

## De-cluttering files after 20 years

*By Ellen Waldman*

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I was supposed to have a small celebration in 2020 for 20 years of providing services as Senior Options.

It had a nice ring to it, and I had planned to host an open house at Village at Valley View, the memory care community at the north end of Ashland. By the way, their food is really good, and that was a big reason I chose that venue.

But as you guessed — like many other events — it didn't happen due to COVID-19.

Besides having a celebration, I had another task in mind after 20 years in business. I planned to go through all my files and cull the ones I no longer needed.

In truth, I have never gotten rid of anyone's file these past 20 years. It somehow seemed disrespectful to them. Many passed while I was still their care manager, or after our time of working together completed. Many are fortunately still alive and well.

And yet, their files sit locked in file cabinets in my garage and home office.

Finally, I made the decision to clean house. Now the question was, can I actually throw all this away, and what do I really need to keep?

That's the reason for this column. I went on a hunt to find the best list I could find for which documents to save and for how long. The good news is that I'm a member of several professional organizations, and I found a few that provided a comprehensive list.

If this is something that appeals to you, I'm happy to email you a copy. By the way, the important document organizer from Oregon Pacific Bank was quite popular. I had more requests for a copy of this than any other item I've written about.

One of the organizations called this the "financial clutter list," and was very clear about what to keep, for how long to keep it and what to throw away.

Here is an example of which items to save from each category: one month (ATM printouts); one year (monthly bank statements); three years (medical bills); seven years (records of satisfied loans); what to hold when still active (insurance documents); what to keep forever (marriage licenses); and a whole list of items specific to the IRS.

When it came to the IRS portion, I planned to defer to my tax preparer to help me figure out which of these items referred to my particular situation.

The other items were pretty obvious, and according to this information, I could have shredded most everything I have in both my personal and business files. The truth is, this still hasn't happened.

Since I have no plans in the foreseeable future to retire, it still felt premature to empty these cabinets. So for now, they remain filled with the charts of people whose lives I was fortunate to have interacted with.

The last part of this column is to encourage you to find your own way around what to keep and what to eliminate. Maybe this financial clutter list will be useful. If you have your files set up in a way that allows someone to come in and help you, should the need arise, that's really what counts. In a time of taking stock of what's important on so many levels, getting specific and tangible items under control or eliminated might be just the task for this summer.