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Do you have the right personality for downsizing?



Diana Clement



Living in high and medium-density housing is the future for many. While some Kiwis dream of the big home and garden in the suburbs or a lifestyle block, plenty more want nothing of the hassle and upkeep.

Medium-density housing in particular is exploding in brown and greenfield sites such as Hobsonville and Stonefields in Auckland. The lifestyle downsize fits with a demographic trend towards an increase in childless couples and single-person households.

It's not easy to downsize after a decade or more in the same home. If you've had children, there will be all manner of stuff that you don't necessarily want to get rid of.

Catherine Foster, author of *Small House Living* and *Apartment Living* says before downsizing, assess whether you have the right personality to do so. Some people simply can't do without things. Others need memories. "You need to explore inside your mind," she says.

For some people a digital photograph of their children's artwork or first shoes is all they need. Others have to have the real thing and may not be suited to medium or high-density housing. "You have to ask, can I give away the memories of a lifetime?" says Foster.

Foster's personal downsize to a tiny home was driven by a quote from 19th century English artist William Morris: "If you want a golden rule that will fit everybody, this is it: Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful."

Some people, however, are anchored emotionally by the physical, not the spiritual, and would be better off downsizing financially to a home out of the city rather than physically to a smaller home, Foster says.



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If you do want to downsize, Foster recommends cultivating the less is more attitude. In the lead-up to the event, she advises, try a year buying only what you need, not what seems a good idea at the time.

Brenda Kelly, who runs IQ Container Homes and lives in a 15sq m home, says be realistic with your clear-out. Are you going to wear that dress again that's been sitting in the back of your wardrobe for the last two years? Do you really need 20 pairs of shoes?

She never met someone who'd downsized and thought, I wish I still had ...

If you struggle to let go, remember that you're not getting rid of the item, you're blessing someone else with it if you sell it online or give it to charity.

Don't be constrained by conventional thinking or what you're used to, adds Kelly. She is a fan of multi-purpose devices, for example.

No longer do you need a blender, juicer, and food processor. There will be one machine that can do all three for your smaller home.

You can also ditch a lot of furniture and buy multi-functional items for the new space.

She has a saying that if a piece of furniture doesn't have more than one function, it doesn't belong in a small home.

That includes sofas and or desks that become beds, ottomans with storage inside, pull-out ironing boards and many other items.

As you go through the process of downsizing, keep your goal in mind, says Kelly. Downsizing has many advantages. While the primary motivator for most is cost savings, it can also deliver a better quality of life.

By not needing to work 80-hour weeks to service an impossible mortgage, only to come home and spend weekends on maintenance and cleaning reduces stress and frees up time and dollars for family, travel, interest and hobbies.

For the environmentally conscious, the smaller footprint is more sustainable, uses less resources and reduces waste.

Foster adds not to get too hung up on the process. Dispose of the accumulated clutter of family life by whatever means you can. Accept that much of it has no zero emotional or financial value to anyone except yourself and give it away. It will be valued by a new owner. Think, for example, of bed linen for needy families.

As an interim measure, hire a small storage unit, she says. Review what you've kept in there regularly. At the end of a year there'll probably be almost nothing you want to keep.

You may choose to get rid of more than you need, so you can start afresh in the new space. The benefit of doing this is that you can have your home dressed more easily for sale, so moving costs less.