

Clearing the Clutter

Inside and Out

By Shirley Vanderbilt

What's cluttering your life? Is it the stuff in the corner of the bedroom or the stuff in the corner of your mind? What are you tolerating that keeps you from expressing your true self? Authors Bruce and Lou Stewart say that clutter — both in our environment and our mind — is stagnating, blocking the free-flow of energy, or chi, in our homes and lives. Whether we're detouring around a box in the living room or repeating a negative pattern in our head, it's time to clear the path.

In their new book, *Your Way Home — The Psychology of Place Inside and Out*, the Stewarts present a unique approach to clutter-clearing by combining Lou's expertise in feng shui with Bruce's mastery of neurolinguistic programming (NLP). While feng shui has to do with external placement and structure, NLP is a psychological approach that addresses our internal structure of mind, body, emotion, and spirit. With feng shui, we can free energy flow by rearranging the room; with NLP tools, we can do the same thing with our mind. The goal is to bring balance between the inner and outer sanctums by clarifying our core, or essential self, and allowing our environment to reflect and support our core values.

When the Stewarts first blended their feng shui and NLP skills together in workshop presentations, they noticed it was easier for people to clear their environment when they were connected to their core. "It really is a cycle," Lou says. "The environment and our core are reflections of one another. When we know our core, it's much easier to understand our environment." But it's a chicken and egg thing, actually. Either one can work as a start.

As a bodyworker, Lou says, "What feng shui and NLP do for the body's environment is so similar to what a massage will do for the body, flushing the system of blockages. When I go through a person's home or office, what I'm doing is very similar to when I first put my hands on a client." In the process of combing through to find blockages in the environment, she will

ask the client about particular objects. "Nine out of 10 times it is incongruent with who they want to be right now. They've gotten numb to it, and it sticks out just like a knot in a muscle. The energy is different."

You don't have to be trained in feng shui or have a personal consultant to implement the concepts of this ancient art, nor is an NLP practitioner required to help you find your core. Throughout their book, the Stewarts offer practical exercises for applying the principles of NLP and feng shui to begin the clearing process. "In feng shui, when the chi of an environment is balanced, it allows the movement of the occupant to be well supported, just like when circulation is pumping well and is unclogged," Lou says. "With NLP, it's the same thing — running through patterns in the mind, flushing out old phobias and patterns that are either negative or destructive."

NLP recognizes that each of us has developed our own individual style of communicating and processing information which results in the patterning in our brain and the ways in which we express ourselves through language and body movement. Sometimes our set patterns do not support who we are at our essential core, but we can change that. Through the core work of NLP exercises, Bruce says, you can discover what you truly identify with and have a better understanding of yourself. At that point, you may find that your goals for your life have changed. It's this clarity of sense of self that is essential to creating an environment that supports and nourishes who you are and what you value in life.

When we take things for granted, or ignore them out of habit, we're not living fully in the present moment. We're tolerating, and we're not inspired. Lou says we need to ask, "What can I do here to make my environment more supportive for me and my family?"


If you're ready to start clearing out the clutter, there are some simple ways to begin. The Stewarts define clutter as "anything you no longer use, love, or need." So if you don't use it, but still love it, keep it.

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Keep your target areas small, and limit the time you spend at the task to avoid feeling overwhelmed. And as you examine your "stuff," consider how it fits with your core, your essential self. Does it support who you are at this moment, or is it a reflection of something in the past you're ready to release? Is the item pleasing to your senses? What fits with your individual way of experiencing the world?

"If you're particularly visual and like arts and crafts, you feel more comfortable with that around," Bruce says. "Someone who is very kinesthetic may not care how it looks but will want the chair to be comfortable."

Once the path is cleared, you can use the principles of feng shui to further enhance harmony and positive flow in your life. But the process involves more than hanging a mirror or installing a water fountain. As with NLP, it has to do with our core self and our intention. "Where attention goes, the energy flows. That's what it boils down to," Lou says. "As we focus our intentions, then our conscious and subconscious mind can connect, and when they connect with our body and our emotions and our spiritual core, then the intention is strengthened significantly." Think of it as a vinyl record with no grooves. "There's no music," she adds. "What our intentions do is they create that pathway on the record. So then we have the choice: Are we going to make it a smooth groove or a bumpy groove? Intention is our tool." 

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