CLA Step Workbook

Step 1

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Step 1
We admitted we were powerless over clutter - that our lives had become unmanageable.

The guiding principle of Step 1 is Honesty.

In Step 1, we start on a journey of self-discovery to learn the extent of our cluttering and its impact on our lives. When we work the 12 Steps of Clutterers Anonymous, we embrace the insight that our problem may be an addiction or attachment to clutter *or* to habits that breed more clutter, rather than habits that maintain clean, uncluttered homes. This has made our lives *unmanageable*. We finally realize that we are *powerless* to change ourselves without help. Although it may be painful to admit powerlessness & unmanageability, it's the start of the 12 steps, the beginning of the solution - and so, the beginning of hope.

What factors have an effect on our powerlessness? We believe that our problem is threefold - *physical*, *emotional* and *spiritual.*

Physical: The stacks, piles, and objects in our homes, cars, storage units, workplaces, and electronic devices, such as cell phones, computers, and email accounts.

Emotional: Resentment, worries about the future, regrets about the past, attachments to our stuff or feelings of helplessness about our clutter.

Spiritual: The deep emptiness we feel inside due to our lack of relationship to a Higher Power.

Many of us would add Mental Clutter as well. This would include rehashing the past, negative/ critical self-talk, and scattered thoughts.

When we first enter the CLA Fellowship, we think we know what our problems are: time, space, disorganization, procrastination, perfectionism, etc. We often believe our cluttering is due to preexisting conditions, environmental factors, aging, and physical health for our cluttering problem. Yes, all of these and many more may contribute to a feeling of being helpless or powerless.

As we work Step 1, we come to realize that we are afflicted with an irresistible impulse to continue acquiring, even as our clutter is making our homes uncomfortable or even unlivable, and damaging our relationships with family and friends. It is keeping us trapped in memories and fantasies, unable to live in the present, robbing us of our creative potential and our joy in living. We find we cannot succeed in making or keeping our home neat, clean, or orderly. We cannot solve our problem if we are in the same state that caused our problem in the first place. It is not caused by circumstances. The problem lies within us.

No book or author we read, no TV show or online video we watch, is going to help change us into clutter-free beings. After countless times of trying and failing over and over again, we know that we need something deeper and more profound than just better skills, more effective tools, or stronger will power. We need to change, but we are powerless to do so alone.

Once we recognize the futility of our own will power, we may be filled with hopelessness. We may know that the quantity of our "stuff" is too great to be "put away," but knowing that will not stop us from bringing even more clutter into our homes. We may feel that the small joy of finding an unusual bargain will be a comfort to us. Even when we decide to get rid of an object, we may fail to actually release it. We find ourselves easily sidetracked with plans that were briefly started, but then abandoned, due to perfectionism, being overwhelmed, lacking skills, or being unable to find what we need.

We recall many times in the past when we started to clean our homes, that we couldn't make the slightest progress. We were confused about where we should even begin. If by some extreme effort, we were successful in cleaning a small area, we found that it was cluttered again in only a matter of hours. In time, we found that our problem only worsened.

Some of us helped others or causes outside of our homes, without realizing that by doing so, we would be avoiding the chaos of our own home and life. We may waste countless hours looking for things we needed, especially paperwork. We might say something in fifty words that most people would say in six. We could be late on paying bills. We may move clutter from room to room and our sinks might be filled with dirty dishes. Our surfaces and floors could be filled with "stuff." We may have kept out-of-style clothing that no longer fit, books we've never read, and broken objects that we planned (someday) to fix. Many of us were chronically late and missed appointments. We may have neglected our physical health, our appearance, our family, and friends. Some of us were reluctant to have visitors and avoided having tradespeople come in for repairs. We may have cluttered our homes, our cars, and our workplaces. Even simple housekeeping tasks seemed unmanageable to us. We felt guilt and shame over our family members' unhappiness with us and frustration over our missed deadlines and lost opportunities.

We didn't understand how or why we kept cluttering. We had less energy and strength to deal with it. We found ourselves giving up on the prospect of **ever** having a home like other people, a home filled with peace and order. We clearly didn't want to live like this, but we were truly helpless in finding a way out of it. ***We admitted we were powerless over clutter— that our lives had become unmanageable.***

The following questions will guide you to look honestly at your clutter and its impact on your life. However, they are not intended for you to feel a sense of shame, but to see how powerless

you are over areas of your life and how unmanageable it might be. They are organized into three categories. Please do the questions in order. We suggest that you discuss your answers and thoughts with your sponsor or co-sponsorship groups. If you choose to, you can do the optional "Going Deeper" questions listed at the end of each section. We have also included a section of "Essential Reading Material" and strongly encourage you to read this.

Category	#	Question
Honesty		
	1	Do I feel shame about my clutter? Describe this experience.
	2	Have I used my life circumstances or others' behavior to excuse my cluttering? How?
	3	Do I feel overwhelmed by my clutter and unable to take action? Give examples.
	4	Have I ever lost something or gotten into trouble, because of clutter? Please explain.
	5	Is my home, or any part of it, unusable for its intended purpose? If so, explain.
	6	Describe the impact of misplaced paperwork, missed deadlines, abandoned projects, or searching for lost items.
	7	What was the "last straw"? What caused me to reach out for help?
Going Deeper		
	8	Do I have unrealistic thinking with regard to cleaning my home, finishing my projects, or reading piles of old magazines/newspapers? Please give examples.
	9	Have I felt defeated by my clutter? If so, in what ways?
	10	Have I rationalized my cluttering, for example, by blaming others? If so, give examples.
	11	Do I avoid talking about my clutter with others? Do I avoid allowing people into my home or life because of clutter? Give examples.
Powerlessness		
	12	Do I feel a strong sense of emotional attachment or sentiment towards any of my possessions which makes it difficult to release them? If so, give examples.
	13	Does how I see the financial value or possible usefulness of items block me from releasing them? If so, please give examples.
	14	Does my clutter affect me physically? emotionally? spiritually? mentally? Give examples.
	15	Have I done things that maintain my cluttering which go against my beliefs and values? Please explain.
Going Deeper		
	16	How do I feel when I cannot find space for an item?

		What do I do?
	17	Do I have a weakness for discarded objects, bargain items, freebies, or yard sales? Give examples.
	18	In what way does perfectionism prevent me from starting or completing a project?
	19	In what way does becoming sidetracked prevent me from starting or completing a project?
	20	Does my behavior towards clutter differ from that of most people? Give examples.
Unmanageability		
	21	Have I tried to control my clutter? Give examples. How successful were these efforts?
	22	Describe any difficulties I've had in managing the amount of my possessions.
	23	In what ways have I tried to change that didn't work? How did I react if I wasn't successful at one or more of these?
	24	How has my clutter grown? Has it expanded over time? If so, give examples.
	25	Have I done things that keep my cluttering problem alive which actually make me less able to manage it? Please explain.
Going Deeper		
	26	Do I feel shame or frustration about my clutter, as if I should know better or do better? Please describe situations where this occurs.
	27	With regard to clutter, do I have times of crisis management and feelings of being overwhelmed? If so, give examples.
	28	Do I find myself often doing things for others, while my own home or needs are not being taken care of? Give examples.
	29	How do I point to external circumstances or people as the reason for my clutter?
	30	What is my track record with maintenance?
	31	How has clutter impacted my finances? Describe (for example late charges, rental fees, added costs, credit score).
	32	Do I often buy items, because I can't find those I already own? Give examples.

After discussion with your step study group or sponsor, you may be ready to move to Step 2. We also encourage you to explore the following readings on Step 1.

ESSENTIAL READING MATERIAL ON STEP 1

- Chapter 1, "Twelve Steps of Clutterers Anonymous: Step 1," *Ten Years of CLArity*, (pp. 1-2).
- "Step One," *AA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, (pp. 21-24).
- "Clutterer's Traits," *CLA Literature Collection Book."* (pp. 41-42), or in "The CLA Meeting Starter Kit."
- "Am I a Clutterer?" or "How do I Know If I'm a Clutterer?" *CLA Literature Collection Book"* (pp. 13-15); in "The Newcomer's Guide," (pp. 1-3); in the "Welcome" leaflet; and in the "Brief Guide" leaflet.
- "Sponsorship in CLA," *CLA Literature Collection Book."* (pp. 77-90).

Approved by CLA WSO on 2-22-2025