







# It's Time to Clean Out Your Closet

**Altering what no longer fits in your leadership life**

It's 2025, and a new year is upon us. It's a fresh start. Many of us make New Year's resolutions. We may stick to a few of those resolutions. Other resolutions are the same year after year — to lose weight, exercise, quit smoking, contribute more money to our retirement accounts or spend more time with our families. We are well-intentioned and may start out on track, but weeks or months later, we return to our former habits. Personally, I greet each new year with the promise that I will clean out my closet at home, which is no small feat.

More than 4 years ago, my husband Will and I built our current residence. And yes, if you do the math, our new-house construction transpired in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. There's no question that marriage itself is challenging, and building a new abode is even more so for a couple. But, constructing a home during a stay-at-home executive order, dwindling workforce and supply chain restrictions will test even the best marriage. As German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "What doesn't kill me, makes me stronger." Fortunately, my husband and I survived the experience and grew stronger and wiser because of it.

**BY YASMIN L. STUMP, ESQ.**





The design of our dwelling includes a massive primary bedroom closet, and when the architectural blueprints for our residence were prepared, my husband made a monumental sacrifice. He reduced the square footage of his home office, which shares a wall with the closet, so that I would have the closet of my dreams. Initially, it was intended to be a his-and-her closet, but almost a half-decade later, it has morphed into a her-and-what's-left-over-for-him closet.

As to cleaning out my closet, some years I make more progress than others. It's a daunting task because of the arduous decisions that I need to make about certain clothing. Over the years of my annual closet cleaning ritual, some pieces that I know should go I retain because of special attachment. These articles have included a pair of skinny jeans that were last seen on me outside the house in 2004, but I keep because I fantastically believe that one day I will return to that slimmer version of

myself; the outdated business suit that I wore at a trial when the jury returned a verdict in my client's favor in 20 minutes, which I preserve for good fortune; and the high school mascot sweatshirt with my maiden name (which is a couple of last names ago) printed on the back, now barely visible from years of laundering. Other clothes occupying my closet I would wear, but they are missing a button or two, a zipper needs to be replaced or the hem requires mending.

If I am ambivalent about parting with any items, I remind myself that I am only a steward of my clothing, and if I no longer wear certain apparel, then perhaps someone else can. Alternatively, some pieces subject to my indecisiveness are collected in a box, and if, within a few months, I do not return to the box to reclaim any of its contents, the un-reclaimed things are donated to charity.

### Candidly assess what needs tailoring

I share the details about the painful plight of cleaning out my closet because I believe it has significance for leaders, metaphorically speaking. Think about it. Maybe it's time for you as a leader to clean out your closet. Take inventory and

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frankly assess those things that no longer suit your business, your team or you. This assessment demands intense reflection and candor. What things no longer propel your organization forward, or even more disconcertingly, hold it back? It could be a team member or two, who, although his or her work product may be acceptable, undermines team morale or creates unnecessary distractions and siphons positive energy from the company. Maybe it is a longstanding policy that now is woefully outdated, but to which employees are blindly allegiant because, “We’ve always done it this way.” It could be a vendor whose corporate culture is misaligned with your business’s values and causing some of your team distress. Perhaps you are serving on a not-for-profit board or committee, and your participation, which you once thoroughly enjoyed, is now draining your energy and resources.

The assessment is challenging because it involves change, and human beings often avoid change, which can be uncomfortable, overwhelming and even frightening. In an August 2023 Tickled Think blog article “10 Powerful Ways to Let Go of What No Longer Serves You,” the author admits, “I have always chosen to hold on to certain things and habits that were only keeping me unhappy just because they felt familiar and safe.” The author also notes that confronting and adjusting for those things that no longer work requires letting go of control, which is also difficult. Alternatively, a leader’s avoidance of confronting what no longer fits could be based on the belief that it is not significant enough to warrant evaluation and action. Organizational misfits may be proportionately minor, and perhaps they have not garnered your undivided attention. But they are there, and they chip away at your fulfillment and success as a leader. They are akin to the 80/20 Rule that Italian economist Vilfredo Pare developed. Twenty percent of anything — employees, stakeholders, clients, vendors or practices — can cause eighty percent of the problems. Even if the outmoded stressors are not a significant part of your organization, and hopefully, they are not, how different would the experience be for you and your team if they were appropriately addressed?

### Design a plan and be patient

After one has identified what no longer fits, decisions need to be made about how to address those items. Some matters may require complete extraction from your business life, while others could fit again with the proper alterations. Like useless clothes given away, the vendor who is misaligned with your team’s values may need to be discarded. The outdated policy may, figuratively speaking, just need a couple of buttons replaced to reflect modern business practices. In addition to discarding or making alterations, repurposing may be a viable option. In the online article “12 Things to Toss from Your Closet ASAP, According to Pro Organizers” (updated October 7, 2024), author Nina Derwin discusses clothing in one’s closet that is “damaged, stained, or full of holes and tears” and

recommends that “holey socks and old t-shirts [be repurposed] for dusting and cleaning.” My intention is not to diminish leadership’s confronting and adjusting what is no longer suitable by comparing it with tattered apparel, but an analogy can be made. For instance, a loyal employee who is no longer a good fit on your team may flourish and offer meaningful contribution in another department in your firm.

The next step is to develop a plan for implementing the needed changes. This plan should be developed thoughtfully and free of emotional reactions with the organization and its members’ best interests at the forefront. Action in furtherance of the plan should be professional and courteous. Any explanations provided to those affected by the plan should be as concise as possible and avoid personal criticism.

Unless you are the sole proprietor, in most companies, you will not be tasked alone with the responsibility for designing a plan to address these issues. Company policy may mandate that higher leadership be involved and approve certain conclusions. Irrespective of whether you are a lone decision maker, consult with others, in and outside your organization, particularly if they have encountered similar experiences. Also, it’s beneficial to include your team members in the plan-making process because choices will affect them, and they likely have insightful perspectives that differ from yours.

Finally, when executing a plan for eliminating or changing the obsolete, patience is required. Change does not occur overnight, particularly when implementing a detailed and thorough plan. A September 2024 Medium blog by Herlittlewisdom advises, “Remember, letting go is a gradual process and takes time.”

### Making Room for the New

Ultimately, when I make meaningful headway cleaning out my closet, I feel lighter, more organized and a sense of accomplishment. Things that no longer suit your leadership life weigh down you and your team, and the load is lightened when they are properly resolved. In doing so “trust that you’re on your way to creating space for new experiences and growth in your life,” the Herlittlewisdom blog advises. Although the process of identifying what no longer works and preparing and executing a plan for change may seem tedious and protracted, it creates open space for the new. Happy New Year! ✨



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