Create Order out of chaos
Get organized and deal with paperwork with these helpful tips

We keep on hearing about the paperless office. Yet, time and time again, government and industry surveys state that paperwork continues to be among the top three burdens for business.

If you are like many, your office is swimming in clutter. Paper piles surround you. Information, mail, bills and catalogues are all over the desk, if not spilling out the door. To make it worse, you may not be the best-organized person in the world. To top it off, you should really be focusing on finding new customers and building your business. You should be spending most of your time on activities that generate value and revenue. And the bad news is that the paper piles just keep on mounting.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. There are ways and means to avoid this highly stressful situation. The solution lies in organization. Now, don't run for the door. Your clutter is not going anywhere even if you do. And one thing is for sure, if you don't deal with it now, it will get worse. It's going to cost you time, money, lost opportunities frustration and stress.

You probably can't deal with details. You think your desk will take too much time to clean up. And besides, you hope the problem will, somehow go away. You could hire a professional organizer to lend you a hand in creating order out of chaos. They have the essential expertise, tips, tools and techniques to help you get organized and stay that way. They won't just do a one time clean-up. They will create a personalized system for you that is easy to maintain with minimal daily effort. They will ensure the paper monster (and tasks) will never again take over your life and business.

But, if you feel you want to do this yourself here are a few suggestions to get started:

Create order quickly. Place everything into three piles: action, which requires you to do something ; reference, items which you want or must keep for the future ; toss, items you no longer need.

In order to decide which action to take or which pile to put things in, you'll need to ask yourself the following questions. Keep in mind that 80% of what you file is hardly ever looked at again.

• How do you decide what to toss?
• Does this require any action?
• Is it recent enough to be useful?
• Can you replace it again (other sources or the web)/\
• Does this paper have any specific use? "just in case" is not a good enough reason.
• Are there any tax or legal implications?
• What's the worst thing that can happen?

Time to start …
• Start sorting from the top. Look at each piece of paper and place them into broad categories. Let the categories emerge, as you proceed.

Some typical categories:
To File (no action, but you want to keep for reference),
To Read (requires time to digest before action can be taken),
To Do (requires action, ie write, call, an errand), Financial (bills, bank statements, cheques, receipts etc.)
To Delegate (pass on to someone else),
Calendar Entry (to ensure action will be taken)

• Start filing in hanging folders with action items and active projects nearest your desk. Create suitable labels for the folders.

• **Stay organized**. This approach can and should be used to process all new information that comes your way. If you deal with your in-box on a daily basis, you will be surprised how little time and effort is required to keep your desk clean, your mind calm and focused on your priorities. You will save time, money and frustration. You will be more productive and less stressed.

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