1-Page Book Summary of The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up

Many of us have difficulty keeping our homes tidy because we were never taught how. But tidying is a simple act, and there are actually only a few reasons why we have difficulty tidying. People who can't tidy fall into three categories: they can't get rid of things, they can't organize things, or a combination of both—most of us fall into the last category.

In this 1-page summary we share a high level overview of the KonMari method, but if it's unclear, there are many more details on how exactly to implement these steps in the full summary.

1-Page Summary

Tidying, at a High Level
The basic process is to **discard first, then organize what's left.**
Most people tidy by going through a small portion of objects first, usually by convenience, and then trying to put that small portion away before they start on everything else. Think of a desk: you go through the stuff on top of your desk, discard whatever you don't need anymore, and then immediately try to put what's left in the drawers—but then you find the drawers are full and cluttered, because you haven't gone through everything first, so you give up and the clutter remains.

The KonMari process helps you avoid these stopping points. Don't do it little by little, do your whole house in one go (as much as you can depending on your schedule—it's fine if it takes up to 6 months). And go by category, not by room.

For each category, gather all the items together in a giant pile, discard first, then organize what's left. Here's the correct order that makes things mentally easier:

- Clothes
- Books
- Papers
- Komono (miscellany)
- Sentimental items

For each category, go through every single item like so:

- Pick it up.
- Ask yourself, does this item spark joy?
  - If it does, keep it.
  - If it doesn't, thank it for everything it's done for you. Then move it to the discard/donate pile.

After you've discarded items in a certain category, then you can move on to organizing what's left in that category. When you organize, keep your storage as simple as possible: use what your home already has, as opposed to buying a lot of complicated storage solutions that ultimately end up cluttering your space more.

Ideally, you should be able to see everything you own at a glance and get whatever you need easily. Vertical storage is better than horizontal storage to accomplish this, like books upright on a bookshelf instead of stacked on top of each other—it's much easier to see all your books and take a single book out when they're organized vertically.

Tidying for Each Category

Clothing
If you have a lot of clothes or want a more organized approach, break it down into subcategories: tops, bottoms, hanging clothes, socks, undergarments, bags, accessories, event-specific clothing like swimsuits, and shoes.

There are 2 major categories of clothes people have difficulty dealing with: 1) clothes they bought but never wore, and 2) clothes they hope to fit into one day.

- For clothes you bought but never wore: thank them for teaching you that you don't like to wear that style of clothing, and discard them.
- For clothes you hope to fit into one day: clothes that you can't wear right now are useless to you unless you're on the verge of being able to wear them and actively working toward that goal. Thank them for motivating you to get in better shape, discard them, and buy clothes that fit you in your current size and spark joy.

Folding and storing vertically is better than hanging in terms of storage. The goal for folding is to make the smallest, smoothest, simplest rectangle that can stand up on its own. (Shortform note: There are much more detailed instructions in Chapter 5.)

Some clothes need to be hung, like suits and dresses, and these should be grouped by category.

Books
Take all your books off their shelves and out of any piles they're already in. If you have a lot of books, you can break them down into these subcategories: general books you read for pleasure, practical books you use for reference, visual books like photography or art books, and magazines.
Don't read any books as you sort through them to discard. This will cloud your judgement.

Many people have difficulty in this category, specifically with books they still intend to read, and books they think they'll reread again. **Keep only your hall-of-fame books.**

- If you haven't read it yet and you didn't just buy it, you're probably not going to read it, so you should discard it. If, once it's gone, you forget about it, then you were right to discard. If you find yourself still wanting to read it, go buy another copy and **actually read it this time.**
- There are very few books we actually reread. This is where the hall of fame idea is helpful. If it goes in your hall of fame and sparks joy every time you read it, keep it. If you liked it but would probably never read it again, discard it.

**Papers**

The general rule is to **discard all papers.**

**There are only 3 categories you should keep:** 1) papers you need to deal with, 2) papers you need for a limited amount of time such as warranties, and 3) papers you need indefinitely such as marriage certificates and insurance policies.

Many people keep things like utility bills or credit card statements. These should be looked at upon receipt to make sure there aren't any issues, put in the "need to deal with" category to pay the bills, and then discarded.

Many people also have difficulty discarding lecture notes, since they don't want to lose this information. But we usually put into practice information we've learned that's helpful to us—so if you're not actively using the information in those papers, you probably don't need it.

Have 1 place or container for each of the three keep categories, and don't bother with any further storage. The goal is to discard enough papers that it isn't a hassle to go through everything you have to find what you need.

**Komono, or miscellany**

This category contains: CDs/DVDs, skin and bath products, gifts, valuables like passports and credit cards, hobby items, electrical appliances and cords, household equipment and supplies, kitchen goods and utensils, and small items like knick knacks and spare change.

This category encompasses a lot of stuff, but it's also the category that contributes the most to clutter. Don't surround yourself with things that you don't use and don't bring you joy.

Go in order from personal items to communal items (the order above roughly goes in the right sequence).

**Sentimental items**

This category includes any item whose primary value is emotional: cards, letters, gifts, photos, objects from your childhood or your children's younger years, etc.

**Save this category for last, because it is the hardest to discard and store.**

- Sentimental items are rare, which makes it difficult for us to let go of them, and they usually involve someone else, which can often make us feel guilty for discarding them.
- Going through the rest of the process first will help you hone your sense of joy and your ability to decide what to keep and what to discard, which will make this category easier to work through.

Two major areas of difficulty in this category are...

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Why Can’t I Tidy?

We tidy a space only to have it cluttered again in no time. What are we doing wrong?

**We can’t do things if we’re not taught how.** Tidying is something we’re supposed to know how to do, yet we’re never exposed to actual techniques.

- There aren’t classes on it. Even Home Ec covers cooking and sewing, but not tidying.
- Recipes are passed down through generations, but does your family have a time-honored tidying method? Probably not.
- Did your parents teach you how to tidy, or did they just demand you do it?
- “Experience” doesn’t make a difference. Kondo has clients who are seasoned homemakers and clients who are young people newly on their own—and usually the experienced homemakers have more bad habits to break down and relearn.

Some guides will tell you to find the right tidying method to suit your personality, but this overcomplicates the act. **Tidying is simple: you should be able to put things away when you aren’t using them, and this means you can’t have more things than storage space.** There’s no personality to it.

People who can’t tidy fall into only 3 different categories:

- They can’t discard items they don’t use or need, so their house becomes cluttered.
- They can’t put items away after using them, so everything stays out and clutters the space.
- Or they’re a combination of those two—90% of people fall into this last category.

The KonMari method is one method for everybody, but you’ll still ultimately do this in your own way according to your personality.

Some people feel like their family members keep them from being tidy. But **getting annoyed or angry at family members for not being tidy actually suggests we need to tidy.** Tidy your own spaces first and be prepared to see a change occur in those around you.

- Once you start dealing with your own excess, it’ll create a chain reaction and inspire others around you to do the same.
- Once your own spaces are tidy, you’ll probably tidy communal spaces without a second thought when necessary, and you won’t feel resentful....

The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 2: The Big-Picture Process

Tidying is really just the sum of two physical acts: 1) deciding whether you want to keep something, and then 2) deciding **where to put it.** If you do these two simple things the right way, you can actually achieve perfection in your home.

**Here’s the KonMari method, at the highest level:**

- Get all your belongings in a single category (eg clothing) across your entire home, and put them in one pile in the same room.
- Pick up each individual item, and decide whether to keep or discard it.
- For the items you keep, organize them effectively.
- Move on to the next category (eg books).
KonMari goes through five categories in specific order: Clothing, Books, Papers, Miscellany, and Sentimental Items. As we'll explain later, this saves the hardest emotional items to discard for last.

This sounds easy, but in practice you'll find it hard to discard items and to confront how much stuff you have (which is why you own more stuff than you need right now).

The rest of this summary is about how to execute these steps effectively. You'll learn how to get over the psychological hurdles that prevent you from tidying to the most effective extent.

Here's what to expect:

- In this chapter, we'll discuss the overall process and mindset.
- In chapters 3 and 4, we'll discuss general principles of discarding and organizing that apply to all categories. We'll discuss common psychological barriers you might face.
- Then we'll have a chapter on each of the five categories, to deal with issues specific to that category.

Ikki Ni - In One Go

Ikki ni, in Japanese, means in one go, and this is an important facet of the process: do it all in one go.

In the KonMari method, tidying "all in one go" means:

- Taking all your items of a category in your entire house and putting it in one pile, instead of going closet by closet or room by room.
- Sorting through the whole pile, picking up each item and deciding what to keep and what to discard.
- Organizing what you keep in the storage space available to you.

Ideally, you'd discard and...

Shortform Exercise: Visualizing Your Life

Use this exercise to help you visualize what your ideal home looks and feels like.

What would your ideal space look and feel like? If you're having trouble answering, try focusing on a specific room instead: what would your ideal bedroom look and feel like? Remember, the more specific you can be, the better.

What Our Readers Say

This is the best summary of The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up I've ever read. I learned all the main points in just 20 minutes.

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The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 3: Discarding

Now that we've covered the high-level process, let's break down the first phase of discarding into more detail.

For every category, once you have everything in one pile, you've got to discard first, all at once, completely. You can't start putting things away until you've finished discarding. It might sound intense, but this is going to be the key to tidying effectively.

Pull out all the items from one category from anywhere in your home. Then, at your pile, pick each item up and ask if it sparks joy.
Then start a keep pile and a discard pile. Remember to go in the correct order of categories.

**Do not let any item slip by when you gather by category.** When starting with clothing, get ALL your clothes. After you've finished discarding your clothes and organized what was left, move on to your books and take out ALL your books.

- It may seem like forgetting an item here or there won't be a big deal, but if you let yourself slip, you won't be able to assess all your things at once, and it'll become much harder to stay on track and sense whether things spark joy or not.

This raises an important question: what standard should you use to decide what to keep and what to get rid of?

**Belongings are valuable for 3 different reasons:**
1) they're functional,
2) they contain information,
or 3) we have an emotional attachment to them. These are also the 3 reasons that make it hard for us to get rid of something.

The KonMari method focuses on joy as the primary reason to keep something, but let's look at a few other philosophies on discarding objects first and their pitfalls.

**Common Methods of Discarding**

Functionality is one of the primary categories we use to discard--it's easy to get rid of something when it breaks down or doesn't work anymore. However, when functionality is the primary reason we keep something, we end up with a lot of things that are useful or might be useful in the future—*but that we really don't like.* **We're more prone to use things when we like them, and we're less likely to actually use something that's functional...**

**Shortform Exercise: Sparking Joy**

It can be tough to understand what something "sparking joy" really feels like. Use this exercise to help pinpoint what it feels like to you, and use it to remind yourself what joy feels like once you start tidying.

Grab something that you know you love. (If you're a clothes person who loves to get dressed, grab your favorite item of clothing. If you're a book reader with a personal library, pull out an all-time favorite book. If you love to cook, pick an item you love using.) Whatever the item is, find it, pick it up, and hold it in your hands. Write down what you love about the item, and how it feels to hold it.

**The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 4: Organizing**

For a given category, you've made it through the discarding phase. Now your task is to **find a place for each remaining thing, and put each thing in its place.**

It may seem like this will take a long time, but it won't take as long as discarding. You've only got to find a spot for each item once. Items without designated spots are much more likely to end up all over the place, causing you to rebound back into clutter.

When you are deciding what to keep or discard, ask your heart. But when it comes time to decide where to put things, ask your house. **Your home has enough space to contain the things you need--the trick is to learn how to store everything properly.**

**Common Mistakes in Organizing**

Many people think they organize to "go with the flow of their house"--that the layout of their house determines what goes where. But if you look at their organization and the subsequent flow, it's actually not determined by the house or anything other than **where they've decided to store things.**
Flow doesn't determine where we store things. Instead, where we store things dictates the flow of our daily lives.

For example, a lot of people put a long, thin table near the front door as a place to put mail, keys, and anything they either need when they leave the house or want to put down immediately upon coming home. But then mail tends to pile up on this table, because it's not actually an effective place to put mail that needs to be opened--it's just the easiest place to drop it. The house didn't force them to use the hallway as a space for mail--the storage method the homeowners chose determined where the mail ends up.

People often end up putting things in places where it's easiest to access *them* fastest. This is a trap, and a surefire way to clutter your house up. When we keep things at arm's length, that's usually where they end up staying, and suddenly your house is covered in things always an arm's length away.

- The average home isn't large enough for it to be much of a hassle to organize things more simply. If it only takes you 10-20 seconds...

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**The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 5: Clothing**

Now that we've discussed the big-picture process and the general principles of discarding and organizing, the next 5 chapters will focus on the individual categories (in the correct order!). Each chapter will address discarding first, then organizing. The first category is clothing.

Kondo breaks this category down into subcategories:

- Tops--shirts, sweaters
- Bottoms--pants, skirts, shorts
- Clothes to hang--jackets, coats, suits, dresses
- Socks
- Undergarments
- Bags--handbags, messenger bags
- Accessories--scarves, belts, hats, jewelry
- Clothes for specific events--swimsuits, uniforms, kimonos
- Shoes

If you have a lot of clothes, you can also use these subcategories to help you tackle smaller portions one at a time.

**Discarding**

Gather all your clothes from all over your home and put them in one place, on your bed or on your bedroom floor. When you think you've finished, ask yourself if there could be anything else hiding anywhere else.

- Kondo gives her clients a rule: if they find another item of clothing after they've gathered everything and sorted through it, that item immediately gets discarded--you didn't even remember you owned it!

**Don't be alarmed by how much you have--everyone has way more than they think.** From Kondo's experience, the average number of clothing items people own is 160.

Then go through all your clothing, item by item, picking each one up and asking if it sparks joy. If it does, it goes in the keep pile. If it doesn't, it goes in the discard pile. Remember to thank anything you discard.

- You can start a maybe pile, but try to keep this small. Remember you should feel the answer to whether something sparks joy immediately, and you shouldn't keep things that don't spark joy. If you hesitate, chances are high you should discard it. Revisit this pile after you've gone through the rest of your clothes and have a better sense of what sparks joy and what doesn't.
The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 6: Books

Books are deceptively hard to discard in. Unless damaged, books are always functional. Even if we’ve read them, they always contain information. And many of us who own books have emotional attachments to them. If you remember, these are the 3 reasons we keep items, and 3 reasons we find it difficult to get rid of items—so you can see why this category gives people trouble.

This is also the only category without the discard/organize divide. This information is entirely about discarding. Organizing books is relatively straightforward: arrange them vertically on shelves. Some people put their books in horizontal piles—we’ve covered why that’s a worse way to organize anything. Books may be the only category that people don’t need help organizing.

The problem most people run into is that they have too many books to store, which is why discarding is the primary focus of this chapter.

As with clothes, take all your books off the shelves, and put them in a pile on the floor.

- It might seem easier to pick what to discard if the books are neatly arranged on a shelf. But, if you do it this way, you’re skipping one of the fundamental stages we already covered: holding each item in your hands, one by one.
- Even if you have books in neat piles on the floor already, bring all the books into one place to sort through them. This lets you see your total number of objects in any given category, and this, as we’ve discussed, can be a wake up call about how many things you own.

Break the books down into categories if you have a lot:

- General, books you read for pleasure
- Practical, books you use for reference, like cookbooks
- Visual, books such as photography collections or art books
- Magazines

Do not read books as you sort them—simply hold the book in your hand and see if you feel a thrill of joy upon holding it. Reading will cloud your judgement and take your brain out of the tidying zone.

If you haven’t read it yet, you’re probably not going to. Discard it. This will be the true test of how passionate you are about it.

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**The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 7: Papers**

Papers are essentially any mail or documents that we receive, notes we take in school or outside classes, or manuals and instructions that come with appliances or electronics.

Remember, this category doesn't include things like love letters or special cards--those are mementos, and go in the last category. And it doesn't include any books or magazines, but it does include newspapers.

### Discarding

**General rule of thumb:** discard all papers. This takes a lot of the guesswork out!

Here's a few subcategories people commonly end up holding on to:

- **Lecture, class, or conference materials**
  - Ironically, the more notes you have from seminars or lectures, the less you're actually putting that information into practice. Perhaps holding on to the notes *is the exact thing* that keeps you from putting the information into practice. The notes become a crutch--you've got the information written down, why would you need to remember it or practice it?

- **Credit card statements, utility bills, used checkbooks, and pay slips**
  - Once you check the content of these items, you don't need them unless there is an issue, so discard them. Some people think they might need these down the line in a court case to prove where they spent their money. This is unlikely, but nowadays, you can get all your statements online should this ever arise.

- **Warranties and manuals for appliances**
  - Warranties are documents with an end date--save them while they're active, get rid of them once they aren't.
  - Ditch the manuals. Read the ones you're worried about needing, and then ditch those. You can find the manuals online, take these items into shops if they're having problems, or call stores to have repair people come take a look at them.

- **Cards**
  - Don't save greeting cards unless you need the addresses on them, in which case you can save just one most recent card with the address, or record the addresses somewhere.
  - You don't need to feel guilty about getting rid of cards that someone sent you. Each card fulfills its purpose the moment it reaches...

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**The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 8: Komono, or Miscellany**

Here are the categories that fall under komono:
Look at the order of that list: it's an intentional order that goes from more personal items to more communal items.

Many of the items in this category are things we keep “just because.” This results in many odds and ends that take up space and clutter our homes.

Discarding

Here are some common areas of difficulty in this category:

- **Gifts**
  - The purpose of a present is to be received, and to convey the giver's feelings of affection. A gift accomplishes these 2 things at the very moment it's given, but then a lot of us end up keeping gifts someone gave us that we don't use or even like. Don't do this. Thank it for the joy it gave you when you first received it, and discard it.

- **Cosmetic samples**
  - These products are smaller sized and consequently have shorter shelf lives. You don't want to use expired cosmetics when you're traveling! Trash them. Get reusable travel sized bottles instead.

- **Electronic packaging**
  - Many people save boxes in this category thinking it will make the electronic more valuable if they want to sell it one day, and for some items, it might. But if you think of your home as storage space...

READ FULL SUMMARY OF THE LIFE-CHANGING MAGIC OF TIDYING UP

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The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 9: Sentimental Items

Sentimental items, mementos, keepsakes-- these are usually reminders of times or people that gave us great joy. But think about the most important moments in your life-- would you forget these moments if you didn't have a physical object to remind you of them? Probably not.

Too many keepsakes might suggest that you're living in the past, and not appreciating the present or thinking about the future.

When we handle each item from our past and decide what to keep and what to discard, we ultimately end up processing our past and putting it in order. If you hide these things away, your past can become an unseen weight that prevents you from being fully present.
Discarding

These are some common kinds of keepsakes, and how to approach them:

- **Letters**
  - A letter fulfills its purpose the second it is received. Think about the letters you've written in your life: do you remember what was said? Probably not. Keep only the ones that actually spark joy, and that you might read over in the future. Discard the rest.

- **Gifts**
  - We covered this briefly in the komono section, but it bears repeating in this context. Gifts are meant to convey that the giver feels affection for us, and they accomplish this the moment we receive them. **You shouldn't keep a gift as a memento just because someone gave it to you, you should keep it because it sparks joy.** If it doesn't, thank it for doing its job of letting you know the person cares, and discard or donate it.
  - If you feel guilty, you can think of it this way: if you can donate the gift, you're turning the affection someone felt for you into something that will spark joy for someone else in the world--you're spreading joy!
  - But even if you can't donate it, the person who gave it to you wanted to bring joy into your life--thank the object for conveying the giver's affection, and thank the giver in your mind for understanding that **some things bring us more joy when we let them go than when we keep them.**

- **Photos**
  - A good rule of thumb regarding photos is to **cherish who you...

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**The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Summary Chapter 10: The Psychological Benefits of Tidying**

Now you've learned why we should undertake this, how to discard and organize, and how to make your way through all the categories--you've learned to tidy! Tidying is a simple process through which we restore the complex balance between ourselves, the things we own, and the home we live in.

A major takeaway of this book is to **appreciate the things you surround yourself with daily.** These things support you and provide service, and most of us don't treat our possessions with a lot of respect.

Active appreciating your belongings will not only give you a deeper sense of gratitude, which is proven to be connected with a healthier and happier mindset, but it will also increase the longevity and usefulness of your belongings.

- Kondo draws from the Japanese religion of Shinto, and believes that objects have spirits and emotions. So, in her view, every time you stuff a balled up pair of socks into a drawer, you might as well be treating a human that way.
- But you don't have to believe that belongings have spirits to see this benefit--the more you appreciate your belongings, the more you'll take care of them, the longer they'll last.
- Kondo greets her house every day when she comes home, and she says thank you to everything she uses over the course of a day. You can do this silently in your mind if you feel uncomfortable saying it loud.

Once you tidy, you'll spend less energy finding things, you'll be able to relax more knowing everything's in order, you'll appreciate your belongings, and you'll only be surrounded by items that spark joy.

And the process of **discarding things and organizing what's left can help us improve more than just our space:**

- Dialoguing with ourselves throughout this process honed our sense of intuition.
- Deciding what to keep or discard honed our ability to make decisions confidently.
- Keeping only objects that spark joy honed our ability to experience joy, and works to bring more joy to our lives.
- Completing this process can even bring us back to big-picture life things that are important to us....
**Shortform Exercise: Noticing the Magic**

Everyone that successfully goes through Marie Kondo’s process has a major revelation about their habits, their spaces, and their lifestyle. Go through the tidying process, then complete this exercise. Then come back to your answers if your space ever starts to feel cluttered again to remind yourself of the impact tidying had.

What's one thing you learned or noticed throughout the tidying process that surprised you? It can be a good surprise, or a not-so-good surprise--both have value.