

## Organize to Get Happy

Ever wonder if organized people are happier? They are!

An organized, peaceful work environment is necessary for your success in business and your overall wellbeing. Organized people feel in control, especially of their time. Their work flows smoothly, like water around stones. Organized people can set goals and break them into manageable tasks. Bosses and employees engaged in the task at hand may feel challenged and simulated, but they are not overwhelmed or stressed out. It's like the old joke, "How do you eat an elephant?" Answer, "One bite at a time."

David Shenk, in his book *Data Smog* (1998), reports that sixty percent of the average office worker's time is still spent processing paper documents. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates the average office worker in the US uses 10,000 sheets of copy paper each year! No wonder workspaces are smothered in paper. Information overload can cause:

- Increased cardiovascular stress, due to a rise in blood pressure;
- Confusion and frustration;
- Impaired judgment about what is really important.

Studies show that the amount of time wasted just looking for lost items can exceed over half of a workday, depending on the occupation.<sup>1</sup> Reducing the amount of time spent looking for items can greatly reduce daily stress. Here are some reasons why organized people are happier:

- They have more energy and get more done quickly.
- They are confident they can find the needed information and therefore less stressed.
- They have freed their mind to think strategically instead of cluttering it up with mundane details.
- They get promoted because they are seen as people who get things done.
- They have a competitive edge in business that leads to greater profitability.

What can be done, quickly and easily:

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<sup>1</sup> There are too many "time management" studies to cite here, and they give varying results, but all agree that a large proportion of "wasted time" in terms of productivity is spent looking for items.

1) Clear the clutter. Begin by having a serious “throw away session.” Get rid of all the stuff that’s outdated, too messy to read, the knick-knacks that make the work space hard to see. It’s like organizing a closet: if you take everything out first, and throw away what you do not need, you can see more clearly where there is space for your things.

2) Remember, the first principle of organizing is that “like goes with like.” Think about your kitchen: don’t you keep your plates with other plates, forks and knives with other eating utensils? Why do you do this? Because it saves a lot of time when your getting ready to have a meal. Do the same thing in your office. Put all your extra office supplies in one place, put your reference materials (books, conference materials, rules and regulations) together, put files of the same type together.

3) Imagine your office in concentric circles. The innermost circle is the workspace, with items needed for active work within arm’s reach (telephone, computer, basic desk supplies, wastebasket). The next, wider circle should be the items you do not need immediately, or very often. This could include “permanent action files” like data entry or expense reimbursements. Further from your active work area are files you are not using or books that you want to keep, but do not refer to regularly. In the next circle out are the things you use rarely, such as files ready to be archived, past tax filings or last year’s accounting books. You can expand these circles beyond your own office or work space including placement of the files in your building or even off-site for the oldest material.

Once you take these steps, you are well on your way to creating a happier self and a more productive work environment.

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