

BUSTING CLUTTER IN THE WORKPLACE

Getting organized means more than just cleaning up your desk!

Imagine meeting an attorney for the first time, whose office is a cluttered mess – papers piled all over the desktop, mail and files scattered on the credenza, and an overloaded bookcase with stacks of books on top and on the floor. Regardless of the actual skill or reputation of that attorney, might your first impression be a negative one? Might your confidence in that attorney be lessened as well? In business, first impressions are important.

Clutter in the workplace ranges from merely annoying to nearly paralyzing and is always detrimental to productivity. A cluttered work environment also projects an unfavorable image to clients and associates. When the desktop becomes a storage place rather than a workspace, it's time to reorganize! Several factors contribute to a disorganized workspace, but here are three ways to combat the saboteurs:

1. Get a good desk. This doesn't mean an expensive desk. It means one that is right for you and meets your daily needs. Your personal work habits as well as your business activities will determine what style and size desk is appropriate for you. If you refer to books, manuals or publications regularly in your business, a desk with an upright hutch would make sense. You can keep the books you refer to daily in the hutch. They will be easily accessed, but up off your work space. If books don't need to be right at hand, a separate bookcase will suffice and you can go without the hutch in favor of a larger flat workspace.

If you use a computer (and these days, who doesn't?) and you have ample floor space, consider an L-shaped desk. You can keep your computer on one section and still have a large workspace on the other. This configuration allows you to avoid juggling two priorities on the same desktop. Another great aspect about an L-shaped desk is the additional room you gain for

desktop tools such as upright file holders, stacking trays, baskets, portable hanging files, and your phone. Don't forget all the space on your walls. When you can't build out, build up! Shelves are a fantastic way to display personal items, awards, and photos while keeping your work area clean and functional.

2. *Improve your time management.* When you don't have a good handle on your time, you often end up in a rush to get things done and inevitably, you can't make being organized a priority. Papers get tossed on the desk "for now" and magazines get stacked on the chair or floor because you don't have time to read them. One of the simplest ways to make better use of your time is to rethink how long tasks will actually take, and schedule accordingly. Visualize yourself completing a task from start to finish and what actions you must take. Until you get more accurate at estimating, add 25% to the time you think you'll need to complete a certain task. Another way to realize actual time is to time yourself while you do different things, such as paying bills, balancing the checkbook or going to the post office. You might be surprised to find out how long things actually take. Make notes on how long each task takes so you can remember to allow ample time. When running errands between business appointments, always allow for unexpected circumstances such as traffic or long lines.

3. *Purge that paper!* Many people accumulate paper clutter due to a fear of throwing away something important, or a concern that it may be needed later. The result is that they end up keeping everything and not being able to discern which things have present or future value and which can be safely discarded.

The reality is that 80 percent of the paper saved "just in case" is never needed again, and if it is, the chances are very good that it can be recreated or obtained from another source. From mail to fax to advertisements and memos, paper is the largest contributor to clutter in an office

environment. In order to avoid a rapid build-up of paper, a regular paper maintenance system is a necessity in every office. Remember, your trashcan and your shredder are your friends.

4. Make Decisions Quicker. Clutter happens when you postpone decision-making. Try to get into the habit of making decisions rapidly on whether to keep paper, mail and other things. The faster you can make confident decisions, the faster you'll keep things moving through your life, which prevents backlog.

Keep in mind is that getting organized is a process rather than an event, so don't expect miracles overnight. You can speed the process along by hiring help, such as a professional organizer, who will work side by side with you and keep you focused. If you do plan on tackling the reorganizing project yourself, it's possible to make a good amount of headway in a relatively short time if you have a game plan and some goals in mind before you start. Just start in one place and keep at it, and before long you'll be amazed at the results you see.

Monica Ricci has been an organizing and productivity specialist since 1999. She offers onsite consulting, as well as motivational seminars and workshops, which teach effective organizing and simplifying and effectiveness strategies for home and work. Reach Monica at www.CatalystOrganizing.com or 770-569-2642.