

The Trials of Piles: or How to Access the Excess without Really Trying

By Judi Jerome, LICSW, LADC



Dictionary entries found for piles:

1. A quantity of objects stacked or thrown together in a heap.
2. Informal. A large accumulation or quantity: *a pile of trouble*.
3. Slang. A large sum of money.
4. A funeral pyre.
5. A very large building or complex of buildings.
6. A nuclear reactor.
7. To move in, out, or forward in a disorderly mass or group.
8. A voltaic pile. (voltaic: *Producing electricity by chemical action*).
9. To accumulate.

My Grandmother Tessie's definition of piles: 1. Hemorrhoids.

When I was a kid my Gammy, used to say: "Don't stay in the bathroom so long, you'll get piles". I never understood what she meant by that. How could my falling back asleep in the bathroom every morning produce the out of control piles that were forever gracing every available surface of my bedroom? Both her piles and mine continued to bewilder me.

My mother incorporated her own strategy. A few times a year I would come home from school to find she had swept the piles of clothes, papers, books, records, jewelry, knick knacks, etc. from my bed, dresser, desk, pink polka dot chair (which NEVER got sat in), and closet floor, onto a huge, volcano sized pile in the middle of my floor. It was at least as tall as I was. This ritual always took place on a Friday so that I would have the entire weekend to sort through the big pile and make it into neat, little, out of site piles, or if I was able to hyperfocus, no piles at all.

I am always being told by my clients that they can't declutter and get rid of the piles because they can't use it if they can't see it, find it, and therefore remember that they have it. This makes total sense from an ADDer's point of view, but the reality of the results is eloquently expressed by Julie Morgenstern in her book, Organizing From the Inside Out. She said, and I paraphrase parts, "that leaving things out as 'to-do' reminders usually results in failure because these visual cues eventually get stacked on top of one another, lost or forgotten, blending into your environment and becoming a sort of visual Muzak that renders all your visual reminders invisible, defeating their purpose". Now how familiar does that sound???

The two minutes it takes to put the mail away in the appropriate slots in the expensive gismo on the desk doesn't happen because you've already jumped ahead to feeding the cat, checking the email, changing out of your work clothes and pulling dinner ingredients out of the fridge. An hour later, the kitchen counter is covered

with mail, envelopes, empty carrot bag, aluminum foil box, eggplant peels, empty sauce bottle, microwave dishes, spices, and waxed paper. The sink is full of dishes and you're taking a break in front of the TV - but, you'll clean the kitchen before you go to bed. The next thing you know its 11:30 and you're yawning. You tell yourself you'll clean it before work tomorrow, walk into the bedroom and you're hit with a bed full of clean laundry, a chair full of work clothes and piles of half-read books and magazines on the floor - each pile was an 'I'll put it away later' gift to yourself. When is the last time that you ate at your dining room table or sat on the sofa? I know that you make attempts at getting rid of the piles, but somehow three hours later, the part of the room that is clean has created more of a mess in another room, or another part of the same room. Face it, you get tangled up in yourself. You don't have to. There is a way out. You know that saying, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Well which came first, the stress or the mess? When you are stressed your energy and motivation is decreased hence the mess increases. When the mess increases your stress also increases as does your anxiety. It's a no win situation. Or is it?

Unless you have a full-time, live-in maid or a partner/spouse/roommate that is an obsessive-compulsive cleaner-organizer, your house will never look like the ones in the magazines. That's OK; it is your home not a museum. It *is* lived-in. There are many books written on organizing, and they all say that no matter how great a system is, it's not the best system for you if you aren't using it. I believe that any system you choose has to start with the same basic ingredients, self-love, and mindfulness.

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn; "Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality." Every moment of every day we have a choice of what we want to be thinking, feeling, saying, and doing. When we purposefully practice mindfulness, we empower ourselves with the knowledge of what those choices are. We take ourselves off of 'auto-pilot'. We choose our behaviors instead of just going through the motions of the harmful habits that we have created over time.

Piles are created when you are not truly paying attention to what the choices (and consequences) are, at the exact moment that you are about to place something on a surface instead of in the particular place where it belongs. Piles, and the negative energy that seep from them, are created by a lack of acuity and awareness. Mindfulness does matter.

Letting go of the habit of making piles is as difficult as quitting smoking. Habits, like addictions, are ingrained patterns of behavior. All have the same need when it comes time to change them; the need for a new language to be created inside your mind - your self-message control center. Yup, Cognitive Re-structuring, or as I like to call it, Positive Brainwashing. What we tell ourselves becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, a negative or positive outcome based on the self-message. When we change the message, we change the behavior and outcome. But I'll stop here because that topic is a whole other article.

A TIP

Practicing *mindfulness* which increases your awareness of what you are doing in each moment of your day, working with a coach and/or a truly patient friend, setting up systems that you actually *enjoy* using, and remembering to breathe can be the beginning of the end for out-of-control piles. Everything that you do, from opening the mail to peeling the eggplant, has to have your mind, body, and all five senses focused on *only* that one particular task. If you have AD/HD, meditating, learning,

and practicing mindfulness, and consciously working on *remembering* to slow down is the foundation of your life raft... *use it or drown*.

...AND A CONFESSION

That old pink polka dot chair has followed me since adolescence. A friend sat in it once when I was ill. It was finally removed from the spare room last year. I put it out at a garage sale, it didn't sell. I offered it to my neighbors girls but they didn't have room for it. I placed it out by the curb, but brought it back in an hour later. It now sits in my basement and is home to an old purple beanbag chair that I also can't seem to part with but don't use anymore. My mother said that sentimentality is admirable but the ridiculous is not sublime.

Suggested reading on mindfulness:

The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh

Full Catastrophe Living and Wherever You Go There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Suggested reading on organizing:

ADD Friendly Ways To Organize Your Life by Judith Kolberg & Kathleen Nadeau

Organizing From the Inside Out and Time Management From the Inside Out by Julie Morgenstern



Judi has been in private practice since 1990 working with a variety of issues, and specializing in teens and adults with AD/HD and co-morbid disorders, life cycle transitions, and substance abuse. Judi enjoys coaching teens and adults with AD/HD in all genres of life. She believes that each individual has potential within to achieve success beyond the current limits that problems such as time management, disorganization, morning madness and late night hyper-focusing may be imposing on their lives. Judi coaches people toward accomplishing their dreams as well as their goals. Her motto - Empowerment, growth and maintenance for positive life changes

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