



"I love America, and I love American women. But there is one thing that deeply shocks me-- American closets. I cannot believe one can dress well when you have so much," ~ Andree Putnam, French interior designer.

We have all seen them --Hollywood celebrity closets the size of a small apartment or the perfectly organized closet of Carrie Bradshaw from television's "Sex in the City."

Real people's closets aren't as perfect unless they hire a professional to keep things neat and organized. And since American closets are big and often filled with way too many clothes, finding what you want to wear can often be a challenge.

Statistics show that 80 percent of the time, we wear 20 percent of what we have. So, what happens to the other 80 percent of what we have?

Closets usually tell stories of the past or hopes for the future: the sweater with the happy reindeer, a gift from the dear aunt Sally, a high school's graduation dress that shouts – "Hi world, I'm young and beautiful," pre-pregnancy sexy tops that you hope might fit someday, and those perfect bargains that were too good to pass up, but still have the price tags on.

It's easy to get attached to items from the past or those "just in case" clothing pieces. So even though we're not wearing 80 percent of what we have, many of us are struggling to part with unnecessary things, unless there's a good reason.

This is where a clothing swap can come in handy. A clothing swap is a event where participants donate their unwanted clothing and are then given the opportunity to choose pieces brought by other attendees. Clothing swaps promise something new and fresh, so it's pretty good motivation to audit your closet and get rid of long- forgotten and lonely pieces that don't serve you anymore.

I especially love the de-cluttering aspect of the swap because it creates more space and a nice flow in the closet. Getting new pieces is always fun, too, and knowing that the clothing that doesn't serve you anymore might be a great find for others, feels equally good.

I hosted my first clothing swap a year ago, and then had some random ones, until I finally created a meetup group -- <http://www.meetup.com/Viva-Clothing-Swap/> to host them once a month. I also often come as a facilitator when people want to host at their homes.

Clothing swaps are easy to organize and so much fun to attend. But, having a wardrobe consultant with a well-trained eye, who is going to assist you in making the right decisions, helps a lot. The whole purpose of the clothing swap is to trade the clothing that doesn't serve you anymore for pieces that fit your body, personality and lifestyle NOW.

How does a clothing swap work? Invite your friends, co-workers, or/and relatives over—10 people is a good number to start with. Ask them to bring a certain number of items, such as 10, including accessories and shoes, and explain to them that the clothing has to be in good shape, currently in style, clean and pressed. A clothing swap should feel like a home-based boutique, not a flea market.



Decide on how you're going to display the clothing. I use commercial clothing rolling racks. Clothing should look nice and have an easy access-nobody wants to dig through the piles of clothing, like when you are at Ross at the end of the day.

Have an agenda: a start and end time and things you want to accomplish. I usually start with introductions, especially if there are new faces. Explain the process, tell people where the unwanted clothing will go, how you're going to solve the situation if there are two or more people who want the same item and so on.

If I have this situation, I ask for a vote and the desired piece goes to the one on whom it looks the best on. Before the swapping starts, I also ask the attendees to show off the pieces they brought and tell their story. When the clothing is picked I ask everybody to model their choices so we can all cheer the nice finds. Appetizers and wine always add a nice touch, too.

There are challenges to holding a swap. The most common concern I hear is, "I won't find anything in my size." Let's say most of the women who come are size 10 and up, and you're size 4. What always amazes me is that size 10 woman might have brought a size 4 classic-style dress that hasn't been worn in years but is still in perfect shape. I've seen that happen many times.

Or, if you don't find a piece of clothing, you might get a pair of great shoes or a piece of jewelry. In the worst case scenario, coming to the clothing swap is a great opportunity to get rid of some clutter. Your closet will thank you.

There are also many ways to make clothing swaps really exciting. I invite guest speakers, jewelry designers, talk fashion trends, personal style and more, so there is an educational piece that goes with the excitement. I see people connecting, making new friendships, so it's definitely about more than just clothing.

And, it allows us to go towards less but better fitting clothes which in turn creates more ease in our life. According to Brenda Kinsel, image consultant extraordinaire, “ dressing well frees you to forget about your clothes and concentrate on living”. --DP



As a freelance wardrobe consultant, Diana Placiakiene, AICI, MBA, works with men and women who are looking to advance their professional and personal image. Most of her clients are professionals who want to take their business to the next level. In her practice, Diana combines her business skills, understanding of human psychology, natural visual talents and passion for fashion to help people have more ease, fun and success.

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