



Pretend You Live Alone

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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So often I hear family members complain about how others make a mess and are not willing to help with the cleanup. They want things done a certain way at a certain time and feel upset, blaming everyone else who lives in the house for this mood.

When they come to me as clients, they believe that I have magic powers that will instantly change everyone but don't expect what I have to say about their dilemma.

I frequently see looks of surprise when I tell them that I live alone and therefore don't have anyone to blame when the place is messy. I also don't have anyone to pick up or organize everything. When you live alone, you don't waste a lot of time feeling resentment of others who might not have done things when or how you would have done them.

However, here are some hints to help deal with the domestic tasks:

1. Meet with everyone living in the household and set out a list of items that need to be done as well as the timeframe to complete them.
2. Let each person decide what they are willing to do and put their name on the list next to the item chosen. Make sure that they are not just making a false promise but understand truly what it expected.
3. Select appropriate and realistic consequences for not completing the task on time. For example, the movie isn't watched until it is done. Outings are delayed or cancelled.
4. Be consistent and never make an exception on consequences (or you will be setting a precedent for the future).
5. Get rid of the things that are causing the most work. If there is too much laundry, perhaps it is because you have too many clothes. Too much on the floor perhaps indicates too many toys. Dusting taking too long - declutter!
6. Use your machines. I view my appliances as free labour. All I need to do is load the dishwasher and I get almost a half hour of unpaid kitchen help. The washing machine gives me about twenty minutes of work that I don't need to do or supervise, and the dryer provides another sixty minutes of unpaid labour. All I need to do is invest a few minutes to fill each machine and push the buttons.
7. Make chores fun. Instead of nagging or feeling annoyed, try setting a timer to see how much can be accomplished before it rings.
8. Plan a reward for everyone when the tasks are completed. A board game, movie or cup of hot chocolate can be motivation.
9. Hold yourself accountable. Make sure that you have done what you are committed to do before complaining about others.
10. Practice and teach habits for cleaning your environment as you go.

My aunt used to have the following "Golden Rules for Living" framed on the kitchen counter to remind everyone about what matters:

If you open it, close it.

If you turn it on, turn it off.

If you unlock it, lock it up.

If you break it, admit it.

If you can't fix it, call in someone who can.

If you borrow it, return it.

If you value it, take care of it.

If you make a mess clean it up.

If you move it, put it back.

If it belongs to someone else and you want to use it, get permission.

If you don't know how to operate it, leave it alone.

If it's none of your business, don't ask questions.

If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

If it will brighten someone's day, say it.

If it will tarnish someone's reputation, keep it to yourself.

Wise thoughts to ponder!