



practice tip

Reduce Office Clutter:

Your Three-Step Plan to Increased Productivity, Efficiency and Profitability

by Pat Heydlauff



Research shows there is a direct correlation between productivity and clutter. Productivity and profits decline when clutter and chaos rise. Do piles of paper, disorganization and information mismanagement take over your workplace while efficiency and effectiveness vanish right before your eyes?

According to the National Association of Professional Organizations, paper clutter is the number one problem for most businesses. Studies show the average person wastes 4.3 hours per week searching for papers, which adds stress and frustration to the workplace while reducing concentration and creative thinking. The average executive loses one hour of productivity per day searching for missing information. And, according to the Small Business Administration, the biggest burden for small business is the inability to properly service customers, increase sales and improve the bottom line because of mishandled paperwork.

In addition, many companies deal with stress daily, and unfortunately clutter can help add to the stress of the daily

grind. Statistics show 75 percent or more of all physician visits are stress-related, and by un-cluttering you will not only increase productivity, security and profits but reduce overall stress and medical care costs.

Think Big

Whether you are working in a huge corporation or a one-person office, there are several benefits to un-cluttering and organizing:

- Increase productivity and profitability increase
- Keep information confidential and secure
- Reduce mental overload and stress
- Reduce workplace accidents and spills
- Save time and improve effectiveness

Your first step is to devise an information management system, not just a filing system. Information comes from many sources, including snail mail, e-mail, text messages, cell phones, and courier services, to name a few. All of this information needs to be organized, in order to be profitably utilized, put into permanent archives or tossed. You also need to have the necessary tools to make the system efficient and uniformly useable such as file folders, filing cabinets for current information, boxes for archives, and scanners with backup capabilities for managing information electronically.

Start Now

Whether you are responsible for creating your own information management system or if those higher up are in charge, it's still up to you to take action and make it happen. Here are some steps:

- Set aside time weekly to manage and organize information. Adhere to that commitment like an appointment and you



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will stay ahead of the game.

- Always organize your desk at the end of the day, so at least 80 percent of the desktop is visible. This will make going to work each morning a joy because desk stress and mental overload will decrease while your productivity increases.
- Eliminate anything on top of your desk that is not used often. Put everything else into drawers, cubicles or containers that are easily accessible. Your efficiency will double and your fatigue will decrease.
- Limit yourself to only one personal photograph, placing it in the southwest section of your work area to energize relationships. This will increase focus on the work at hand not others.
- If you need to access files at a moment's notice or need a reminder to follow up on specific projects regularly, use a vertical desktop file sorter instead of stacks, and color-code them. Use green folders for new clients, red folders for established clients that provide you good business and good fortune, and yellow folders for less important but still necessary information. You or colleagues can quickly find client information, which improves client relations and results.
- Handle information only once whether on paper or in your e-mail inbox. Make a decision as to whether it takes action or can be tossed or deleted. You will become more efficient and lower your stress levels.

Sustain Your Information Management System

Once you have devised your information management system and put your plan into action, you must focus energy onto it to keep it operating smoothly on a daily basis. It won't become part of the corporate culture or a personal habit if you don't do more than just un-clutter and organize once or twice.

- Create a Clean Desk or Clean Workspace Policy, and establish a reward system that is handed out weekly, such as a small trophy for each office that qualifies. If the trophy stays with that person for six months or a whole year provide them an extra reward, perhaps a day off or preferred parking for a month.
- Post pictures of the winners in your employee lounge or common area, and recognize them at company meetings.
- Encourage your employees to put something one personal, creative item on their desk, where stacks of paper used to be. This will serve as a reminder of how easy it is to stay clutter-free and stress-free.

Stress, clutter and disorganization cost businesses thousands of dollars in lost profits, productivity and time. By creating a plan to stay organized, and implementing these tips on a regular basis, you and your company can reap the benefits and your employees will be happier and healthier. 