every single thing needs its own place.

More tips for decluttering your workspace include:

- Clutter takes time to accumulate, so build in time to de-clutter regularly. Block out time in your calendar for a weekly tidying session or spend 15 minutes at the end of each day on cleaning up and putting things away in preparation for the next work day.
- Search online for the KonMari Method and checklists for quick and free downloads to

help get you started.

- Seek a [balance](#), as Kondo suggests: “Start by tidying your desk entirely – just once! – and see how you feel with a tidied desk. If you don’t feel comfortable, perhaps you require a slightly less structured desk. The goal is to find what works for you and your creativity.”

My journey to a clutter-free desk is a personal one. I invite you to join me in this global movement that Kondo has sparked and bring some joy to your office. Share your results with me at [vhood@jaffepr.com](mailto:vhood@jaffepr.com).