



*Office
Organizing
101*

Simple Ideas to Help You Get
Organized.....And Stay That Way!



**By Ellen Martin Kramer
A New Leaf**

*Organizing Your Space.
Simplifying Your Life.*

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Introduction

Come back in time with me to 1989, I was a teenager who had the messiest room in the neighborhood. You couldn't even see the bedroom floor! I was a dumper. Daily I would unload my backpack, papers and the cloths on my back anywhere in the house. I could never find anything and spent countless wasted hours looking for homework, school books and especially shoes! One day, I even went to school with 2 different colored shoes on because I was in chaos zone that morning – like every morning.

After trying to survive living in disarray, I decided one day that I wanted to change. It was in that one simple decision that I transformed from a life of chaos and lunacy to a life of clarity and sanity.

And that's why I believe anyone can become organized and live a life of clarity, focus, and direction. Being organized is a mindset. And all it takes is a decision.

I initially began my organizing business to help businesses create systems and streamline processes. Because I didn't do any targeted marketing, I got lots of people calling me for help at home. So, I thought, why not? This path led me to meeting some of the most fabulous women who have taught me so much through my work with them.

The journey has been a wonderful one. I have learned so much about what being organized really means for my clients. Having clear spaces is wonderful, but having time for the things that truly matter to you is the most important result. My passion is helping women to break free of the fear, stress, and frustration caused by disorganization and to empower them to live the lives they truly desire.

This Action Guide was created to guide you through the organizing process, step by step. Each module is designed to help you successfully complete any organizing project.

Enjoy the journey!



Busting the Myths of Organization

There are many myths floating around out there about being organized and productive. Some of them are:

- Organized people are **born** that way.
- An organized space means you've got to have a **perfectly clear space** with nothing on the counter tops or desk tops.
- Organized people and spaces are **rigid and boring**.
- Organizing is **difficult and unpleasant**.

These myths stop many people dead in their tracks. They think that being organized means they'll lose creativity or spontaneity. They don't want to have to be perfect all the time.

Well, the good news is that these myths are just that....myths. Getting organized is not about tidying up a space, organizing files and balancing your checkbook to the penny... Being organized is a decision! Some people *are* born organized. These are the little girls who organize their Barbie shoes and clothes. However, most organized people were born that way. I certainly wasn't.

I was actually pretty messy as a young child. My room was a disaster area and I was constantly being reminded to put things away and clean the place up! As I got older I started to care more about the appearance of my room and I was really tired of losing things. One day I just decided that I was going to take control of the situation. This decision didn't come at the prompting of my parents and didn't happen with a lot of fuss. I just woke up one morning and decided I had had enough.

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You've taken a very important first step in improving your ability to be organized by purchasing this Action Guide. The next step is to decide that you really can be organized. It really is that simple. Make the decision right now that you are an organized person.

Do You Believe That You Can Be Organized

While working with a client, I noticed that she was repeatedly saying that she would never be able to do this organizing work without me. Now, I had heard this before, but this time I had some new information that made me stop to think what this really meant for her.

A couple of months prior to that client visit I was introduced to a program called "The Winner's Image" produced by Bob Proctor. In the program Bob equates our self-image to the auto pilot feature of an airplane. The auto pilot is set to a certain course and corrects should the plane veer off course. Now, think about self-image for a moment.

Your behavior patterns are a direct reflection of what you believe about yourself. If you believe that you are a successful person and bring in lots of money each month, then you probably do just that. However, if you don't truly believe that you *are* that successful, wealthy person, what happens when you do experience some success? You have a fabulous month bringing in more money than you ever have. Then self-doubt sets in and your self-image auto pilot begins to bring you back to your old course.

Getting and staying organized is no different from the success example. Hearing my client saying that she would never be able to do this without me and thinking back to other clients who I'd heard say the same thing, made me realize that their self-image is dictating the situation.

The truth is that they won't be able to do this without me, if that's what they truly believe. Their self-image is telling them that they can't be organized or stay organized because they haven't been able to do it before. Or because so many people have told them how messy and

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disorganized they are and they believe that about themselves. If you don't truly believe that you can get and stay organized, you will not get and stay organized. If we move a little outside of our belief about ourselves, the self-image autopilot will bring us back to its original course.

So, how do we conquer this? Change your self-image. This is no easy task, but is guaranteed to get those behavior changes to stick. Create the fantasy or vision of what you want your life to be like. Are there people you can model? Write your new vision out in detail.

One of the most important questions to ask in the self-image changing process is "Am I Willing." Are you really willing to do what is necessary to make the changes you are seeking? Really think about this. If you really aren't willing to make the changes necessary to be successful at getting and staying organized, maybe it really isn't as important to you as you once thought it was.

Once you have written out your new self-image it's important to focus on the changes you must make and reviewing your goal regularly. As I said, this is no small or easy task, but one that is well worth the effort.

As you consider your goal to be more organized and productive, pay attention to the things you are telling yourself. Is your self-image dictating that you can't be organized?

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Why Get Organized?

First, congratulations on making the decision to get organized! You know, getting organized really is all about decisions. The decision to get organized in the first place is the most important one. Of course, many people say that they want to get organized, but the difference between those people and you is that you have made a real decision to make a difference in your life. Getting organized is just a little piece of it.

As we begin this journey together I want you to think for a moment about why you are doing this. What is motivating you to make this change? Do you want to decrease the stress in your life? Do you want to set a good example for your employees or your children? You may want to be able to find things easily in your space when you need them. You may want to open your office door without cringing and wanting to run away.

The real reason people want to get organized is that it feels good. Imagine opening that door and seeing your office just exactly the way you want it or being able to leave work on time and spending your time off doing things you actually enjoy.

I encourage you to think about the real reason you want to get organized. There are all those tangible reasons like getting more done during the day, but how is your life going to change when you get organized and are more productive at work?

Are you doing this because you want to, or because someone else wants you to or because you think you should? There is a really important distinction to be made here. Sometimes people try to get organized or change their current system of organization because of comments others have made or because of something they've seen on TV.

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Take a moment to really think about why you are doing this. Write your “why” below.

Now, why did I have you do this? Well, as you are going through this process, you may get frustrated or have a moment when you wonder “Why am I doing this to myself?” When that moment comes I want you to come back to this page as a reminder of the big picture.

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What is Organized?

What comes to mind when I ask you what is an organized space or organized person? Do you see or imagine spaces like these?



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What about these?



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All four of these spaces are organized. The first two are what I like to call “magazine” or “catalog” organized. The second two are real-life organized spaces.

The truth is that being organized is not about being Martha Stewart perfect all the time or about things being in their place. When some people think organized, they think everything in its place. If everything is in its place all the time, then we’re not living. That’s just not realistic for most of us.

When you are evaluating a space or system to figure out whether or not it’s organized, you can ask yourself four questions:

1) Do you like it?

There are some people who live and work in spaces that some of us would think are pretty messy and disorganized, but they’re okay with that. They can find what they need when they need it, and it really doesn’t bother them. That’s okay.

If you’re a clutter bug, guess what? It’s okay. If you can find the things you need when you need them, and you like it, there’s nothing wrong with that.

2) Does your system work for you?

If you have that clutter-bug messy space, and it works for you, then you’re okay. Some of us change systems just for the sake of changing.

You might find a new tool that you like or one of the newest gadgets out there, and you want to try it out. The fact is that being organized is more about habits and behavior than about a gadget.

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The unfortunate thing is that those habits and behaviors don't come in the box with the new toy, so don't change your systems just for the sake of changing or because you think you should.

A couple of years ago, I decided to use a PDA for my calendar and my contacts. I'm a paper person, so I decided I was going to do this. About a week into it, I missed an appointment. The next day, I missed another appointment. This is not a good thing for a professional organizer to be doing. It's not good for my image at all.

Why did this happen? As a paper person, I tend to remember things a lot better if I write them down. When I previously wrote my appointments down in my calendar, I had a mental picture of what my day was supposed to be like.

The other issue was that I needed to see the day at a glance and even a week at a glance. With the PDA, I was not scrolling down, which is why I missed those appointments. I couldn't see my whole day, and that caused big problems for me. I ditched the palm and went back to my paper planner.

The lesson if a system's working is not to just change it for the sake of changing. Make sure that if you want to move to something different, you have a good plan in place for developing the skills and habits you need to make them successful.

3) Does it work for others?

If you are living and working with other humans, they may at some point need to find things in your space.

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Once you've set up your system, teach some key associates in your office what you've set up. If you are out of the office, get sick, or something happens, they can easily find things in your space.

Another thing you can do is clearly label where things belong. This is very helpful at home as well. A lot of times I work with people in their homes. They'll tell me that they set up the system and everything had a place, but no one would put it where it belonged. There's no labeling, so how are they supposed to know where those things belong if we don't have really good clear labeling?

4) How quickly can you recover?

This is the most important question. The fact is that life is going to happen. You're going to get a big project. You may go on vacation or get sick, and your system might get away from you. If you have good structure in place, you can come back, easily reset and get back on track.

This is the point when people usually throw up their hands, call themselves and their system a failure, and just move on. What we really want to do is gather back up and keep moving forward with the system.

The Organizing Process



The organizing process is made up of three steps. The first step is planning. Notice I didn't say shopping. I know, you are sighing. The shopping will come later, I promise!

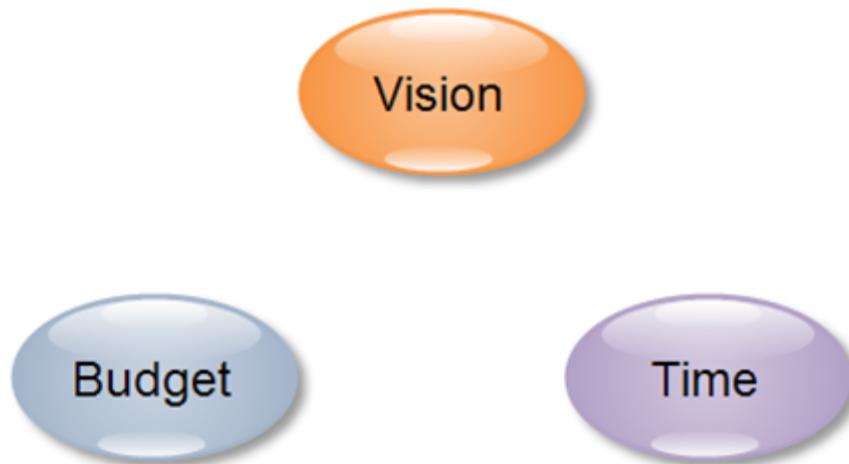
When most people decide to get organized, what do they do? They run out to their favorite container store or get online and start buying bins and different kinds of tools that they think will get them organized.

Unfortunately, the truth is that the skills, behaviors and habits you need don't come in the box with the new gadget or organizer. The process of getting organized must begin with planning.

The next phase is the doing phase, which is exactly what it sounds like, and finally maintaining, which is the most important. It's where we set up routines and systems to go forward.

Step 1: Planning

Planning



Crafting Your Vision

Let's dream a little here. Think about the space or system you would like to organize. If you could create anything, what would it be like? If you are having a hard time imaging what you want, think about what you don't want. Maybe you don't want to waste time searching for things. Or you don't want to feel overwhelmed by stacks of paper on the desktop.

Following are some questions to help you craft your vision:

- What is the area of your life or space that you have committed to changing?
- What will you feel like when you have accomplished your goal to clear the chaos from this area of your life?
- What will be different when you are done?
- How will your relationships change?

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- Will your work or home space look differently?
- Imagine walking into the space and experiencing it as it will be at the end of your organizing project.
 - How will it look?
 - How will you feel when you walk into the space?
 - What will you be able to do there that you cannot do now?
- What are the benefits of your actions and commitment to taking on being organized?
- And, how much will your business increase because of your commitment to getting that space organized?

On the following sheet, write out the vision for your project.

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actually purchase tools and products to support your new system. But you can think about some factors that may require some monetary outlay and plan a budget accordingly.

When thinking about your organizing project there are some things that scream out at you for replacement or that are missing. For example, many people do not have file cabinets or lack adequate shelving. You may know that you don't work well at your current desk or that you would benefit greatly from buying a paper calendar. Make a list of items that you will obviously need to purchase during the project and begin to create budget amounts for each.

You may need to hire help for the project. A Professional Organizer can be useful to get you started on the right track and help you to plan the project well. You may need to hire a temporary employee to help implement a new file system or accounting system. Research what the investment will be to hire these resources.

It is very important that you DON'T go out and buy anything at this point. Buying products to support your system is one of the last steps in the process. There are many steps between budgeting and buying so please resist the urge to do this. It is highly likely that if you go out and buy products and tools now, they will not be appropriate for the system you ultimately put in place.

Professional Help

In this section we will explore various resources that you may need to tap for help with your project. I encourage my coaching clients to delegate as many tasks as possible and to get help with things that they want to do, but may need a kick start to do on their own. Because I work with many entrepreneurs working from home I encounter lots of folks trying to do everything themselves, whether they are good at those things or not.

The area that you have chosen to tackle may require that you hire some outside help to get you started, facilitate implementation, and/or perform maintenance.

Some possible resources to consider:

Organizing and Productivity Coach or Professional Organizer - I strongly recommend that you hire someone to help you get the project started on the right foot and get it completed. An Organizing and Productivity Coach can help you plan the project, identify appropriate resources, implement the pieces of the project, and most importantly set up a maintenance plan for success. I hear clients complain that when they've tried to organize in past they ended up making a huge mess and then putting everything right back where it was. Or that they started off really well, but then something happened and everything fell apart. The process that I teach clients during our sessions ensures that they will not experience these issues. We collaborate to create systems that work for the client so that when life happens they are able to quickly reset and get back on track.

Administrative Support - You may only need some administrative support temporarily. As you are clearing the chaos from your life there will be some administrative issues that may be best suited for someone else. Examples might be filing, mailings, making routine phone calls, and so on. There are so many options here for hiring a good administrative specialist. You can hire someone from a temporary service, hire a virtual assistant, or hire someone you know who has strong administrative skills.

You may also need to hire additional professionals to help like an attorney, accountant, financial planner, interior designer, wardrobe consultant, closet designer, and so on. The bottom line is that you don't

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have to tackle this thing alone – and most of you probably shouldn't! It is very beneficial to consider using professionals whose job it is to take care of those details that you may not be good at or want to do.

Another possible resource is education. Perhaps it would be beneficial to the success of your project to learn how to use Microsoft Outlook more effectively. Or a workshop teaching you how to manage your paper and electronic filing would help you out. Research possible classes and workshops that will help.

Your assignment is to answer the following questions and then research your options. Ask friends and colleagues for referrals and start making phone calls to connect with these professionals. Find out about workshops and classes in the area that will support your goals.

Do you need help?

If so, who can help you?

Budgeting Your Time

Thinking about all of the possibilities at the beginning of the project will help alleviate the frustration of discovering "road blocks" along the way. These things don't have to be road blocks if they are properly planned for.

It reminds me of my client Ann. She let me know during our interview call that she wanted to organize her entire home. She was tired of living a chaotic life and didn't want her children to grow up in a disorganized environment. Great goal! Unfortunately, she wanted to complete the project within about one week. Taking into consideration her very busy schedule we were able to quickly determine that this was not realistic. Moving forward with an unrealistic time frame would have resulted in stress, overwhelm, and ultimately failure.

So let's talk about budgeting time for the project. As illustrated by Ann's story, people seeking to get organized often don't realistically plan the time necessary to complete the project. When I am working on a project with a client we look at the deadline and then budget time each day or week to complete the project. How much time you take to complete your project is entirely up to you. Typically when you are ready to get organized you want it done yesterday! So, the first step is to set a deadline for the completion of your project. If you are extremely busy and have little free time, don't set a deadline for a week from now. You may only be able to work on your project for one hour per week. If that's the case, you may want to set a deadline that is two months away.

Organizing themed television shows do help to educate viewers on the process and give good suggestions for systems. Unfortunately, people sometimes develop unrealistic timeframes for their projects because of

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them. Occasionally potential clients will tell me they've been watching one of the organizing shows and really want to get organized.

One client, Allison, really thought that organizing her house would only take a few hours based on what she'd seen on TV. What you don't see in the 30 minutes on TV is that the projects usually take 30 to 40 hours and they've got crews of people working on the project. While your project most likely won't take 40 hours, you must recognize that it is unlikely to only take 3 hours to clear years of clutter.

Once you have set the deadline for project completion you will want to budget your time accordingly. Set appointments with yourself to get the work done. If you want to work on the project for 30 minutes a day, set an appointment with yourself for 30 minutes each day...and then KEEP IT!!!

You may decide that you want to try to complete the project in one day. I typically discourage this because most people become very overwhelmed by the thought of putting aside an entire day to organize something. I find it a large barrier to most people getting organized because they think that they need to do it this way when, in fact, the better way is to chunk the project into smaller pieces as mentioned in the last paragraph. However, if you really feel that you want to do it this way, schedule the appointment with yourself...and KEEP IT!

So thinking about your schedule, commit to a timeline for your project and schedule the time into your calendar.

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Timing

Organizing a space doesn't have to be an all day affair, but often I hear people say that they set aside a whole day to organize their office or take care of filing. This can be very overwhelming and it doesn't have to be that way.

Decide what is manageable for you and your schedule. You may decide to work on the project for 30 minutes a day or even 30 minutes a week. Schedule these "sessions" with yourself into your calendar. Once you get into the project you will see how much you can get done in those 30 minutes and adjust your project schedule accordingly. I recommend that your first session be a little longer since you will need to set up at this time.

My space will be organized by: _____

How much time will you budget for the project and how often?

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Evaluating Your Systems

Please rank each of the following on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being least true, 5 being most true about you.

- ___ I waste lots of time looking for papers I need.
- ___ I waste lots of time looking for information I know is on my computer.
- ___ I would be terrified if I were notified of an impending audit.
- ___ I do not have enough space in my office.
- ___ I do not have a good system for managing reading material.
- ___ I do not have a systematic method for purging outdated papers.
- ___ It is very difficult for me to manage interruptions and prioritize my workload.
- ___ I do not use my time planner (calendar, Palm, etc.) effectively.
- ___ I do not have a system for managing projects and work in progress.
- ___ I am frequently overwhelmed by what I need or want to do.
- ___ I waste time looking for phone numbers and other contact info.
- ___ I feel unproductive working in my office.
- ___ I am not confident others can find what they need if I am not here.
- ___ My office does not reflect the quality of my work.
- ___ My daily life does not reflect the quality of life I want.

Step 1: Prioritize - If you could get organized in just one of the areas listed above, which would make the most impact on your life? And then the next biggest, and then the next. Continue this process until you've got a fully prioritized list.

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Step 2: Visualize - What will your life be like once you have eliminated the chaos in your top priority area? Imagine how you will feel. Imagine how your family will feel and react to the changes. What will the changes do to you on a personal level? What will be different once the changes are complete?

Step 3: Commit - Commit right now to taking the bold steps needed to change your life forever and invite abundance into your life.

Now, imagine your highest priority area now being clear and free of the clutter. For example, if you've chosen finances as one of your high priority areas, imagine that your bills are all up to date. You are so calm and happy because you are no longer stressed out by the uncertainty that previously existed. You feel peaceful because you know that you have a well thought out financial plan in place and you are saving money for future endeavors like vacation and retirement. Feel the increase in confidence that having your finances in order gives you.

Notice the power this one step out of chaos gave you! This first step will open up other opportunity for organized living.

Step 2: Doing

Setting Yourself Up For Success

Finally we have reached the step that includes doing some actual physical work! Let's talk about some of the major steps of organization:

1. Setting up a staging area
2. Sorting
3. Categorizing
4. Discarding
5. Clean up

Step 1: Setting up a staging area

Sometimes when people try to get organized on their own they miss some foundational pieces that ultimately lead to frustration, overwhelm, and often results in abandoning the project. One of those is setting up a staging area. The purpose of the staging area is to give you a spot to do your sorting and categorizing and is the place that you will store your sorting boxes after you complete a session.

During the sorting and categorizing steps you will need to use sorting boxes to contain the things you are keeping. I encourage clients to start off with a donations box, trash can, lots of trash bags, and a shredder. As you begin the sorting and categorizing you will then begin to make additional sorting boxes. Each box will be a separate category.

Right now you need to decide what type of sorting container you will use. The most common solution is to purchase several bankers' boxes. You can also use boxes that you've got around the house or office. If you are

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working with paper, you can use paper trays or file folder boxes (the box that the file folder comes in). The container should have a top so that you can easily stack them.

If you have lots of clutter or a small space, you may not be able to dedicate an entire room for your staging area. You can set up a folding table in a room out of the way. You can also clear out a spot in the room you are working in by moving things to make room.

My client Janet initially didn't understand why we set up a staging area when beginning her project. She went along with my suggestion and we set up a staging area in her rarely used formal dining room. She decided to use containers that she had in the house for sorting boxes. A few days after our session I got a call from Janet. She had decided to do some sorting on her own and was so happy that we had set up the staging area. It gave her a place to do her sorting and a place to store the boxes at the end of her sessions. She felt so confident and proud that she had finally been able to do some organizing on her own and she knew exactly what to do!

So, would you like to have that feeling while going through your organizing project? Would you like to experience the confidence and pride that comes from really knowing that you are making progress and have great structure in place to support you? Your homework is to designate a staging area in your chosen area of chaos and to decide on sorting containers.

Just imagine the clarity you'll create with an organized office or home environment!

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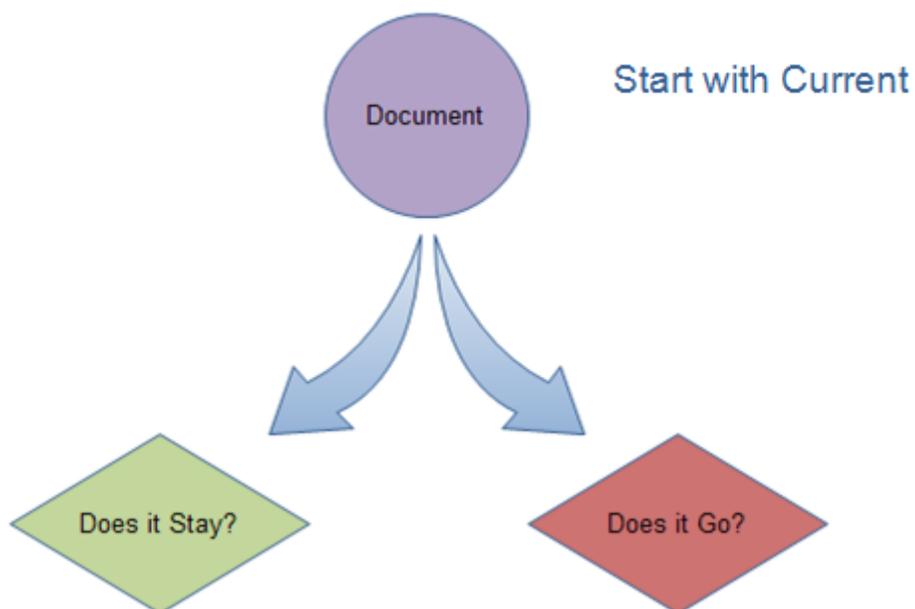
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Step 2: Sorting

This step is all about decision making and can be really tough for some folks. The clutter and chaos in your life is a result of delayed decisions. The piles of paper in your office, the stacks of stuff in corners...those are things that you at some point chose to ignore or put aside. Now you will be making really good decisions about those things.

You want to begin with the most recent documents or items. Don't start by pulling out of the old file cabinet you haven't touched in five years or the back of the toy room closet. Your first decision is about whether the item is a keeper or if it goes away. This is the tough part. Sometimes it's really difficult to make decisions to give away or throw away items. But, this is where you exercise tough love with yourself and release that stuff!

Sorting & Categorizing



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These questions can help you to make good decisions:

1. **Do you love it?**

It is really important to only have things that you love in your space. If you don't love it, let it go!

2. **Does it make you feel good or bad?** Along the same idea as "do you love it" things that remind you of bad times or events bring negative energy into your life. Why are you keeping something that causes you to feel bad?

3. **Can you identify a specific purpose for it?**

You may be surprised by how often folks want to keep things but really can't identify a purpose for keeping it. When thinking about paperwork try to think about when you might ever be asked for the paper. What circumstances would have to occur to make that paper become relevant? Has anyone ever asked you to produce this paper before? How often does this happen?

4. **Are there tax or legal implications?**

You should consult a tax and legal advisor if you have any concerns about this. If you don't have tax and legal advisors, there are document retention guidelines available on the internet. Some companies have retention policies that can guide you in determining what you need to keep and for how long.

5. **What is the worst thing that could happen if you got rid of it?**

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Are you going to die or go to jail? Think about what the worst thing that could happen might be and if you can live with that, get rid of it!

The decision to let something go will mean that the item is going into the trash, being shredded or being donated. There are so many worthy charity organizations that need the items that you are getting rid of. Something that I hear quite often when people are going through things is that the item is good so they think they should keep it. But they haven't actually used it in quite a while or they don't really need it anymore. Thrift stores need good operational items to sell to the people who frequent them. If you have something that works but no longer has a use in your life, donate it to a thrift store. It will definitely be useful for someone else and you are making room in your life for other things to come in.

One thing you don't want to do is run around during this process. This is what makes organizing take a really long time because you tend to think, "Oh, the trash can is way over there. I have to go to the trash can. Recycling is in the other room." You're running around all over.

You want all these things to be in your space very close to you as you are doing these sessions with yourself. Do whatever you need to make that as efficient as possible.

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If it Goes...



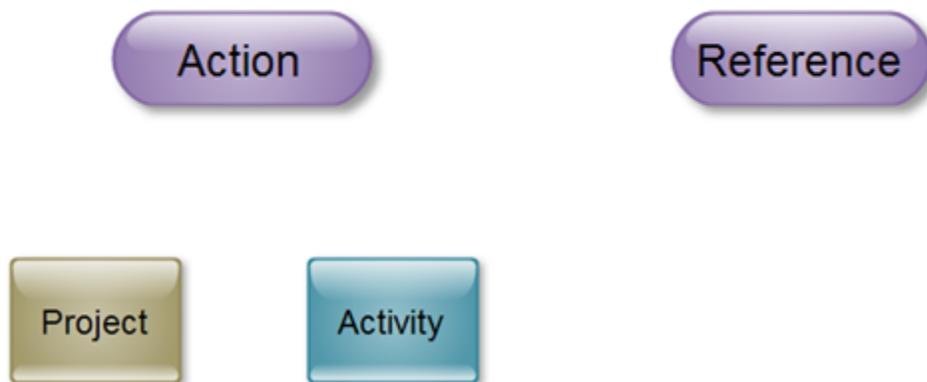
Releasing things from your life gets easier the more often you do it. I personally love releasing things that I no longer need and I love donating things that no longer suit my life. My clients often develop this love as well. Some of them get the idea right away and some of them take a while to develop it. It is a wonderful feeling to know that everything in your space is there because you decided that you wanted it there. And that will give you incredible confidence and power!

Your homework for today is to get rid of any obvious garbage or things that you already know that you don't want to keep.

What do you do if the paper stays?

First, you want to consider how you view tasks. When you pick up a piece of paper, do you think of it in terms of a project or an activity?

If it Stays...



Activity would be I pick up this paper and think, “I need to call Jan.” If you think of things in terms of project, you would pick up that same piece of paper and say, “Task analysis,” so you think in terms of project rather than actual activity. That’s the first step in getting familiar with how you think about your work.

There are two options. We talked about action. The other option if your paper is staying is that it’s a reference file. Reference files are things you want to keep, but you don’t need to do anything with them right now. I know I want that. I don’t need to do anything with it, but I want it available if I ever do.

Sometimes reference and action get confused. A good example I see a lot is you may get a conference announcement. The conference is in

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September, and it's too early for you to make a decision. A lot of times people will say, "I need to figure out if I'm going to go to this. It needs to be filed," never to be seen again.

Any time you're saying, "I need to do this," that's going to be action. Anything that is, "Oh, this is nice. I'm going to keep this for future," is reference.

How do we set this up successfully? This is an example of one person's sorting system. We talked about if you think about paper in terms of projects or activities. Now we're going to start sorting those papers.

Pick up your paper. Do you think, "I need to call this person?" Then you would have "calls," "things to read," or "develop relationships." I like that one. You get some business cards, and you want to develop relationships with these people. There's your reference category. You always want to have a place to capture those reference files.

This is an example of a sorting system where this person set up manila folders. As they were going through their papers, they put labels on the folders indicating the category and then just assigned the paper accordingly.

These are just some typical categories that you might come up with, but there are also some other things you might want to be aware of. As you're going through your papers, what's coming to your mind? It's not what the paper says or what I'm saying. What is in your head as you see that paper?

Grant opportunities, big ideas, and share are some different kinds. I want to talk about grant opportunities a little bit. I was working with a woman who is in a nonprofit. She was coming upon a lot of these grant documents and wanted to look at them.

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She said, “I have a lot of these kinds of things come in. I’m just going to make an action file for grant opportunities so when I sit down to work, it’s grab that and review those.” That’s how she wanted to set that up.

Remember that your system needs to be based on your logic, not my logic and not the book you bought. A lot of people buy organizing books. They don’t work a lot of the time because they’re not really focusing on how you think. They’re giving you solutions that may not work for you. Think about how you think about paper and what’s coming to your mind as you’re setting this up.

We’re almost at the buying time. All your paper has been sorted through. You can see what’s left. You know you have a big stack of reading.

If you’re doing project files, think about this when they get really thick. You want to get box-bottom folders. Those are all the things you want to look at now that you’ve gone through everything. What’s left is going to need to be contained, so you want to choose the appropriate products for that.

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Cleaning Up

By now you should have started sorting and categorizing the items in your chosen area. Typically organizing projects get derailed because folks that make big messes, aren't sure what to do with all of the stuff, and end up putting everything back and giving up. The difference between those people and you is that you are following a good system for planning and executing your project. Today we are going to talk about the final step you must take at the end of each organizing session: clean up.

Rather than leaving things out and having a mess to stare at while your project is in progress what you have are labeled sorting boxes that can be stored out of the way in your staging area or in a storage space. You can then easily pull them out again when you are ready to work more.

All trash should be removed from the space. Take out all trash bags, empty boxes, large items that don't work, etc.

All items to be donated should be taken immediately to the charity of your choice. The longer that these items sit in your office or home, the more likely you may be to sift through them again. They may become just part of the background and turn into clutter. The best thing to do is to schedule the time in your organizing session to bring donations to the charity of your choice. Add an extra 30 minutes if you need to. Just be sure those donations leave the space as soon as possible. The organizers in my company take donations for our clients. You would be amazed what a relief it is to have those things removed from your space.

If you have papers that need to go to other people in your office, this is the time to deliver those stacks to those people. Be sure to take all of the stacks and deliver them at one time.

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I truly believe that this simple action at the end of each of your sessions will determine whether you are successful or not. When working with clients they are happy to discover at the end of our sessions that we are not leaving the office or home in a wreck. They are able to see very clearly how simple and organized the process really is. This gives them the confidence to do some organizing sessions on their own.

Now, you can shut it down for the day and celebrate a job well done! Your homework today is to continue your organizing sessions and be sure to clean up after each session.

The Second Pass

After all of the sorting is completed you'll want to do one final sorting step called the Second Pass. At this point all of the sorting boxes in the space will contain only items that belong there. Any other categories should be taken to the rooms or offices where they belong. Now you will start sorting each of the boxes again. There are several benefits to this additional sorting process.

1. After going through the entire room you may find that you are more willing to let go of things. So, when you go back through some of the boxes you created at the beginning of your organizing project you will let more go. Many of my clients experience this phenomenon. It makes lots of sense because you are more accustomed to the thought of letting go by this time.
2. You can categorize even further to ensure that you are identifying duplicates and getting all of the like things together. At this point you may have more clarity around what you are trying to accomplish so you may have more refined categories. For example, instead of just supply closet, you may now create a box for mailing supplies or workshop material.

Continue the sorting process as you have before breaking the sessions into manageable chunks and cleaning up as you go.

Jeanne, a client, was really surprised by how much she let go during the Second Pass. She initially thought it to be double work since she had already been through the items once. She was able to cut her keepers in half! Very cool since she had limited space and was worried how we would contain everything she was keeping.

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How much more can you let go? Your homework is to complete the Second Pass step going back through each of the boxes remaining in your chosen area and be willing to toss more out and create even more clarity.

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Action/Project Files

These are four examples of action files. Again, they're just guidelines and ideas. You can do absolutely whatever you want. The first one is something that might sit right on your desktop. It's easy to see. You can just drop things in, and you can just pull things right out.



The next one is for you pilers out there. I know there are some people who just love their piles and will not let them go. There are products that can help you do that in a more effective way.



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The one here at the bottom with the straps is for those who are mobile. If you want to take your action files with you, just pick up your little leather bag there and take all that stuff with you.



Finally, there are more traditional files in the drawer. If you want to set something like that up, have it in your prime real estate right in your desk drawer where you can easily access it.



Prioritizing Your Workload

Now that you have set up your system for handling daily tasks it's important to talk about prioritizing those tasks. When you are staring at piles and stacks of paper on your desk it can be very difficult to determine what you should work on first. However, since you are well on your way to a more organized life, you have determined your system for handling your tasks you should no longer have uncategorized stack problem.

Prioritizing your workload is basically the same in both systems. I will discuss the action file system first.

Grab one of your action files and lay out each item on your newly cleared desktop. Look all of the items over and decide which one of these tasks is the most important one. Turn that one item face down on your desk. Now looking at the items remaining, which is the most important? Turn this one face down on top of the first one. Continue this process until you have turned each item face down. Turn the stack over and you now have a prioritized stack of action items.

The process differs only slightly for the Tickler System. At the end of the day you will reschedule the items that you have not been able to get to that day. Remember not to put everything in tomorrow's file. Plan out a little further into the week or month on days that you may have time. Then you will pull out the contents of the following day, layout all of the items face up on your newly cleared desktop and follow the same process outlined above.

When you come into work you will work on the one item you have determined is most important. If you are interrupted by phone calls or people, you will now only have to choose between the one thing you

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decided was most important and the interruption. This is much less overwhelming than having stacks of paper on your desk being constantly interrupted and reacting to every interruption. The planning and prioritization you have done will pay off in much more calm and focused days.

The Power of Delegation

Time is the most coveted natural resource. Everyone wants more of it, and I am quite sure that if it was possible to purchase more time, it would be sold at a premium. We are always searching for ways to "save" time. A better solution is to come up with ways to make tasks take up less of our time? One great way is to let someone else do the tasks!

Delegation is one of the least utilized time management tools. Some excuses for not delegating that we often hear are: "If I want this done correctly, I have to do it myself." "I don't have time to teach my assistant how to do this." According to Getting Organized, by Chris Crouch, psychologists have discovered some of the underlying reasons that people do not delegate.

- They don't know how
- They are control freaks and can't let go of anything
- They don't trust others
- An unhealthy need for power
- They don't know how to develop others
- They think that they can do things better than others

What about you? Are you avoiding delegation because you think that if you want a good job done, you have to do it yourself? Are you lacking trust in your employees or co-workers? Do you know how to delegate effectively? If these statements ring true for you, take a look at the following five steps to effective delegation:

Step 1 - Select the right person for the job

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- a) Who is the best match in terms of skills and talent?
- b) Who needs to learn to do this job the most?
- c) Will the job energize or drain the person selected?

Step 2 - Clarify what needs to be done

- a) Lack of clarity leads to confusion
- b) Clarity leads to focus

Step 3 - Verify understanding of what needs to be done

- a) Ask the person who will work on the task to "mirror" your instructions
- b) Don't ask "do you understand" - no one will say no

Step 4 - Set a completion date (deadline)

Step 5 - Get agreement on completion date

I want you to think about the tasks that you are doing now and answer the following questions:

1. Are these tasks worth your hourly rate? Would you pay someone \$75 per hour to file paperwork or mail letters?
2. Are you spending lots of time on tasks that could be done better and more efficiently by a professional in that area? For example, are you spending time on graphic design when your area of expertise is finance?

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3. Who in your organization or on your team needs to learn how to do these tasks? You are not just passing off tasks and telling people what to do. Take the opportunity to develop a team member and teach them.

Choosing Your Tools

It's the day you've all been waiting for! The day that you get to go shopping! Now that you have completed the Second Pass in the sorting process you can more effectively choose solutions to fit your needs.

Begin with one small space at a time. For example, your desk drawer may need a tray for all of the little things that are in it. Take measurements of how deep, wide, and long the drawer is. What size compartments should the drawer tray have? Do you have lots of little things that need separate compartments? Or maybe you have lots of longer items like pens, rulers, or scissors.

Information like this should be determined for each of the solutions that you will need to purchase. If you need shelving, you should first determine if the shelving will be wall mounted, custom made, or if you will use bookcases that sit on the floor. Where will the shelving be placed in the room? What items will be contained on the shelves? Will you put only books on the shelves? Will magazines also be kept here? What about decorative pieces? Determine how wide the shelves should be and how much space should be between each.

Are you getting the idea? Before you run out and buy an organizing solution be sure that you have all of the information about what you are trying to contain first. Many times I work with clients who have lots of containers, shelves, and bins none of which fit what they are trying to accomplish. So, they are always trying to find a use for these unneeded containers. Be sure to approach this from the other direction and only buy organizing products that fit what you have.

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Lots of products are very good looking or cute, but are not very practical. Avoid the urge to purchase something because it looks cool or “seems” like it could be useful.

Step 3: Maintenance

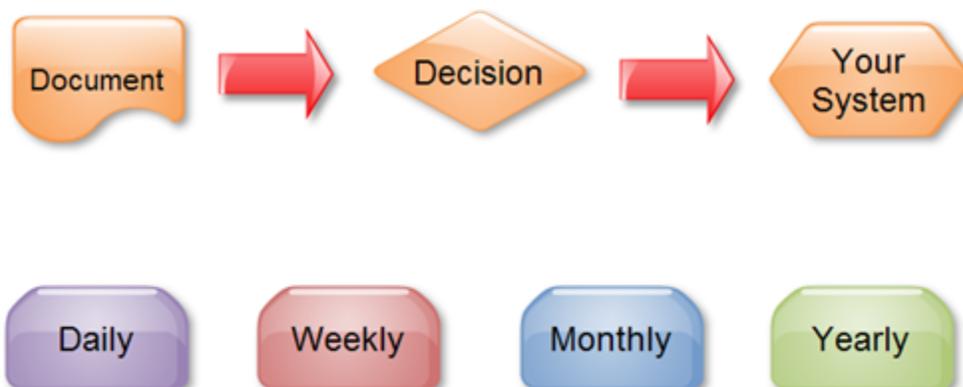
Developing Your Routines

We have this action plan in place. When do we actually do work? We're in the maintenance phase. This is where you need to start thinking about what routines and systems you're going to put in place to keep all this up.

This is sort of the life cycle of the document. The document comes in. You need to make a decision. It's trash, shredding, or it stays. It's action or reference, and it goes into your system.

Now what are you going to do on a daily, weekly, monthly and even yearly basis to keep all this up? Go back to your vision. What did you want to accomplish when you started this?

Routines



If you said that you wanted to have a perfectly clear desktop, one of the things you might want to do is stop work a little early. Make it a part of your leaving process to make sure your desktop is clear and that you've

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put everything away and delivered things to people you're delegating to so you can come in the morning and see your beautiful clear desk.

If you have said that you'd like to get more done during the day, something you might want to do with your action files is devote some focus time, 30 minutes, 60 minutes or whatever you can afford during the day, to truly focus on the things that are most important for that day.

This is one of the most important things, actually, that you can do for yourself to be more productive. Set aside time that is truly, with no distractions, devoted to getting those most important things done.

On a weekly basis, you might decide that you're going to file 30 minutes on Friday afternoon so you can get that filing done. Of course, monthly and yearly, those can be whatever you choose. The point here is to decide what you're going to do regularly to keep these things up. Again, this is the area where everybody falters. It's because we don't have these things in place.

Again, if you mess up or don't do it a couple of days, it's no big deal. It happens to everybody. You don't even want to see my office right now. It's terrible, but I have a good excuse. Get back on the horse and start over.

Your New Routines

Once your system is in place what you will do regularly to keep it up? Go back to your vision. What did you say that you wanted your space to be like? The routines you set up will support that vision. If you want your desktop to be clear at the end of each day, you must determine what you need to do each day to make that happen.

Here is a sample maintenance routine:

Daily:

- 60 minutes of focus time every morning.
- Process contents of Inbox at least twice per day.
- Reserve the last 15 minutes of the day to clear off the desk, put things away and prepare for the next day.

Weekly:

- File documents in the "To File" bin every Friday afternoon.
- Process old documents into my new system 30 minutes per week.
- Review action files

Monthly:

- 60 minutes sorting old email/electronic documents
- Review old files and purge

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What's your new routine?

Daily:

Weekly:

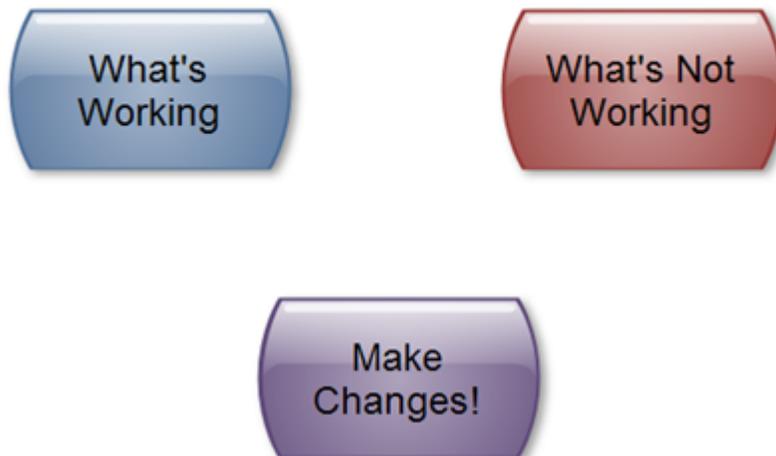
Monthly:

Evaluating Your New System

The next thing you want to be very aware of is if this is even working. Sometimes we set up systems, and as I said with my palm pilot, that surely wasn't working. Everything was wrong with that.

Pay attention to yourself. Is your action file too far away or in the wrong place? Is it not comfortable to you? Are you not using it because it's too far or because you don't like the color of the folders?

Tweaking Your System



All these things, as minor as they seem, really affect your productivity. Think about what's working well and what's not working well, and make changes accordingly.

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We can go back to those questions from the beginning to evaluate our system. Do you like your new system? Does it work for you? Does it work for those around you? How quickly can you recover?

I want you to remember why you're doing this in the first place. It may be because you want to get more done in less time, and that's what you can do with focus.

Remember why you want to get organized in the first place. It's not about being perfect. It's about being able to get more done in less time, focusing on the things you need to, and being able to enjoy the things you truly want to do in your life.

Advanced Topics

The Power Of Focus

There is a little idea that improves everything from communication, relationships and even organization. It enhances work quality and increases knowledge. This little technique can quite literally change lives. It's FOCUS. Seemingly a small thing, focus can make a huge impact on your daily life.

In the fast paced "always on" world we live in we often find it next to impossible to focus on the work or play that we are engaged in. In my experience one of the most valuable productivity enhancers available is simply FOCUS.

So often in the rush of life people are multi-tasking like crazy, thinking about several things at once, and not paying attention to their work or family. Work quality suffers. Family relationships suffer. Think about your life. Has there ever been a time when you found yourself in the midst of a conversation and realize that you really haven't been paying attention to the other person? Or how about a time where you dialed the phone and within seconds forgot who you were calling?

These events are the result of excessive multi-tasking and generally not focusing on the present task. This can be easily remedied simply by focusing on what you are doing when you are doing it!

Imagine an Olympic athlete, a diver, approaching the board to make the dive that will decide the game. Imagine this diver thinking about what she will have for dinner later tonight and when she is going to return that dress she bought last Saturday that doesn't fit. Athletes cannot afford to have over active minds. They would never accomplish their objectives if they did. They must be completely focused on the task in which they are

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presently engaged. Look at the results. These athletes are at the top of their games. They are the cream of the crop.

Apply the focus idea to your job or life. Would focusing more each day on the present task propel you to the top of your game? Would your work quality improve? Would your leadership skills be enhanced if you were fully present for your employees and coworkers? The results would be phenomenal. All a result of implementing one small change...FOCUS.

This topic is so important, tomorrow we'll talk about how you can improve your focus.

Strategies for Improving Your Focus

Yesterday I explained the concept of focus and why it's so important to your efforts to be more productive. Today I will share a few strategies to improve your focus.

Right Now - Simply focus on what you are doing right now! This technique helps you to be more productive by focusing on the task at hand. This is truly how to be "in the present." When you feel yourself being distracted bring yourself back to the present by saying "Right Now I am ... (fill in the blank here) and that's what I am going to focus on right now." You can use a chiming clock or the ringing phone as a cue to remind you to ask yourself if you are doing what you are supposed to be doing right now. Then say "Right Now I am filling out this form, and that's what I am going to focus on. This technique can be used right away and can make a tremendous difference in your life.

Brain Dump - you may find yourself occasionally overwhelmed by a tremendous number of thoughts all seemingly occurring at once. A great way to alleviate that overwhelming feeling is to do what is called a "Brain Dump". A brain dump is simply writing or typing out every thought that you are currently having until your brain quiets. Continue writing the list until no more thoughts are entering your mind. You can then use this list as a to do list or you can get rid of the list. It is basically just a tool to help quiet your mind so that you can focus on what you are currently doing. I find it helpful to do a brain dump every morning. This readies your mind for the day and helps to get you focused.

Thought List - keep a pad or notebook close by while you are working. When you think extraneous thoughts not related to the current task, jot

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them down in the notebook. You can then revisit the list later and work on those tasks at the appropriate times.

Meditation and exercise are also great ways to improve concentration and focus. There are various meditations that can be done to improve concentration. One of which involves focusing on the flame of a candle for various amounts of time, closing your eyes and holding the image of the flame in your mind for extended periods of time until you get up to 20 minutes.

Exercise has been proven to increase focus and concentration and is being used in many schools. Some schools have instituted pre-class physical exercise sessions that increase blood flow to the brain. The results are that grades are up and reading levels are being increased. In the workplace you might take short breaks which include a brisk walk or a few jumping jacks.

Your homework is to try one or all of these techniques right away. Do you see the difference in how your day feels when you are truly focused and centered? Are you experiencing less brain over-load? Are you feeling more calm and centered?

Let me know how you are doing! Send me a note letting me how things are going so far!

Following Through with Your Intentions

Why don't we follow through on the things that we "should" do?

In *Following Through: A Revolutionary New Model for Finishing Whatever You Start* by Steve Levinson and Pete Greider, the authors propose that we have two guidance systems: the Primitive Guidance System and the Intelligence-Based Guidance System. Each of these systems pulls us in different directions like a car with two steering wheels. The Primitive Guidance System, PGS, has the most control and is based on instinct. The PGS responds to the squeakiest wheel - I'm hungry: Look for food. I'm bored: Look for something more interesting to do.

In the meantime, your Intelligence-Based Guidance System, IBGS, has enabled you to make great plans...I should get my taxes done. I should eat more healthy food. I should exercise daily. I should, I should, I should.

The problem is that there is no connection between the two systems. On April 14 your taxes will become the squeaky wheel and your PGS will respond. You will race the clock to get your taxes done. They may not have been done early, but they were on time. This is the way your guidance systems work. So you see, poor follow through is not so much a character flaw, but a flaw in the design of your mind and your guidance systems.

Now that you know why poor follow through occurs you can take steps to work around the design flaw. The key is arranging your environment so that your good intentions are the squeaks that get the powerful PGS' attention. Here are a few of the suggested strategies to effectively follow through with your intentions.

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1. Spotlighting - Your mind becomes distracted by many voices when you are trying to accomplish something: the ones that want to get the project done and the ones that just want to sit back, relax and not get it done. The trick in spotlighting is to make sure that you are paying attention to the "right" distractions or cues. Here is an example of a cue: You see a big, juicy hamburger on TV and then become hungry for a big, juicy hamburger.

Here are the steps involved in spotlighting:

- 1) Identify the right voices that urge you to do what your intentions are telling you to.
- 2) Identify or create a cue. Something that will stimulate the right voice.
- 3) Find a way to be sure you will be exposed to the right cues.

For example, a manager who also coaches a baseball team uses baseball theme to provide cues throughout his day. His intention is to coach his staff the way he coaches his little league team. He puts a photo of his Little League team on his desk, uses baseball themed notepads, and hangs a baseball cap on the wall. All of these cues remind him throughout the day to do a better job motivating his staff. What behavior would you like to develop? What cue would work for you the way that baseball worked for this manager?

2. Going too far - Make the intention more meaningful or threatening by pledging to violate it in a big way. Essentially you make a deal with yourself. If your intention is to stop smoking, make a pledge that if you are going to smoke a cigarette, you must smoke two cigarettes, one after the other. You can't just smoke one. To your Primitive Guidance System

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smoking becomes a threat rather than just satisfying a craving because you HAVE to smoke two cigarettes.

3. Right Before Wrong - With this strategy you make a deal to do the right thing before the wrong one. For example, let's say you decide to start eating healthy snacks, but find yourself reaching for something unhealthy instead. Make a deal with yourself to eat a healthy snack first and then eat the unhealthy snack if you still want it.

You have been introduced to three strategies to help you follow through on your intentions. Try these strategies for yourself. I am very interested in hearing about your results. As you go through this, keep in mind that we are talking about your mind here. If your mind fails (such as forgetting about your routine), you think that you have screwed up. If your heart failed, you would not think of yourself as a failure. It typically takes some time for habits to change. Give yourself a break and give yourself time to fully integrate into the new behaviors.

How Your Mind Impacts Your Organizing Efforts

Becoming more organized involves a combination of changes in both your physical and mental environments. It is more than tidying up the office and going about your day as you always have. Getting truly organized involves making habit changes that will impact your life long into the future. This can be easier said than done if you are faced with other obstacles involving brain chemistry and lots of "tapes" from your past.

Chronic Disorganization (CD) and ADD/ADHD can cause major productivity issues. Developing individualized solutions is the key to success when addressing these issues. CD is not a medically diagnosed condition. According to the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization; Chronic Disorganization, or CD, is having a past history in which self-help efforts to change have failed, there is an undermining of current quality of life due to disorganization, and there is an expectation of future disorganization.

People with ADD/ADHD often struggle with cluttered homes and desks. Their lives seem chaotic and overwhelming. Often traditional organizing approaches are not helpful because they are too detailed or complex and aren't individualized enough to work. There are great resources for individuals with ADD/ADHD to help develop organizing solutions that will work. ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life by Judith Kolberg and Kathleen Nadeau, Ph.D. is a wonderful resource for organizing ideas. You also may find it helpful to work with an organizing professional who specializes in working with individuals with ADD/ADHD.

Some of the most powerful obstacles to productivity and organization are self-defeating behaviors. These are sometimes disguised as positive attributes, but in reality cause individuals to be less productive. The three

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primary behaviors that cause problems are perfectionism, workaholism, and multi-tasking.

Now, you may be thinking "We're on deadline. I have to work late!" or "What's wrong with wanting my work to be top notch?" When discussing these behaviors it's important to note that the level of intensity, duration, and to what degree the behavior affects your life is what classifies it as a "dysfunction". So, maybe you do have to work late when on deadline. This is sometimes a necessary part of work life; however, if you work late most nights and haven't taken a vacation in five years, you may have a problem with workaholism.

If you want to be more organized and productive, change your behavior! This is certainly not an easy task, but one that can be accomplished by taking baby steps. For example, if you are working late every night, explore why. Is there a problem with your workload? Is this self-inflicted or has your supervisor just piled too much onto your plate? The answers to these questions will help you to discover what needs to change first so that you can begin the process of developing more productive behaviors.

The next three days will address each of the three self-defeating behaviors: perfectionism, workaholism, and multi-tasking. We will explore each one in depth and discover resources to help you overcome them.

The Perils of Perfectionism

Perfectionism is defined by American Heritage dictionary as a propensity for being displeased with anything that is not perfect or does not meet extremely high standards. Perfectionism is a self-defeating behavior that is often disguised as a virtue. In fact, many non-perfectionists often wish they were more like those they see with "perfect" lives. The unfortunate thing is that dysfunctional perfectionists often live a tortured life in which nothing is ever good enough.

One thing to keep in mind while reading this is that a little bit of perfectionism is a good thing at times. The desire to produce high quality work is certainly acceptable. The line is crossed when perfectionism is a persistent issue that negatively affects a person's life and the lives of those around them.

Perfectionism is a self-defeating behavior that causes anxiety and procrastination. In some cases perfectionism can be paralyzing. Perfectionists often feel that they can't begin a project or task unless they can do it perfectly. Until they have the right tools and the right knowledge they can't begin. Often when they do begin they are unable to finish projects because they constantly refine their work to be sure that it is perfect.

In an office environment the perfectionist may have a desk covered with stacks of paper. He can't do anything with the stacks because he hasn't figured out the perfect system for filing the papers away or handling the tasks associated with the paper. So the stacks remain and day after day the perfectionist beats himself up over his imperfect office conditions.

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Perfectionism is debilitating for the business owner. Imagine the opportunities squandered as the business owner struggles with simple decisions involving very basic business functions. Fussing over the perfect wording for each letter or email sent, constantly refining business materials, and never happy with anything. This is the life of the perfectionist.

Perfectionists often don't reserve their high standards only for themselves. They expect above average results from everyone they come in contact with. When they don't receive those results they can be abusive and abrupt. Working with a perfectionist can be a tough job.

For those of you who identify with some of what you've read here, there is hope! If you know someone struggling with this issue, pass this along.

1. Self-talk is often your worst enemy. Listen to what your inner critic is saying about you. Counter those statements with statements of your own. For example, if your inner critic says that you can't do anything right, challenge that statement by thinking of things that you have done right. What evidence does your inner critic have to support the statements that it makes about you? Most often the statements are wrong and completely false.

2. Recognize that your value as a person does not come from your performance in the various roles you play in daily life. Consider that when something is wrong in your life or you make a mistake that it doesn't mean that you are an idiot or can't do anything right (or whatever your inner critic says to you). It may mean that you need some training or improvement in that area of your life. If feedback is coming from external sources, the problem may not be yours at all. Perhaps the person giving the feedback is having a bad day.

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3. Realize that perfection is an unattainable goal. Realign your goal to pursuit of excellence or mastery. You will find much more satisfaction.

4. Make mistakes intentionally. Since mistakes are extremely dangerous for perfectionists, this is an experiment that may cause a lot of stress initially. Try "forgetting" to sign in at a meeting or class. Most likely, the person in charge will simply remind you to sign in. Let yourself experience the feeling. You won't die and no one will think you are an idiot. Mistakes are actually great opportunities for learning. If you aren't making mistakes, you aren't growing.

Busting the Multi-Tasking Myth

The pace of work just keeps getting faster and faster. We are often being asked to do more work with fewer resources. Often we are handling not only our current workload, but also the workload of employees that have left but have not yet been replaced. The use of technology like instant messaging and the Blackberry has created an "always on" culture in many companies that is truly unhealthy. Excessive multitasking is not productive behavior.

Because many employers place multitasking in high esteem, job seekers and employees try hard to live up to their claims of having excellent multitasking ability. It is important for both parties to understand the pitfalls of excessive multitasking. Many people feel pressure from employers to work on many tasks at the same time.

Much research has been done in recent years on the effect that multitasking has on employee productivity. This research has shown that the brain cannot process more than one activity at a time. So, technically, you are never actually multitasking. What you are doing is rapidly shifting from one task to another and to another. Some of the effects this can have are short term memory loss and poor overall work quality. In some cases, as in Air Traffic Control, excessive multitasking can mean life or death.

Studies have also shown that multitasking can be costly to businesses both in terms of dollars and time. For example, it can take up to 25 minutes for an employee to recover from interruption. According to the Institute for Innovation and Information Productivity, a study by Basex calculated losses of \$588 billion due to interruptions by such things as mobile phone calls and others. This translates into lost man hours of 28

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billion. Not only does multitasking cost lost time for recovery and handling the interruption itself, but it also causes stress and frustration which can lead to health troubles for employees and increased medical costs.

While there is a good case for limiting multitasking, you will likely never be able to completely eliminate interruptions from your daily life. Here are a few suggestions to help you to get more work done without interruption and to help you to recover from interruptions when they occur.

- 1) Set aside distraction free periods of time to truly focus on getting things done. Limit technology use during these periods. Ask for permission from your boss to set aside one hour a day free from instant messaging and cell phone calls. Turn off the automatic notification of email coming into your inbox.
- 2) When you are interrupted take a moment to jot down the last thought you had or where you were on the task. Use sticky notes or a note pad. This will help you to recover more quickly upon your return to that task.
- 3) Build your mental muscle and learn to multitask better. According to the article "Multitasking Makes You Stupid" by Sue Shellenbarger, meditation may help to increase your mental ability to shift priorities.

Recognizing the negative effect that the "always on, multitasking is a good thing" mentality will be a key to helping you to be more effective in the workplace. Multitasking may not make you stupid, but as we have discovered it does have negative effects on your work product and stress level.

Your homework is to notice your work habits. Are you multi-tasking excessively to the point of creating anxiety? Are you making mistakes and

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producing less than desirable work product? What can you do to slow down? Try doing one thing at a time through completion.

Overcoming Workaholism

Today we discuss workaholism, another self-defeating behavior that causes major problems for people both at work and most importantly, at home.

A workaholic is not the same as a hard worker. People can work very hard and be high producers, but then go home and not worry about work during social activities or family time. The workaholic thinks and talks about work constantly. The workaholic works long hours often to avoid intimacy or social relationships. This often causes family troubles and ultimately destroyed relationships.

Workaholics often derive their worth from their work. This is unhealthy since they think that if they are not working all the time or seeming to work all the time their worth will be diminished. They often take on more work than they can possibly handle because they find it difficult to say no to new tasks. They also like the appearance of being able to handle anything.

Unfortunately, workaholism can cause more than just family and relationship issues. It can also cause major health issues. Stress, anxiety, temper and anger problems are just a few of the long list of health and behavior problems that result from compulsive working.

If you have workaholic tendencies, how do you overcome this? Workaholics Anonymous is a wonderful organization that is committed to helping workaholics overcome compulsive work. Their website includes a list of 20 questions to ask yourself to determine if you are a workaholic. This is a great first step. The website is also filled with great resources to help you overcome compulsive work. Some of the suggestions on the site are:

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- 1) Prioritizing - What is the most important thing you have to do? Do that first!
- 2) Over-scheduling - Stop over-scheduling. Allowing more time for tasks than you initially think they will take
- 3) Concentrating (Focus!)
- 4) Relaxing - Become aware of trigger points for pressure both internal and external.
- 5) Asking - Ask for help! Acknowledge your weaknesses and find someone to help you.

Overcoming workaholism can be very difficult. It literally requires a complete shifting of the mindset that working longer hours makes you more valuable. Recognize that worth does not come from number of hours put in or the amount of "work" accomplished.

If you think you may have an issue with workaholism, check out <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org>. The resources there are great. Try a couple of the suggestions listed above and see if those make a difference for you.

Conquering Procrastination

Procrastination is the putting off of tasks until they absolutely must be done. The task may be important or irrelevant, large or small. There are different ways of procrastinating and so many different reasons for procrastination. The unfortunate result is typically guilt, missed deadlines, late fees, and occasionally illness.

While everyone procrastinates for one reason or another and to varying degrees, as with any behavior the duration and intensity is what determines whether that behavior is dysfunctional. Some people go through their entire lives putting things off. They are either working frantically to do the things they have put off for a month or sitting around trying to figure out where they could possibly begin.

Perfectionism is a major cause of procrastination. These folks are waiting for the perfect conditions to exist to get started. Unfortunately, the perfect conditions will never exist so these projects often never get off the ground.

Another cause of procrastination is indecisiveness or unclear goals. When you have no clear vision of what you are trying to accomplish how can you possibly be productive? Ask yourself what your ultimate vision or goal for the project is. What is the current situation, what is the vision upon completion, and what are the interim action steps to take you there?

First, eliminate tasks that are unnecessary. Some tasks end up on your list because you feel that you should complete them. They are not necessarily tasks that you want to complete. Ask yourself whether these really need to be on your list. What would happen if you never did the task? If the consequences are not great, eliminate the task from your list.

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Begin to schedule tasks into your day. Schedule time in your calendar to knock out some of the smaller tasks on your list. Try working on larger projects for one hour at a time. After the hour is up, put the project away and start on the next one. Making a little progress daily can go a long way to relieving some of the anxiety that may be felt when tackling a large project.

Set one big goal for the day. For example, I must finish this article on procrastination on Monday. Focus on achieving that goal and getting that project done. The next day focus on another.

Putting things off rarely makes them easier to tackle. Usually, the task becomes harder and more overwhelming the longer you wait. Most people struggle with procrastination. It is one self-defeating behavior that is hard to kick. Once you begin to develop the habit of doing things now the joy of accomplishment will overshadow the convenience of waiting until tomorrow.

Identify a task or project that you have been putting off. Try scheduling time in your calendar to get it done and commit to yourself that you will absolutely get this thing done before the end of the day. See if that works and use it for other projects or tasks.

Project Management

Lack of skill in project management is one issue that causes disorganization and inefficiency in the workplace and office environment. Developing skill in that area is extremely important to effectively complete tasks and projects. Now some people think of project management and get overwhelmed because it can be very complicated. Engineering and architecture firms often use complex software applications to manage their projects. Individuals are employed in these firms strictly for project management purposes. However, for most of us simple project management solutions will do the trick. In this issue we will talk about how you can effectively manage projects within your daily life.

There are two main elements in project management. The first is clarity. Imagine that you are chatting with someone at work. You mention during the conversation that you are going to the grocery store later. Your friend says "Oh, can you get something for me while you are there." So you say that you can and you guys continue on with your previous conversation. Later that day you go to the grocery store. As you walk into the grocery store, you realize that you never asked your friend what she wanted you to get at the grocery store. You could try to complete this project with the limited information that you have. You could attempt to guess what she wants. Maybe she wants batteries, a loaf of bread, or dishwashing detergent. It would be very difficult if you did attempt to complete the project in that way because you are not clear on what you are trying to accomplish. This scenario may seem silly; however, many of us have been asked to complete projects with very little information to help us get started.

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What would you need to do in order to successfully complete this project? Well, asking some simple questions would help. First, what does the person want? You discover that the person wants milk. At this point you at least can go into the right department or the right area of the grocery store. But it's still possible for to mess this up because there are other details you must know in order to complete this project successfully. You need to uncover all of those details so that you can actually accomplish the objective. Perhaps she wants a half gallon of white, 1% milk, and the brand that she wants is Borden's. Now you have enough information to successfully complete the project. The key to clarity is asking questions to define what the ultimate objective is, and to uncover all of the details that you need to know in order to successfully complete the project.

The second element in project management is accountability. Have you ever been in a situation where you weren't quite sure who was doing what? Perhaps you assumed that someone was taking care of a task, but in reality no one was doing the task, and it fell through the cracks. Often there is confusion about accountability and ownership of tasks which leads to delays and missed deadlines. This confusion can be avoided with clear communication. Effective communication is often a lacking element in the workplace. When beginning a project have a meeting to establish tasks, who is responsible for each one, and what the deadline for each phase will be. To keep track of all of this information try using a simple project tracking spreadsheet.

Begin by determining what the project is. Assess your current situation and determine your vision for the project. The next step is to begin thinking about each step in the project. For example, when planning each month's newsletter I begin by asking myself what the very first step is. Step 1 will be to decide on a topic for the April newsletter. Step 2 is to outline

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what I would like to cover in the newsletter. Step 3 is to do some research on the topic. Step 4 is to write the copy and so on. After determining the steps I assign deadlines and responsibility to those tasks.

The assignment of responsibility is where the real accountability begins to come in. Once you have committed the tasks to paper and gained agreement on responsibility from team members, it's very important to establish a plan for follow up. A great way to follow up is by holding regular status check meetings. Use the project management template to review the steps, and get a report on the status of the task. The status and notes columns can be used to track this information. Effective project management comes down to solid planning on the front end, having a good system for capturing project information, and following up regularly with your employees or your team.

Your homework for today is to plan a project using the steps outlined in today's lesson. Think through each step and then begin working on step 1. Additional steps may be added during the course of the project. The important thing is that you have established a structure for the project and can easily see the steps necessary to move forward.

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Meet Ellen, Founder of A New Leaf, LLC.



Ellen Martin Kramer is a productivity trainer and efficiency coach with a passion for changing lives. Recognized as a leader in her field she has appeared on Dr Oz, Larry King Live and TLC, Ellen has earned celebrity organizer status. She's co-author of the book **Exploring Productivity: Ideas from Industry Professionals on Getting More Done in the Workplace**, a collection of common sense ideas shared by seasoned experts.

Ellen specializes in working with busy professionals and business owners who struggle with excessive clutter, time management, and disorganization issues. She teaches companies how to create their own productive, efficient work environments by using proven organizational systems. And most importantly, Ellen ensures that each client develops the good habits necessary to stay organized. In addition to her various accomplishments, she is trained in identifying learning styles and individual behaviors that effect overall organizational ability. Ellen is able to objectively analyze each situation to produce a custom plan for long-term success. She is an accomplished organizer and has earned certification from prominent training programs including; Productivity Trainer and Authorized Consultant, Certified Productive Environment Specialist, GO System Certified Trainer and Clear & Simple Certified Professional Organizer.

In 2003, Ellen founded **A New Leaf LLC**, a professional organizing service to assist individuals in finding order in their chaotic environments. She offers hands-on organizing, virtual accountability programs and coaching. She delivers upbeat and interactive training programs,

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corporate workshops and seminars that encourage audiences to transform their lives through mastery of their environment and behavior.

To schedule Ellen for a speaking engagement contact or work directly with Ellen visit www.anewleafproductivity.com.