

# FUNCTIONAL FASHIONABLE 6

## Love Your Wardrobe

What are you wearing? No, really, what do you have on right now? More importantly, ask yourself how you feel today in your clothes. Do you feel attractive? At ease? Do you feel like yourself? Or are your pants outdated? Are your shoes pinching your toes? Are you looking down at your sweater thinking it's way more 10-years-ago "you" than today "you?"

Shallow and inconsequential as they may seem, these questions are important because life's too short not to be comfortable and confident in your clothing! Not to mention that the closet space in your bedroom cannot be large enough to accommodate unused or unloved items, even if you're in the enviable position of having a cavernous walk-in. Clothing "clutter," those unused pieces you put on once a year and regret wearing as soon as you've left the house, takes up valuable space, time and energy. Worst of all, it robs you of days that should be spent wearing something that makes you feel fabulous.

Loving every piece in your wardrobe allows you to assemble outfits easily each day. It also makes dressing a pleasure rather than a chore. Your closet should feel like your favorite clothing store. The things inside should delight and inspire you. Whether you're choosing a dress-to-impress professional ensemble, a casual bus-stop-then-grocery-store outfit or even a pair of pajamas, you should be excited about all of your options.

Here are a few things to consider when you're evaluating a clothing item:

- **Does it fit properly?**
- **Is it versatile? (Can you make more than one great outfit with it?)**
- **Are you physically comfortable when you wear it?**
- **Do you feel confident when you wear it?**
- **How many "duplicate" items do you own? (Items that essentially fulfill the same purpose in your wardrobe.)**
- **And, critically, would you buy it today?**

When in doubt, use this last question to seal the deal. Putting aside your "sunk" costs (the price you

paid for the item plus whatever you might have spent to alter, clean and/or repair it), ask yourself if you would buy this item again today. If there's any hesitation, then you have your answer and it's a resounding "no." Put the item in a bag, take it to Goodwill and drive away. Do not look back.

Speaking of looking back... This wise-guy cartoon by Someecards sums up the clothing conundrum perfectly, capturing the universally felt phenomenon of emotional attachment to clothing, which often surprises and astounds us. We wonder why it's so hard to let go of a few pieces of fabric, especially when they no longer fulfill their purpose in our lives.

The truth is that, as with most "things," our clothing often connects us to our past and to the people we once were. You were younger, perhaps thinner, when you bought those slacks. You celebrated something important or met someone special in that dress. Though you don't have occasion to wear a football jersey these days, this one reminds you of your glory days on the high school team. It's hard to say goodbye to old clothes because we feel like we're parting with the memory of our old selves.

Of course, sometimes the hard thing to do is the right thing to do. After all, we need to set aside some of our old memories to create room in our lives for making new ones. And, when it comes to clothing, there are ways to make the separation easier. Think of the benefits of a wardrobe purge. For instance, you might be able to make some money consigning pieces that are still in good condition. With that money and the space you've created in your closet, you might treat yourself to a new item or two. And not least, you are setting your unwanted garments free so that they may be fully appreciated by someone else who may not otherwise have been able to afford them.

I often encourage clients to take photos of things before they give them away. Sometimes they wear the item for the shot; others simply lay it out on a table or display it on a hanger. If you truly loved an outfit once, you probably have an old picture of yourself wearing it: you and the ballet troupe in your matching Nutcracker sweatshirts, you in your prom dress, you in your lucky jeans. Pin these photos to a corkboard on the back of your closet door as a way of commemorating your favorite clothes at their very

best moments — and donate the items themselves.

Photographs are a great solution for special clothing items such as graduation gowns, wedding dresses and baby clothes. You can also find creative ways to capture the essence of a special piece of clothing without saving the entire thing. For instance, frame your daughter's Honor Roll sash to hang in her bedroom but get rid of her chintzy graduation gown and mortarboard. Trim a detail from an old dress — a piece of lace, a flower applique — but donate the dress itself. Donating baby clothes can be emotional as we watch our little kids rapidly grow up into big ones. But it's also very rewarding, as there are so many mothers in need of these items for their children. Select three or four of your kids' most precious baby clothes and display them in your closet. They don't take up much room and they'll bring you daily pleasure from the memories they inspire. I'm a shoe girl. I have the pair of black velvet Mary Janes I wore at my first birthday party on a shelf in my closet. I also kept my wedding shoes, which I still wear for formal occasions.

One of the most common challenges — both spatial and emotional — that my clients face is dealing with a multi-size wardrobe. Women, in particular, often own collections of clothes in two or three different sizes. They are reluctant to dispose of off-size clothing, thinking they might gain or lose weight. Some women keep maternity clothes in case they decide to have another child. So how can you organize a wardrobe that might be double or triple the volume for which your closet was designed?

First, be honest with yourself about your size. Whether you're hoping you'll need your size 2s again or fearing that you'll need your size 12s, analyze the likelihood of that scenario. If you regularly experience significant weight fluctuations, you have a legitimate need for keeping off-size wardrobes. For many people, however, the need to maintain several sizes is less about practicality than superstition. Often it's nostalgia for our younger selves that keeps those pre-baby jeans on the hanger, or an irrational notion that weight gain will overtake us the minute we donate our "fat" clothes. Honesty with yourself is always the best policy. Whatever your worry, face the facts and the fears.

Once you've determined that you really, truly do





need multiple sizes, put each size to the test. Off-sized clothing that's uncomfortable or out of style isn't really an asset. In other words, you should love all of your wardrobes! Taking a thorough look at your "skinny" clothes and you might end up weeding out several pieces that are worn or outdated. If and when you're back in that size again, you'll relish the opportunity to replace a few of those discarded items with ones you love.

Most Americans have overly extensive wardrobes that they couldn't put fully to use in the space of a year, let alone a one- or two-week laundry cycle. Keeping a streamlined wardrobe of versatile items is spatially, economically and emotionally beneficial for everyone. For people with multiple sizes, it's absolutely essential. When building your wardrobe, reduce the volume and focus instead on quality and versatility.

Following the organizational "like with like" principle, I always recommend that different sizes be kept separately. A size 8 dress among size 10s is like a landmine, lying in wait to make you late for work. Section your clothing according to size just as they do in stores. Store off-sized wardrobes in a satellite location, such



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as in under-bed containers or guest room closets, just as you would off-season clothing, making the big switch when necessary.

Just last week the clothes in my dresser made the switch from winter to spring. As I pulled things from my under-bed

storage container, I carefully considered them one by one. I filled two shopping bags with no-longer-fit-me T-shirts, never-wear-them-shorts and these-aren't-really-me accessories. I have an appointment to consign a few of these items tomorrow. The rest are destined for Goodwill, where I hope someone else will fall in love with them the way I once did. I've made space in my wardrobe for a couple of new pieces, which suit my current needs and tastes. I've also made space in my closet. There's "breathing room" between garments, which creates an orderly, appealing space and keeps my clothing in good condition. I look forward to each morning knowing that, whatever I choose to wear, it will look and feel good.

Spring is the most inspiring season for a closet makeover, so set aside an afternoon to ask yourself those tough questions. There's every reason to love your wardrobe!

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