

Gift guide: how to give presents that mean everything

PSYCHOLOGIES

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Eva
Longoria

“I’m not
afraid of
failure”

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true to
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>>> Parrack says: 'Having "too much stuff" isn't a problem unless, or until, you feel it is a problem.'

Not only that, but a 2013 University of Minnesota study believes that disorder enables the mind to break free of convention, thereby promoting creative thinking and stimulating new ideas. Many famous successful people have worked in chaos, including Roald Dahl, Steve Jobs and Albert Einstein. The researchers point out that there is order and disorder in both nature and culture – and that order is good for achieving some things while disorder is beneficial for achieving others.

Although this study recommends a tidy desk for conventionality and healthy food choices, it's also worth remembering that having an overly organised environment may have its drawbacks. 'If everything must be completely tidy and organised all the time, we're setting ourselves up for problems,' explains Hamer. 'The healthy middle

"We've confused who we are with what we have. Something feels like it's a little part of yourself, even though it's just tat"

ground would mean helping to minimise stress and frustration and maximise quality of life.' So in other words, the best way of all is to be neither overly messy nor obsessively tidy.

I still think I may have tendencies towards chronic disorganisation, especially when I'm feeling stressed and overloaded, but I'm now embracing some aspects of my clutter. Others may want constant order, but I don't think that I'd ever be comfortable with that Stepford Wife-like perfection sanitising my creative environment – even if it was orchestrated for me.

Nonetheless, I now have a better understanding of how a little bit more

order might help to reduce my stress levels without leaving me blanching of creativity – the 15-drawer filing cabinet for paperwork is on its way and I finally have a 'to-do tray' which I'm vowing to clear each week. I'm also having more cupboards built to house the stuff I need, and Silverthorn will be coming back to make sure I'm not holding on to stuff I don't need. She has also told me not to buy any storage boxes 'until you know what's going in them'.

And – central to my reorganisation – I've started clustering all my chargers in one place. If all goes to plan, next time I go on holiday, I won't be buying my sixth travel plug to add to the collection. Watch this (newly uncluttered) space...

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP:

- [APDO apdo-uk.co.uk](http://APDO.apdo-uk.co.uk)
- [Clarify Interiors clarifyinteriors.co.uk](http://Clarify Interiors.clarifyinteriors.co.uk)
- [Help for Hoarders helpforhoarders.co.uk](http://Help for Hoarders.helpforhoarders.co.uk)
- [Hoarding UK hoardinguk.org](http://Hoarding UK.hoardinguk.org)
- [Streetbank streetbank.com](http://Streetbank.streetbank.com)
- [Vicky Silverthorn youneedvicky.com](http://Vicky Silverthorn.youneedvicky.com)

BEAT STRESS

HOW TO FIND CLARITY

Confusion, mental congestion, information overload... we can often feel lost, chaotic and stressed in our modern, fast-paced world, our minds running overtime. So how do we combat this? Jamie Smart, writer, speaker, coach and consultant, explains how to find your way back to clarity

Clarity isn't an achievement; it's something we all already have, our mind's natural state, our 'factory setting', according to Jamie Smart. But superstitious thinking – for example, thoughts we or society believe to be true – can get in the way of seeing things clearly. However, as he explains in his new book *Clarity: Clear Mind, Better Performance, Bigger Results* (Capstone, £10.99), we can reboot to our default settings and think clearly.

1 BE CONSCIOUS OF SUPERSTITIOUS THOUGHTS
There is widespread cultural conditioning that mistakenly lets us believe we have clarity through understanding what we know to be true: 'superstitious thinking' – eg, we carried posies in the 1800s to ward off cholera. These thoughts inform everything we believe or do. But we live in a reality where we create our own unique experience of reality through our thoughts in that moment. The more 'superstitious', misguided thinking we experience in our minds, the less clarity we actually have.

2 BOOST YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL IMMUNE SYSTEM
Just as we have a 'pain withdrawal

"When we search for solutions, we often look to the known – thoughts we've already had. But the unknown is where fresh, innovative ideas come from"

reflex' when we touch a hot pan, we're born with a mental pain withdrawal reflex – which is why toddlers can move from screaming tantrums to gleeful giggling in minutes. As adults, we learn to override this, mistakenly believing we're experiencing something bigger than our own thoughts. Practise insightful understanding of your thoughts. Are you letting what you're thinking about dictate how you feel?

3 THINK FROM THE INSIDE OUT
The true source of most stress is the mistaken belief that we are at the mercy of anything other than our thoughts. When we think that we are experiencing something outside our own perception, our minds fill and speed up. But by realising we're not thinking from the outside in but from the inside out, our stress levels will automatically start to decrease.

4 LOOK TOWARDS THE UNKNOWN
When we search for solutions, we often look to the known – thoughts we've already had. But the unknown is where fresh, innovative ideas come from. 'Superstitious' thinking can make the unknown seem dangerous. When we allow our minds to be clear, we open ourselves up to new perspectives.

5 STOP TRYING SO HARD
There is nothing you need to do to achieve clarity – it's more a case of not doing. External intervention can stop the mind's self-correcting system from doing its job and returning to its set-point of clarity. We don't always need to make huge changes, or try to control our mental states or emotions that we believe will serve us.

COACH YOURSELF

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE? Identify your beliefs by completing the sentence 'I believe...' 20 times.

PLAY AND BE CURIOUS. Ask, what if the opposite were true?

NEXT TIME YOU HAVE A STRONG EMOTION, ask, what is the thought or belief that triggered this feeling?

Q&A

DIGITAL OVERLOAD

Endless email, social media demanding attention, and more information online than we could ever digest; to truly clear the decks, do we need to detox our digital lives too? Technology theorist Tom Chatfield says it's not the answer

INTERVIEW ALI ROFF

Why are we struggling to cope when it comes to our digital lives?

There's no question that dealing with a global glut of information is an immense challenge, and one we're badly prepared for: time and information management aren't taught in schools and there are few guidelines or reliable sources of advice. I may dislike the phrase 'digital detox', but the problem it points to is very real. There's something slightly terrifying about the scale of the mismatch between what's out there and our capacity to deal with it in a happy, healthy way. We still have the same number of hours in our days as ever, yet we all carry in our pockets access to more information – words, sounds, sights, people, opportunities, truths and untruths – than can be digested in a thousand lifetimes. We need strategies for dealing with this that don't end up in bingeing and regret.

Why are we attracted by the idea of a 'digital detox'?

Many people can identify with the toxic feeling you get when you've consumed too much of something: alcohol, junk food, tobacco. You bitterly regret an experience you wanted and enjoyed at the time. You feel guilty: you want to purge, atone, rebalance the scales. This is exactly how many people feel about technology and media, and for similar reasons. The afternoon somehow vanishes down the cracks between 'just checking' emails or catching up with Twitter or Facebook, and five minutes becomes an hour or two. Later, you feel guilty – and decide you need to do something dramatic to cleanse yourself. It's an understandable impulse, especially because it puts the problem outside of you. But it's also a misguided approach when it comes to technology.

How can we deal with digital clutter?

The problem with treating technology as toxic is that it ignores the fact that we have different, complex relationships

with many different kinds of technology. Understanding what it means for you to negotiate better and more fulfilling versions of these relationships can't simply be about 'detoxing'. If you want to make an analogy with diet, my preferred metaphor is 'becoming a digital gourmet': filter out and make choices on the basis of what you relish and care about, rather than from fear of contamination.

To love something is to choose. It's to say 'no' as well as 'yes', rather than simply to stuff your face all day with content; it's to be interested in what it means to use technology well. It may be that there are individual technological experiences – a video game, an app, a social network – with which you have an almost wholly negative relationship, and which your life would be better without. It's important to be prepared to sever these bonds. I've uninstalled several video games because they just weren't good for me; I played them too much and they took up too much time. But this isn't because *they* were toxic. It's because my habits around them were destructive.

What about screen time? How much is too much?

'Too much' is one of those weasel phrases that can lead you in circles. Anything is too much if it is having negative consequences in your life; too much for one person may be a requirement for happiness (or employment) for another. What I try to be careful about – and don't always manage – is falling into a habit that brings no real benefits, one that cuts me off from other things I would be better off doing.

I've already mentioned playing video games too much – I also worry about habits like leaving a computer on all day, or having a phone permanently in my pocket. This isn't all 'screen time', but it's still technology being a squatter in your life. As a rule, I try to think about what you might call 'away-from-screen time', to make sure I carve out a sufficient amount of this for the things I value that can't be achieved

"Become a 'digital gourmet': filter out and make choices on the basis of what you relish and care about, rather than from fear of contamination"