

Taming office clutter

TEN TRIED-AND-TRUE TIPS
TO GET ORGANIZED AND
IMPRESS YOUR BOSS

—by Chi O clutter-cutter
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I F YOU HAD a quarter for every piece of paper piled on your desk, would you have enough to purchase a Louis Vuitton steamer trunk? Does your purse live in the file drawer while your files, well, what files? Do you have business cards you're afraid to toss, even though you can't remember the people associated with those cards?

According to Smead, manufacturer and distributor of paper-filing supplies and records-management software, "Each day, every office worker in America produces 45 new sheets of paper, adding up to more than 1300 sheets of paper per month per person." And you thought this was the electronic age! Having a tough time staying on top of paper and information overload? Try these cures for the most common causes of office disorganization and watch your stress level plummet.

1 DO YOU KNOW that 80% of filed papers are never accessed again? Be ruthless in tossing or recycling papers you really don't need. **UNLESS A PAPER HAS TAX OR LEGAL IMPLICATIONS, IS RELATED TO A CURRENT PROJECT, OR IS REFERENCED OFTEN, TOSS IT.** If you suffer from "Someday Syndrome" ("I might need it someday!"), take emotion out of the decision to toss paper by asking, "What is the worst thing that could happen if I throw this away?" or "Which do I value more, this piece of paper or the desk or file space it's occupying?"

2 WAS THE LAST TIME anyone saw the surface of your desk during the George H. W. Bush administration? In my experience, people pile papers because they fear "out of sight, out of mind." If this sounds familiar, I suggest you **TURN THOSE PILES INTO FILES.** However, instead of filing current project files in a file drawer, keep them in a vertical file stand on your desktop. Your papers will be organized, right at hand, and top of mind. Keep reference files in a file drawer.

3 DOES YOUR now-clear desk look bare without a few piles? Once you've turned piles to files, **CREATE A ROADBLOCK TO YOUR FORMER PILING HABIT.** Add a few framed pictures, plants, a jar of candy, or other decorative objects to your desktop (being careful not to add too many, which can look cluttered). Doing so will allow less room for paper piles.

4 DO YOU HAVE enough small scraps of loose paper to supply a ticker-tape parade? If your desktop is covered with scattered notes from telephone conversations, voice messages and meeting notes, get a spiral-bound notebook, post haste. **USE A NOTEBOOK (or note pages in a planner) WHEN YOU TAKE NOTES TO ENSURE THEY ARE CONTAINED AND IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER,** making it easy to locate the important topics of discussion from Monday's staff meeting when your boss asks for a re-cap.

5 HAVE YOU EVER accepted a business card from someone not because you really want or need their contact information, but because you don't want to be rude? Just because we accept a business card doesn't mean we have to keep it. If you need to save a card, by all means *do not use* business card "books". If you've ever tried this method, I'll bet you're wincing at the thought of adding a card without disturbing the alphabetical order of the rest. Instead, **GO FOR A ROLODEX OR INDEX-TYPE FILING SYSTEM.** If your contact database is electronic, enter the contact information and throw the card away.

6 DO YOU reflexively respond to e-mail each time you hear "you've got mail"? As hard as it may be, **CHECK AND RESPOND TO E-MAIL ONLY A FEW TIMES DAILY.** Responding to e-mail as it arrives causes a loss of momentum on the project you are working on. It will take several minutes to get back in the groove once you return to the task.

7 IS "MY DOCUMENTS" your catch-all for computer files? Filing soft-copy documents follows the same concept as that of filing paper: **CREATE FOLDERS AND SUB-FOLDERS** within "My Documents" to organize your work.