

A SOUL PROPRIETOR SPECIAL REPORT



Putting Paper in Its Place

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Who's the boss of all the paper on *your* desk, in *your* office? Are you overwhelmed by it? Has it taken over your space *and* your peace of mind? Let's talk about how to take control of your work space; where to start; how to proceed and discover that calm and clarity are right around the corner.

I worked in corporate America for over 30 years in industries that create and deal with a tremendous amount of paper: insurance, banking and the title industry. I experienced productive and nonproductive work scenarios and know what it feels like to come into the office and heave a huge sigh because of all the paper piles surrounding me. As a solo-preneur, you must now be more efficient than ever, not only to get the job done, but to get it done *well* and keep your *sanity*.

So...have you ever felt like this? Whether the problem is too much multi-tasking, poor organizational habits or just plain "too much," a change must be made. Organizing isn't defined as "neat and tidy," but finding what you need *when* you need it OR getting done what you need to *when* you need to. The clutter we see all around this woman is *unmade decisions*, where items have no "home", and paper is a particular nemesis. It can suck the life right out of you, so we need to learn to control it! It is *not* going away – the Paperless Society does not exist. In fact, we are creating more all the time, by printing everything we have emailed to us or email to others, teleclasses, ebooks, etc.



If you'll think about the following questions for a moment, they'll give you an idea of how to determine what you initially want to spend some time on to find the productivity you are looking for and to do it with calm, clarity and purpose.

1. What's working in your office right now? What's *NOT* working?

- Post-its everywhere of "things to do" but no master list of priorities?
- An In-box so deep with papers that you can't see over the top?

- Files so full that you can't put another thing in them?
- "Living" at your desk, so you have coffee cups and food debris everywhere?
- Are you such a queen (or king) of multi-tasking that you just jump around all day like this woman and get nothing substantial done?
- Or, NOT...which of these things are just fine? You get the idea...

2. Who are you, in the paper world – a "piler" or a "filer?" That will make a difference as to how you approach your desk's "abundance." Organizational habits vary, just as personalities do, so don't go against the grain of your natural tendencies or you'll be setting yourself up for failure.

3. Do you want to *see everything* you have to work on OR *do you want to hide it, knowing where it is when you are ready for it?*

To help you work through this lesson and in almost any organizing situation: **P-L-A-N**®. Planning is at the forefront of accomplishing anything in an orderly, successful manner. Yes, we're talking about good, old-fashioned time management (which is truly just self-management, folks!)

WHERE TO START? "P" is for PREPARE!

Hopefully those questions gave you an idea of where your stumbling blocks may be with regard to getting through your hectic days more successfully. You know, you can't get from Point A to Point B without a **road map**. So, define what your target is, what your **goal** is or all your best intentions won't get you there.

So, project in mind? Set a date, make an **appointment** with yourself to start working on what you identified as an initial problem area: Desktop? A particular drawer? Incoming mail? Need a system for getting papers off your desk and into file cabinets? **Prioritize** based on what will make the biggest change the quickest – that way you'll have the energy and confidence to continue down the path to complete organization of your office space.

Don't be paralyzed by over-thinking the process or waiting to plan out the "perfect" solution – there is no such thing. Aim for "good enough" because you'll be tweaking your new systems as you see if they work for you or not. Procrastinating just lets the mess continue on and on. So forget that: start small if you wish, but **start**, and know that any amount of reorganization you make is going to change your workspace so much for the positive that this will be **fun!**

So, now, the date has arrived, let's **"L", LAUNCH INTO ACTION!**

Here are some ideas of where and how to focus on creating a more organized work space. Hopefully you can zero in on at least one or two of these.

- Anything that lands on your desk needs a "home." Be sure to at least have an inbox, a place for filing and some system for working with current projects.

- Define a system for prioritizing your work, whether you use a stand-up, tiered divider system on your desk, slotted trays or temporary piles. Speaking of piles, there are products for the “pilers” among us, or for those hot-button projects you’re working on. These help you remember that you still need to sort a pile in order to have any success in working with it, even if you are just rearranging it into various action categories, such as “To Read,” “To File,” “To Do,” etc.
- There are *many* organizing products now, in all types of materials, colors and styles. Use these **on** and **in** your desk. Small sorting dividers can make a huge difference in getting what you need when you need it. But remember: you don’t need to buy lots of stuff; you can repurpose business card boxes, check boxes, even candy boxes to act as drawer dividers. Later, if you see a new organizing gadget on the market and it’s not too expensive, it might just be fun to play with it. Caution, though: before you buy it, make sure you’ll really use it. Otherwise, it just becomes a future garage sale item!
- You do need a **filing system**, some sort of methodology for controlling all the paper. It needs to be simple or you won’t use it, no matter how pretty, or color-coded or fancy it is. It needs to be functional for *you*, because each of us operates under different parameters. Again, remember that there is no such thing as perfection – aim for “good enough.” Now, I’m not saying to be sloppy about what you do. Just know that what “good enough” is changes throughout your life: you can be organized one moment, go through a period of disorganization, get back to speed, etc., all dependent upon the degree and intensity of life’s challenges and the strategies you have for regrouping and getting back “into the groove.”
- How about doing some sorting and purging of those piles on your desk that you haven’t dug into for eons? Initially do a Quick Sort: there are many acronyms for getting this job done, such as FAT™ – File/Act/Toss or RAT™ – Retain/Act/Toss. It doesn’t matter – just get rolling. If it’s been there untouched for any length of time, you will probably be able to trash 2/3 of that stack. Anything that looks important but doesn’t have a date on it? Jot the date on an upper corner so if you do run into it again, you’ll know how long you’ve had it and feel more comfortable getting rid of it. With each document, ask pertinent questions, such as:
 - Is this time sensitive?
 - Are there legal or tax considerations regarding this?
 - Is this something I need to refer to regularly?
 - Does this pertain to a major project I’m working on?
 - Is it available elsewhere or is this the only copy?
 - And...*would my life, my work change if I didn’t save this piece of paper?*
- Concentrate on about 1" of paper in an area that you really want cleaned up at a time, or set a timer for a specific period. Then, focus, focus, focus. Don’t pause to take any actions at this time: no phone calls, no emails, no reading, no leaving the area.

- Now...the storing of all this paper! Keeping in mind that the *purpose of a filing system is not storage, but retrieval*, please be aware that only 15-20% of the papers you file will ever be accessed again. Filing cabinets or drawers don't have to be "black holes" where things go in, never to be found again. Basics, such as "like with like," are paramount for making sense out of any system. You want it to be easy and efficient, with everything close at hand, so you can just swivel, roll or reach your way to it. If you are not using the system you currently have set up, there is something wrong with it and you need to revamp it. Maybe you simply need to change tab positions; add some more files; delete some files; label files differently. Whatever it is, you may need to try several variations to find the right one that works for you.
- You can save yourself a lot of printing and filing merely by being extra cautious about what you *do* print. Keep your copies for backup, but keep them on the computer or an external hard drive, if possible.
- Spend the last 15 minutes of each day clearing your desk, checking your calendar for the next day to see that you are prepared and filing what needs to be filed. You will start the next day on a super note when you arrive to a clear desk, trust me!

This now brings us to the **"A", for "ADJUST AND ADAPT!"**

- Control what comes onto your desk, into your work space, by having designated "homes" for everything.
- If you deal with paper of a *confidential* nature, and if you aren't getting that filed away appropriately, that confidentiality is being compromised, with all sorts of ramifications.
- Set up a routine maintenance plan to help you establish new habits. For instance, when you receive your daily mail, handle it at one time that allows you to complete it as much as possible, from making necessary phone calls to filing.
- Sort and purge constantly. If things creep back in that you just weeded out, you now know how to handle them!
- Remember, too, that nothing is perfect and this is a continual learning experience: what you like, don't like, what you are able to handle. So, when a crisis arises, you will be under less stress and not so distracted, enabling you to handle it better.

The last little trick is **"N" is for N-JOY!"**

Dealing with all this paper will make you feel more effective, efficient, confident and in control! So, relax/reward/repeat for the next project! Make it fun and be sure to celebrate your success!

Now is the time to attack a paper project that's been driving you crazy, get a start-date on the calendar

and get set for planning that accomplishment. Trust me: you will find that you have more confidence to get the job done, more energy, are happy doing it and will revel in the peace of mind that completing each project gives you!

Keep on organizing – one step at a time:

- If you see a pile, deal with it.
- Watch out for flat surfaces – they have a tendency to collect anything & everything.
- If you're done with something, put it away.
- If you don't have any more room for certain items, it's time to begin the process of sorting and purging again.

I hope you have gleaned some ideas for changes you can make in your office space so that **you** will be the boss of that portion of your world. Your reward? *A more focused, more productive work day.* You will receive more respect and recognition if you **look** organized! You'll leave your desk or office knowing that you did your absolute best as you walk out the door with a big smile on your face.

Albert Einstein said, “There are three rules of work: 1. Out of clutter, find simplicity. 2. From discord, find harmony. 3. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” Are you ready to accept the opportunity to be successful in eliminating a trouble spot in your office? I *know* you are! Remember our friend from the beginning? Wouldn't you rather feel like *this??!*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



If clutter has taken over your life and you just can't get it together...If you have too much stuff in too small a space and can't decide what needs to go...If you're frustrated and stressed because you can't find your keys, your wallet, your checkbook...If you're inundated with paper and getting buried in piles of it...If you would like less confusion, stress and frustration and more peace, order and serenity in your life...You'll find relief at Sensible Organizing Strategies. Get free organizing tips and information from Rhonda McNett at <http://www.sosbyrhonda.com/contact.html>. Find the peace and harmony hiding in your home or office!



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