In this lesson, you'll learn why productivity is closely aligned with tidiness and how to use that knowledge to increase your own productivity through a 3-step process to "make a place" for all the things that might be holding you back from getting your best work done.

But before we get started, I need to make a disclaimer: When I say "tidy" I don't necessarily mean perfectly organized and clean. "Tidiness," you see, is a relative term. What I mean when I say "tidy" is that you have control over the environmental factors that allow you to be as productive as possible.

Like we learned in a previous lesson, even a pile of clothes in the corner is a system in that it's a kind of organized chaos if having that smelly pile of laundry helps you achieve other, more important things.

Even Albert Einstein used to joke that if a cluttered desk is the sign of a cluttered mind, then an empty desk is a sign of something much worse.

Also, like we recently learned, if you can control your environment, you can control your productivity.

So, tidy is a relative term, and the goal of giving everything "a place" is to make it easier for you to control your environment and, as a result, control your life and your performance.

We're going to start by focusing on your physical space and the "things" in your life. But "giving everything a place" is about much more than just things. By the end of this lesson, you'll see what I mean.

To find a place for all the stuff in your life, you can follow a relatively simple 3-step process.

The first step of that process is to get the unhelpful things out of the way.

When you look around right now, how many of the things you can see serve an actual, useful purpose in your life or your work?

If you're a Type-A organizer, then maybe you've got this perfected already. Most of us, though, could use a little help here.

If we were perfect, everything we own and everything that surrounds us would be immediately useful. And anything that is not useful would not be around!

But life gets messy and, over time, you acquire things that were once useful but no longer are. Or, things you thought would be useful, but never ended up using. We've all done that, right?

And if you don't have a process to regularly remove these things, then they just sort of build up over time.

That used to happen to me a lot because I'm what I like to call a "reluctant minimalist." I see the value of keeping the things in my life to a minimum but, once I have something, I become a little bit of a hoarder—I never want to get rid of it.

But when something doesn't serve you anymore, you have to cut your ties with it because it becomes a kind of mental drag. A kind of anchor that holds you down.

And if you're thinking, "Well, I don't need to get rid of anything, I just need to organize better."

Let me tell you, it is *much* easier to simply not have things than it is to organize things.

Like we learned earlier in the course, the universe is always headed towards entropy, and we're the ones who create order from the chaos.

The more stuff you have that you don't need, the more time and, worse, the more energy you're going to spend keeping it organized.

Not owning something in the first place, if you can help it, is far superior to organizing it.

So, step one of the process is to take inventory of all the things in your life and simply discard, donate, get rid of—whatever—everything that doesn't provide a tangible benefit to you on a regular basis.

I won't sugar coat it. That first step is hard. We get attached to things. Even things we know we shouldn't be attached to.

Now, there are lots of books and systems you can follow if you want a guide or map to help you complete this step. And I'll share some of the best ones in the lesson resources.

This step can be done concurrently with the other two. So, you don't necessarily have to finish it before moving on. You can get *started* with this step and still keep progressing.

Alright, so what's step two? Step two is organizing what's left. This is where the title of the lesson really comes into play. Everything around you needs a place.

Why does everything need a place? It needs a place because it's exhausting to not have one. Sounds a little counterintuitive, doesn't it? Isn't easier to just toss things wherever than to spend time and effort to put them where they belong?

Well, yeah, it is. At first! But then it's a lot harder and it has to be fixed all at once. Think about it the way you would with car maintenance.

Which scenario is less stressful? The one where you regularly maintain your car and make sure all its systems are working the way they're supposed to? Or the one where you ignore maintenance until it breaks down on the side of the road?

At first, ignoring maintenance feels like it's saving time. You don't have to go to the shop or get your hands dirty when nothing's going wrong. You don't have to do any work just to fix a non-existent problem.

But, then stress builds up. Over time, performance starts to wane and, even though the car is still working, you know that you're kind of running on borrowed time.

That stress slowly eats away at you. It's low-level at first so you just put up with it, but it builds up the longer you risk it.

Finally, the car breaks down, you have to have it towed to the shop, and it takes days and lots of money to fix it. And then, if you don't change anything, the whole process just repeats itself.

It works the same whether its kitchen gadgets, papers on your desk, clothes on the floor, doesn't matter.

What could have been just a few minutes of work every so often becomes a lot of work with quickly diminishing returns.

I like to do a lot of DIY projects around the house, so I notice this pattern with my tools—which, honestly, I probably have too many of and need to go back to Step 1. But, I digress....

Each of my tools has a place to live in the garage—a little space just for it and nothing else. After I built this organization system, it took a little more time to put tools away than just throwing them in a pile on a shelf, but it can be done quickly

and I can find anything easily the next time I need it. Also, I just feel a lot more at ease in the garage because there's a level of order around me.

Before I had this system or—let's be honest—when I sometimes get busy and ignore it for awhile, things build up until I have to do a lot of work all at once in order to get things back on track.

That works, of course, but it takes a tremendous amount of time. And, like we all know, finding a lot of time all at once can be pretty hard to do, which makes it easier to put off even longer. The problem sort of spirals out of control.

Now, if I go through all that work to get organized and *still* don't maintain it, then I get almost no benefit from the huge amount of work I just did to get organized in the first place. I'll spend hours on a weekend putting everything away and, a few days later, it's messy again.

The "do it all at once" approach is a vicious cycle that kills your motivation each time you go through it. You work really hard, everything falls apart again, and then you have to work hard again. It's a lot to do for very little benefit.

That is where the magic of *staying* organized with regular maintenance really shines. Perhaps you can see now how those one-minute tasks you created in a previous lesson can really help you stay organized.

So, the most important thing you can do when you're in Step 2 is to just find everything a place to live. For each thing you own, you should know where it belongs when you're not using it, and it should be as easy as possible to put it there.

When something doesn't have a place, it's more likely that it's going to get in your way over and over and become a distraction that keeps you from maintaining productivity.

And keep in mind that this can also be done in stages. Remember not to take an all or nothing approach to it. That's too overwhelming. Make progress where you can and celebrate that progress when you make it.

Okay, now step three is all about expanding step two to the other areas of your life. When I say that "everything has a place" I really do mean everything. Not just physical things, but work and tasks and relationships and even emotions and other abstract concepts.

Have you ever sat down to do some work only to get stuck wondering if it's *really* what you should be doing? You wonder if something else might be a better use of your time.

Or, have you ever wanted to get something important done, but you felt sad or scared or frustrated about something else. You mind kind of wanders to another topic.

If you've ever let your personal life get in the way of work—or, you know, vice versa—then you've experienced this. And it kills your productivity.

And the cause of it is that your other work and even your emotions don't have a place, so they compete for attention at inopportune times.

So, what can you do about it? How do you give all those things a place?

Let's start with a work example. Something simple like keeping up with your paper filing.

If you follow the steps from earlier, you might have a place like an inbox or outbox or filing drawer or something for your papers. Personally, I hate paper and I digitize everything. But there's a place for it.

Okay, so you have a place in space. Now you need a place in time. Even if you do your best to keep up with everything, you eventually fall a little behind and need to catch up.

Give that task a time. When you choose will depend on your own needs—there's no hard and fast rule. It could be once a day, once a week, once a month. Or some other timeline.

Personally, I save all the boring filing tasks for Friday afternoons. I could do it more frequently, but it doesn't take up any more space or time to do it weekly. But if I leave it for multiple weeks, it turns into a big task that just gets bigger and bigger as I continue to ignore it.

The timeline doesn't really matter. At least not at first. What's important is that you have a scheduled time for it because, once you do, you can forget about it until then.

You no longer have think about it each time there's a decision to make about what to do next. And that's really powerful. As you start to schedule your time better and better, there are fewer decisions to make when a block of time comes up, which

means you can get started a lot faster and stay focused a lot easier because there's nothing else to distract you.

Everything else has its place, and you're not worried about when you'll get to it.

Now, do you ever get this perfect? Of course not. If you're like most of us, there's more to do in a day than you can ever actually make time for. But by running this process over and over, it helps you get better at prioritizing.

You start to see and understand the things that you're doing too often and can put off—or, like we went over in the very beginning, get rid of it altogether. And you start to see what you're not doing often enough and need to make more space for.

Slowly but surely, work starts to flow easier. And, like I mentioned earlier, this applies to feelings and emotions, too.

When something frustrating comes up, it can really throw you off your game. If you don't give it a time and place, you either have to give up on what you're doing and deal with it immediately, or you let it fester and bother you while you try to focus on other things.

But, what if you gave it a specific time to process?

What if, when something upsets you, you tell yourself, "Okay, I'm going to prioritize what I'm doing right now because it's important, but I'm going to spend 30 minutes thinking about what's bothering me tonight after dinner."

It's like scheduling a date with your thoughts. If you're in the middle of something and your friend texts you and asks if you want to have coffee, you probably wouldn't just get up and go, right? You'd figure out a time that works for both of you and meet up then.

Well, start doing that with your frustrations and other emotions. Once they're on the calendar, you no longer need to worry about them until that time comes. And, in fact, it's a lot easier to stay focused and productive.

This works really well for worry. When I find myself worrying, I stop and put a little mark on my calendar to spend 15 minutes or so just letting all those thoughts play out some time later in the day.

It's incredibly helpful because not only does it get me back on track, but it also time-boxes it so that I'm not letting it eat up my energy in the background all day long.

Okay, so here's what we accomplished in this lesson:

First, we learned about the importance of "tidiness" for productivity. And we clarified that tidiness is a relative term. You don't have to achieve perfection to get great results.

Then we learned the three step process for slowly tidying up our lives so that we have more energy to give to our important work.

The first step is purging and getting rid of things that simply don't serve a purpose anymore. That makes the rest of the process simpler and faster.

The second step is giving everything a place or a home. When all our things have a place to live, you don't have to make a new decision each time about where to put it. Staying organized gets a lot easier.

Finally, you find a home for all the abstract tasks and even emotions that hold you back when you're trying to be productive. By giving them a specific place or time in the future, you free up your mind to stop worrying about them in the moment and stay focused on your important work.

I recommend you spend some time today thinking through how you can apply this process to just one area of your life, and then make an effort to do it.

Don't try to tackle everything at once—it'll quickly get overwhelming.

Just pick one small project—maybe your bedroom or your desk or even your refrigerator—and get started there.

When you're done, I'll see you in the next lesson.