

Developing your Organisational Skills

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INNOVEST SME

Accelerating Small Business

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*Don't agonize –
Organize.*

FLORENCE KENNEDY

PREFACE

Good organizational skills can prove beneficial in many areas of life, including personal and business areas. Organization can increase a person's general productivity, project management, and can even affect his memory and retention skills. These skills are not acquired overnight – it will take a lot of hard work and practice. But with a little guidance and the right tools, anyone can learn how to stop hunting for missing things and become better organized.

*Out of clutter,
find simplicity.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN



REMOVE THE CLUTTER

One of the hardest parts about getting organized is going through and getting rid of the things that cause distractions and take up space. When you find yourself among the stacks and piles of stuff and items, it can seem overwhelming. But by taking it one step at a time, and remembering to breathe, you can begin to de-clutter your life and start on the path to successful organization.

JUST DO IT

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed about taking on the task of removing our clutter and tend to make excuses as to why it doesn't get done. We can claim that we don't have the time, or that there is too much to do at once. But as Nike says, we have to "Just Do It" and we have to throw away our excuses and dive in. Make a plan on how you can get started, such as making a 'cleaning calendar' or choosing an area to start on. Stick with your plan until the job is complete, and don't let the same excuses hinder your success.

Helpful tips:

- Make a calendar with time to clean
- Divide the areas that need to be conquered

- Make a list of tasks
- Decide where items go beforehand

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KEEP EVERYTHING

You know who you are – the person that exclaims *“I have to keep [this] because I might need it later!”*

In reality, we can throw away over half of our saved documents or items without feeling a sense of withdrawal or consequence. The decision to keep everything can drive us to make inappropriate choices with organization and contributes to more clutter. We can break that kind of thinking by examining what we are holding on to and by realizing we can't live by the *'what ifs'* an item may have. Go through your clutter and clarify how it is useful to you right now and get rid of anything that doesn't have a clear purpose. Once you have removed the items you don't need or have use for, you are no longer wasting time on useless clutter, but are developing better organization for the things you did keep.

Ask yourself:

- Am I going to use this in the near future?
- When was the last time I needed this?
- If I keep this, what is it organized into?

THREE BOXES: KEEP, DONATE, AND TRASH

The most common approach to clearing out clutter is the Three Boxes method. This method forces a decision to be made about each item you touch as you go through your clutter. You don't get to put it aside or come back to it later. Pick up an item, one at a time, and think about which box it should go in. Try not to release the item until a decision is made.

- **Box 1 – Items to Keep:** This box is for items you would like to keep in your area or maybe even put away for safe keeping (such as heirlooms or special gifts). This is not to be confused with the *'things I might need later'* type of thinking. Only keep items that have value and meaning to you.
- **Box 2 – Items to Donate:** This box is for items that you realize you no longer need or want. Items in this box can be donated or sold at a rummage sale, just as long as it leaves the clutter!
- **Box 3 – Trash:** This box is for the things that you do not need or want and cannot be donated or given away. This often includes old papers or documents, mail, or broken items. Once this box is full or complete, remove it from the area right away and don't give it a second look.

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING AND EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

One factor that contributes to our clutter is where we decide to keep it or let it lay. When something is not in its proper place, everything else can seem chaotic and, disorganized. While we are thinking about where

things need to go, think about what the item or items are and where it would best be suited. This may require you to refresh your mind and search your office over for every available open space that can be used. But no matter the amount of stuff you plan to keep, once it has found its proper place in your office, it won't stay in the way of you becoming more organized.

Ask yourself:

- What do I need to put here/there?
- Where would this be best suited?
- Will it be in my way/contribute to clutter there?

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Stacy decided she would spend her Saturday afternoon clearing out the clutter that has built up in the family den. She knew she had put it off for too long, and decided this would be the best time. She took her three boxes marked Keep, Donate, and Trash and began picking up items one by one. As she picked up old papers and broken toys, she knew it was an easy decision to throw these things away. But then Stacy started to find old keepsakes lying around, including her children's old clothing and photo albums. Her immediate thought was to put them away; until she remembered that it isn't necessary to keep everything and that she can, and will, have to part with some things.

By the end of the afternoon, Stacy had managed fill a donation box with items she knew she no longer needed or wanted. She also threw away several boxes of garbage. When she was left with just the items she wanted to keep, she had no trouble organizing everything finding a permanent place for it all.

*The key is not to
prioritize what's on your
schedule, but to schedule
your priorities.*

STEPHEN COVEY



PRIORITIZE

Organization doesn't only refer to our physical items and physical possessions; it can also include organizing our time and activities. Taking time to label what we want and what we need to accomplish allows us to sort through everything on our plate and find out how to tackle it. Since everything is lined out and identified, regulating our time and energy can seem less overwhelming.

WRITE IT DOWN

When organizing your priorities, it is important to write them all down and make yourself some sort of 'master' list because it helps you remember everything you want to accomplish or complete later. This list gives you a visual aide to use when making organizational decisions. You don't have to list the items in any particular order, but just list anything that comes to mind. Once you feel you have completed the list (for now), then you can go back and assign their priority order. Common codes such as ABC or 123 can be used to determine each listings priority and how you will proceed with each one.

URGENT/IMPORTANT MATRIX

Sometimes we confuse our urgent priorities with our important ones, which can cause us to be confused about what to take care of first. The Urgent/Important Matrix is a tool that we can use to think about our priorities and how we handle them. Before we can use the matrix, we must write down everything we want to accomplish in a certain period of time, such as daily, weekly, or even further and assign their priority in which we want to get them done.

The matrix is divided into four quadrants, each ranging in importance, and allows for activities and projects to be plotted in each one based on their need. Using the list you created, you would plot each job in the corresponding quadrant. After all of the tasks have been plotted, we can see all of the things we want or need to do and how urgent or important they are to us. This leads us to make better choices regarding our time management and overall organization.



DIVIDE TASKS

Now that you've made a list and categorized all of the things you want to accomplish, it can seem overwhelming or even intimidating to get started. But by dividing your tasks into smaller groups of things to do, we can feel more empowered to get them done. Tasks can be divided any way that is convenient, such as things to do for one particular project or maybe even things to do that involve going through papers. The key is to find what combination works for you.

Helpful hints:

- Sort tasks by each specific project
- Decide what tasks can be done the fastest
- Determine what tasks will need more time

80/20 RULE

Simply put, the 80/20 Rule emphasizes the need to focus on what is important to us, and disregarding the rest. In most cases, 20% of things we have or accumulate are important to us, while the other 80% is usually trivial, if not useless. If the 20% is handled first and focused upon, the remaining 80% practically takes care of itself. For example, using the 80/20 Rule, you can sit down with your daily to-do list and identify the top three or four projects or tasks that *need* to be done (the 20%). Then outline the less important or mundane things that can be done next, or even at a later time (the 80%). By focusing on what is the most important/

urgent first, we are more focused and ready to tackle them. Once they are completed, the rest of the tasks seem less daunting and can be done with ease.

The 80/20 Rule is about being organized while doing what you want in your everyday life.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Joseph wants to become more organized and realized he has some free time to do it. When he looked around at what needed to be done, he began to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. But he sat down and wrote a list of everything he wanted to accomplish. Once he had a long list, he decided to mark which ones had higher priority than others. Still feeling swamped, Joseph went over the list again and divided them by the different projects he was working on and what would need to be done in each one. Finally, he marked which tasks he wanted to take care of first and ranked highest to him, and put the rest of them aside. Now that Joseph had lined out what he wanted to do, and in what order, he was ready to tackle his list of jobs and get organized.

*Prioritize. If you can't
get to everything or do
everything, that's okay.*

JULIE CHEN



SCHEDULING YOUR TIME

Your time is valuable, so you should treat it that way. Your schedule can get busy and sometimes it can seem like there are not enough hours in the day. But when that happens, we just need to take a step back, and manage our time effectively. When we schedule our time and resources in a way that benefits us and aides in becoming better organized, there's nothing we can't accomplish.

HAVE A MASTER CALENDAR

It can seem like a good idea to have several calendars for every area of life, but when you use more than one at a time, it's easy to get them confused. With multiple calendars, you can run the risk of double booking events or miss important appointments. Instead, get one calendar and put it somewhere you can see it every day, such as on the refrigerator or hanging by the front door. Write all of your personal and work reminders on it, including deadline dates, appointments, events, and reminders. When you use one calendar for everything you do, you are not only able to manage your time better, but you can get rid of the paper reminders you have posted everywhere.

SETTING DEADLINES

When scheduling our time, deadlines provide a sense of structure and balance for us. While every person responds to deadlines differently, they are a key tool to better time management. By setting deadlines, you are putting a concrete need in your schedule, and it helps prevent it from being forgotten or lost in the near future. They give us a sense of accountability when it comes to things we either want or need to get done. So whether you write them on a calendar or program them into a mobile device, the next time you plan to do something, set yourself a deadline first and stick to it. You'll find that when you take the time to schedule them, you'll make time for other things.

Tips when setting deadlines:

- Keep your deadlines in arm's reach – write them down where you will see them
- Set periodic reminders – give yourself reminders that a deadline approaches
- Pad your actual deadline a little – give yourself some extra wiggle room

REMOVE OR LIMIT THE TIME WASTERS

A time waster is something that can distract you or take away from the task at hand. They can occur at home or at work. Removing or even limiting some of these wasters can improve your concentration and help

you stay focused on what you want or need to do. They can include personal time wasters, such as checking messages or stopping to talk, or can even be as simple as wasting extra time to go look for that extra file. Practice cutting or limiting one thing that distracts you the most, such as other people or stopping to start another task. Give yourself a set time that you will not let these things distract you or take away from your current duty. You'll be amazed how taking these small steps will improve your time management.

Some common time wasters and distractions:

- Excessively checking email/text/phone messages
- Boredom or daydreams
- Extra time spent away from your work area
- Extra time spent looking for things
- Taking on extra projects

COPING WITH THINGS OUTSIDE OF YOUR CONTROL

There are many things in life that we cannot control, such as an illness, rude or mean people, and especially the weather. But we learn to cope with them every day and adapt ourselves to them. You can control how you react to certain circumstances and setbacks. When we are faced with something we realize we cannot change or control, the key to dealing with it is to, first, accept it. Once you have accepted that you cannot change the fact that it rained on your moving day or that someone almost

rear ended you in traffic, we can learn to cope with them by remembering what we can control. You *can* control what alternative plan you have for moving day and you *can* control how you choose to respond to the rude driver. Focusing on what you can control rather than what you can't will help you feel more empowered and less likely to let other obstacles overcome you.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Kerstin has an important report due at the end of the week and is having trouble finishing it on schedule. Even though she wrote it on her master calendar and gave herself several reminders, she feels as though she is lacking enough focus to concentrate on the project. One night, Kerstin decided to work on the project at home and turned off her cell phone and went into her room to be alone and work on her report. She noticed she worked much better without the everyday distractions she was letting get in her way. She finished her report two days early and was very excited about her progress. But when she tried to print her final copy, her home printer broke. Kerstin panicked at first and wasn't sure what to do. But she remembered that she could print it at the local library instead. Once she had her final, printed report in hand, she was grateful that she had left herself enough time for possible mistakes and was able to save her report in time.

*Nothing is so fatiguing as
the eternal hanging on of
an uncompleted task*

WILLIAM JAMES



TO DO LISTS

Since we can often feel overwhelmed by the amount of work we need to do, one of the easiest ways things we can do is create to do lists. Creating a list ensures that tasks are written down in one place and is easily referenced later. You don't have to use a typical to do list, just as long as you can manage the tasks you have written down and prioritize them as needed.

USE A DAY PLANNER

A day planner is a great tool to help you manage your time and stay on top of projects and job lists. It's handy to carry with you and keep within arm's reach. When making your central to do list, your day planner can be used for keeping all of your reminders and notes in one place, which can make it your central source for your information. The key is to update it regularly and to use it every day.

Tips for having a day planner:

- Put contact information in the front of it
- Update it regularly and reference it everyday
- Utilize the 'notes' sections

FINISH WHAT YOU START

When we complete a task or project, we get a sense of completion and accomplishment, which can make us feel great about ourselves. But when we drop a project or fail to complete it, it can make us feel depressed and bleak. Completing something that you've taken the effort to start also helps you to become more productive and ensures that things are done on time (whether it is your deadline or someone else's). Also, when you complete something all the way through the first time, it saves you from having to come back later and try to finish it then!

FOCUS ON THE IMPORTANT

By now you're keeping several to do lists and endless tallies in your head or even writing some down. Even though you've established your project's priority, sometimes we can lose sight of the big picture and will stray from the main path. It is essential to keep focus on the important aspects of your to do list, whether it's finishing something on time or making sure you get the right data for the report. If you come across a task that does not coordinate with your larger goals, put it aside for now and keep focus on what you need to do to get your things done. If you have to, limit yourself to a few important tasks to focus on first before moving on to the rest. Recognize what tasks are important enough to focus on now, and which ones can wait until a later time.

Remember, anyone can make a to-do list with lots of check marks and bullets, but getting the things done will seem endless if you lack focus and determination.

DO QUICK TASKS IMMEDIATELY

When we make our to-do list, there is normally a variety of chores and tasks to complete. Some are more important than others and some will take more time than others. While looking at your list, make note of things you can do quickly and wouldn't take up much of your time. Do these tasks right away so that you can quickly cross them off of your to do list and give yourself a pat on the back. When you finish these tasks quickly and do them right away, it leaves more room for you to focus on more complicated or lengthy tasks and projects.

Sample 'quick tasks':

- Filing paperwork
- Posting reminders and notices
- Sending follow up emails

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

David is reviewing his schedule lately and realized he has been missing several important appointments and meetings, while also not accomplishing anything on his to do list. He thought about what he could do to help improve his productivity and memory skills. The first thing he did was buy a calendar for his house and a small day planner to carry with him. He went through his weekly and monthly schedule and wrote down everything that needed to be remembered. He made a list of projects he had recently started, but never finished, and made a plan on

how to complete them so that they would not linger on his list any longer. When he made his to do list for his home, he marked three things that needed to be done urgently. David then marked the top four tasks that he could do right away and decided to tackle those first. Now that he had his tasks and projects organized, David felt like he had a better handle on his schedule and time.

*A place for everything and
everything in its place.*

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



PAPER AND PAPERLESS STORAGE

We all have those pieces of paper we keep around us, whether it's old receipts, invoices, cards, or old letters. On the other side of the coin, we are living in the 'paperless' age, where everything is done electronically, including utility bills and notifications. Luckily, we don't have to choose between one and the other. A paper and paperless storage system can work for anyone, as long as they work together to keep things organized.

FIND A SYSTEM THAT WORKS FOR YOU

When deciding whether or not to go paperless, we have to decide what would work best for our situations. Many of us function well with physical pieces of paper in some sort of filing system. Others of us work better in the electronic filing system and keep paperless files, whether on a computer or portable device. Paper storage systems allow you to keep various paper documents in files for easy access and reference and can provide a firm reference if needed to present a hard copy. However, a paperless system allows you to free up more space while managing to keep documents for a longer period of time. So in order to decide what works for you, examine how you store your valuable information.

Ask yourself some of the following questions to help decide what system works for you:

- Where do I keep my information?
- Do I keep physical things or electronic versions?
- If I store paper, do I have the space?
- If I store paperless, do I have the access?

MAKE IT CONSISTENT

Whichever storage system you choose, or whether you decide to use both, keep your methods consistent. If you decide to choose one method over the other, be sure to stick with this method for all of your papers or files. Keep them in one central location so that they are easily accessible. If you decide to use a combination of these methods, keep your paper files and electronic files consistent with matching names for paper folders and the ones on your computer. If file names are different and do not share a key name, documents could be lost or placed in the wrong folder or file. The system you choose to use should help boost your organization, not complicate it.

MAKE IT TIME SENSITIVE

Every piece of information in storage is connected to some kind of time line, such as a printed date, times, or schedules. When we store these items and keep them out of sight, we can often forget what they are for and possibly miss important deadlines. To avoid misplacing or forgetting

these time sensitive materials, make your method of organization time sensitive as well. Create bins or folders with dates and reminders on them. Make different categories for them, such as personal, bills, work projects or jobs, to help remind you of their 'shelf life'. By keeping these documents handy or in marked computer files, we can keep track of pressing, time sensitive information without letting the deadlines or due dates slip through our fingers.

Tips for organizing time sensitive information:

- Mark folders/bins/files with dates or date ranges
- Highlight or emphasize deadlines on each material
- Once something has passed a deadline or due date, re-file it to another folder

SETTING UP ARCHIVES

Now that you've sorted all of your files and folders and decided what you need to keep or throw away, the next step is set up various archives for documents that you need to keep for future use, but won't necessarily need every day. Establish a reference system that works for you and can be easily sorted through later when you need to find something. If you're keeping physical files, keep them in a folder or bin that is not in your direct work area. Put it away in the back of a drawer or on a higher shelf than everything else.

If you decide to keep digital files, keep all documents in archived folders and relocate them to another computer if possible. Don't keep them on the desktop along with things you use every day. However you decide to store your materials, setting up archives will help you keep track of files you need to hang on to while keeping them out of your everyday work space.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Rhonda is going through her office and wanted to organize her mounds of paperwork. She realized she needed a better way to store everything she needed to keep. First, she decided that she could scan and copy several of her document files onto her computer for easy storage; that way she didn't need to keep the hard copy. But her special documents, such as various manuals (employee, policy and procedure, etc.), she realized she needed to keep the physical copy for future reference. So she developed a file system for her paper storage and her paperless storage that worked best for her everyday use, including files and folders that held her work deadlines. Lastly, she set aside a special folder for her older and less important documents to archive. She put them in the back of the bottom drawer of her filing cabinet so that they would be out of her way while she was working, but she could reach them quickly if she needed to.

*Happiness is the real sense
of fulfillment that
comes from hard work.*

JOSEPH BARBARA



ORGANIZATION IN YOUR WORK AREA

Organization at work is a great tool to help us increase our productivity and keep our tasks and projects in order. However, becoming better organized means more than just keeping your pens and pencils in the right drawer. It's more important to develop good organizing habits and valuable techniques that will keep you on the right track in whatever you have to do at work.

KEEPING ITEMS WITHIN ARM'S REACH

When in your work space, design your work layout so that everything is within your arm's reach. We waste so much time having to go out of our way to go get a certain file or to stand by the copier. Generally, if you have to leave your work space to get something, you can become distracted or lose focus, which can interfere with your work and your level of productivity. So when you get to work each day, before you do anything else, reorganize your area so you have immediate access to everything, such as your computer, supplies and even files and folders. Taking time to do this at the beginning of the day will not only better organize your work space, but it will save so much time that could have been wasted throughout the day.

ONLY HAVE CURRENT PROJECTS ON YOUR DESK

You may have a variety of stacks of papers and projects on your desk, but the key is in knowing what is in them. Keeping your desk more organized by only keeping projects that you are currently working with, in your work area. Projects that you have finished should be filed away in the appropriate place, while projects that you haven't yet started should not be in the work area until you do. Having these projects in sight with your current projects can cause confusion and a lack of focus on unimportant details. Stay focused on current projects by keeping them on your immediate desk area, and don't allow anything else to encroach.

Questions to ask yourself when keeping projects on your desk:

- When does this need to be finished?
- Is it something that can be completed later?
- Has this already been completed?

ARRANGING YOUR DRAWERS

When you are organizing your different drawers at work, think about how each one functions in your everyday routine. What purpose do your desk drawers serve? How often do you use your filing cabinet drawers? Drawers that are within arm's reach, such as your desk drawers, should house items that you use often, but don't necessarily need every day. You want to ensure you have access to everything without a hitch, while not letting things clutter your desk workspace. Keep your filing cabinet

drawers organized by a certain filing system, whether it is by color labels or alphabetical sorting. However you decide to arrange and organize your office drawers, be sure to find a method that works for you and will help increase your ease with finding anything you may need.

ORGANIZE TO MATCH YOUR WORKFLOW

Every day you face a variety of tasks or projects to complete, so plan your day accordingly, and plan what you will need to have in order to complete these tasks. If you know you will not need your computer, arrange your workspace to utilize the areas around in and don't bother with turning it on. If you know you will need the copier or scanner all day, organize the supplies and space you will need to accompany that. When you organize your work area to match you current workflow, less time is wasted trying to move between different areas or side step certain supplies, and will increase your productivity throughout the day.

Tips to help organize with your workflow:

- Decide what tools you will need for the day
- Determine if additional supplies are needed
- Focus on that project or set of tasks for the day. Don't try to mix in other things.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Aaron was assigned to work on a company slideshow presentation for the next week in his office. When he came to work, he decided he would

need to reorganize his office in order to help him work better and complete the project on time. First, he removed all of his other projects off of his desk since he would not need to work on them for the next week or so. Then he went through his desk drawers and file cabinet to make sure he not only had the supplies he needed, but that they were easily accessible to him at all times. Finally when he sat down at his desk to work, he moved and rearranged everything he would need to be in arm's reach so he wouldn't have to get back up to find something. Now that everything was arranged to Aaron's office space was organized to his workflow, he knew he could complete the project without any problems.

*Start by doing what's
necessary; then do what's
possible; and suddenly you
are doing the impossible.*

CATHOLIC SAINT
FRANCIS OF ASSISI



TOOLS TO FIGHT PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is one of the leading causes of disorganization. As we've seen before, we can often make excuses to do it later for find various reasons why something can be put off until later. But once we've compiled our giant to do list and have decided what tasks should be done first, our next step, or steps, is to fight against procrastination and just do them. With the right tools and good habits, you'll be able to say good bye to procrastination sooner, rather than later.

EAT THAT FROG!

As Mark Twain says, *"Eat a live frog every morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."*

We all have that task we dread doing, whether it's at home doing the dishes or at work sending our email reports. Our normal plan of action is to put it off while completing various other tasks. Then when it's time to complete this unpleasant task, we either find a way to put it off or don't tackle it with full force. But Eat That Frog is a concept that says we should "eat the frog" first, or rather do our least favorite tasks first, and fully complete them before moving onto another project. When this job is

out of the way, we spend the rest of our time completing more favorable tasks, and revel in knowing that you don't have to return to the first one.

Eat That Frog Guideline:

1. The Frog – Identify your most important task first.
2. Complete this task first before you move on to anything else.
3. Eat the Frog - Continue with this task until it is completed.

REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

Even after you have set your mind to completing a task and checking it off of your to do list, the smallest distraction can make you lose focus and stop working. They can occur at home or at work, and often times we do not even register them as a distraction. When you are preparing to start a project or task, look around and evaluate what is in the area that could distract you. Turn off personal cell phones or devices or put a sign on your door asking for silence and to not disturb. Ensure everything you will need is organized with your workflow to reduce the need to get up and leave your area. When we eliminate these distractions that can make us lose our focus, we will see an increase in production and spend less time trying to complete the same project.

GIVE YOURSELF A REWARD

Rewards are a great way to keep ourselves motivated. After all, who doesn't want to earn a little treat after a job well done? The key is to only reward the good behavior, such as finishing a small task or completing a

whole project. If we jump to the reward too soon, we are only rewarding our negative behavior and are not helping to reduce procrastination. Start with small rewards when working on something, such as taking a break or getting something to snack on. We can reward ourselves with a bigger prize when the entire job is finished, such as going out with friends or doing something fun that we enjoy more.

Tips:

- Only give rewards for work done, not work promised.
- Start with small rewards before working up to bigger ones.
- Keep a visual reminder of what you've accomplished.

BREAK UP LARGE TASKS

Sometimes we think we have less to do because we have fewer items on our lists, only to realize they are larger than we realized and could become overwhelming. When we feel defeated by these larger tasks, they can lead to further procrastination. Instead, take this one large task and break it into smaller, more manageable tasks that can be completed more easily. If you have a 20 page slideshow due at work, break the project into separate page tasks, completing one or two at a time until it is all completed. If you have decided to clean out your entire garage, start by retrieving all of your donated items or clearing out trash items. When one task is done, you can move on to the next one until the entire job is done. Don't forget to take periodic breaks and stop to re-evaluate your progress.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

April has decided to use her day off to clean out her messy attic and hopefully reorganize the storage items she has in there. She left her cell phone downstairs and made a short list of everything that would need to be done in there in order for it to be finished. She groaned when she realized she would need to sweep and dust the entire area in order to help clean out all of the dirt. April decided she would do this task first so she could go ahead and get it over with. When she finished, she divided up the rest of the work in smaller, quicker tasks, such as removing boxes and cleaning out any trash items. After she had worked for a few hours and had completed several tasks on her list, she took a short break and got a snack. When she came back, she felt more energized and was able to finish the entire attic by the end of the day.

*Have a time and
place for everything,
and do everything in its
time and place, and you
will not only accomplish
more, but have far more
leisure than those who are
always hurrying.*

TRYON EDWARDS



ORGANIZING YOUR INBOX

If your email inbox is cluttered or unorganized, it can make it difficult to find the email or message you need or notice when you have a new one waiting. Many email systems have tools you can use to help sort and organize emails and appointments in order to go through them easier. When your emails are in order, you better able to stay on top of your incoming and outgoing mail and always have the information you may need.

SETTING DELIVERY RULES

Many email systems now allow you to create rules that you can apply to email being delivered to your inbox that can help you better sort and organize certain messages. These 'rules' use filters that you choose and will either flag/highlight an email for you or re-route it to another folder for you to access later. For example, any email from your manager's email address can be highlighted in yellow for immediate attention. Or if you have been speaking with a friend about adopting their new kitten, any email with the word 'kitten' can be re-routed to a folder with her name on it. These filters and rules can help you reorganize your long list of emails

and messages into appropriate folders and sections to help you access your information faster and with more ease.

FOLDER AND MESSAGE HIERARCHY

To better organize email messages, a good folder structure should be in place and ready to use. Once these are established, a folder and message hierarchy system can be put into place. This hierarchy system allows you to sort folders and messages by priority or importance and can be done in several different ways, such as using a color code or relocating items to the top of the inbox for better viewing. Establishing hierarchy among your many emails will help you identify the most important messages first and reduces the risk of you skimming over it to read and handle something less urgent.

Tips to consider when establishing inbox hierarchy:

- Sender of the message
- Urgent topics/subjects
- Upcoming deadlines or projects

DEAL WITH EMAIL RIGHT AWAY

Your inbox is not meant to be a storage area for your messages. When you receive an email, you don't necessarily have to respond to it right away, but the message should be filed away to an appropriate location to retrieve later. If it needs to be handled at the end of the week, re-file it to another folder that can be reopened later. If the email needs to be

addressed by someone else, forward to the appropriate party and remove from your inbox. If the email simply isn't needed, then delete it right away instead of holding onto it any longer. Taking a few more minutes to deal with the email once you open it will not only save you time in the long run, but it will help keep better track of emails that require your attention and which ones do not.

Ask yourself these questions when handling your emails:

- Does this email need immediate action?
- If not, when does it need to be addressed?
- Will you need this information at a later date?
- Does this email pertain to me or my department?

FLAG AND HIGHLIGHT IMPORTANT ITEMS

Important emails should not be forgotten or lost, so you can assign these email a flag or even highlight them in a different color to call attention to them in your inbox or subfolders. Flags can be used to remind you of an upcoming event or project, including meeting or deadlines. Various types of flag categories can be set up, so you can flag some message for a follow up while some can be flagged as an appointment reminder.

If you don't want to individually flag every message, highlights can also be set up to highlight messages from certain sender or that contain key words, such as 'meeting' or 'appointment'. For instance, all emails from your boss can be highlighted in red for urgency, but emails from your best

friend can be colored in blue for a later time. Flags and highlights can be used individually if desired or can be used together to work in sync and organize your growing inbox.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Gina sat down at her desk and opened her email. She was amazed at how many messages she had at one time, many of them about upcoming deadlines and correspondence from her boss. She decided she better sort through it and get it organized before she missed anything important. First, she created several folders and subfolders by order of importance that she could use to sort her messages. She deleted several emails that were no longer needed or did not pertain to her. With her remaining emails, Gina sorted them into the appropriate email folder, including “Emails from the Boss”, “Upcoming Meetings,” and “Projects”.

After she had her inbox almost clear, Gina set up several new delivery rules that would help her keep track of her emails, including highlighting meeting reminders in green and flagging all assignments and projects with a red flag. Any emails from unknown addresses were set up to go into her Spam folder. When she was finished Gina was finally able to find and read emails that actually needed her attention, instead of trying to find them among the mass amount of messages.

*There is a huge
stress with disorganization
and there is also a cost to
being disorganized.*

CAROLEE CANNATA



AVOID THE CAUSES OF DISORGANIZATION

Sometimes getting organized means more than just making sure everything has a place or that we check off our to-do list. Often times becoming organized is mainly about avoiding the things that can cause us to become disorganized, especially after we have already started the process of changing our ways. When we make ways to stay organized part of our regular habits, we won't have a need to give in to reasons for disorganization.

KEEPING EVERYTHING

We are all guilty of trying to keep things that we don't necessarily need. It's usually contributed to the thought of "Well I *might* need it one day". When we keep old or expired items and paperwork, we don't realize that this can actually contribute to further disorganization rather than helping us in the future. Although we feel we have to keep everything, we can actually throw out over half of our saved items or documents without consequence. Avoid building up the clutter, also known as hoarding, by examining what you are trying to hold on to and pin point its purpose in your office area. If it doesn't serve an immediate purpose, throw it out.

How do you determine if it needs to be kept?

- When was the last time I used or needed this?
- What purpose does this serve me?
- If I get rid of this, what will happen?
- Will I need this in the near future?
- If I get rid of this, can I access it later somewhere else (online, office copy, etc.)?

NOT BEING CONSISTENT

Repetition is the key to learning, and these repeated and consistent behaviors are the key to developing good habits. When in the process of getting organized, we set ourselves to-do lists and actions that we take to keep ourselves organized (such as sorting emails right away or keeping office supplies close by). When we become inconsistent, such as forgetting to turn off our cell phone before starting a project or just throwing the unopened mail on our desk one morning, we are leaving room to become disorganized again. After one slip, it becomes easier to forget what we have learned and begin to fall into our normal pit of excuses or procrastination. Once we have established good organizational habits, it is important to stick to them and be consistent in our actions.

NOT FOLLOWING A SCHEDULE

For many people, not sticking to some sort of routine or schedule can cause them to become disorganized and procrastinate. Ask yourself

why you need to follow a schedule, and what is that schedule meant to help you accomplish? A schedule can be simple and flexible, such as creating yourself a to-do list and sticking to it, or schedules can be more definite and set, such as outlining specific tasks and timelines. While schedules are not set in stone, they are supposed to provide a sense of structure when completing tasks, projects, and activities. If schedules are ignored or forgotten altogether, it can lead to wasted time management or prolonged duties.

BAD HABITS

Being organized is all about creating good habits that we can stick to in the long run. Unfortunately, we all have bad habits that can steer us away from getting on the right path. Habits such as leaving unused supplies on our desktop 'for later' or keeping every employer newsletter you receive 'to go through'. Sometimes we do not even recognize when we have developed a bad habit that is keeping us from becoming more organized. Take a look at some of your everyday actions and determine if you have, or are developing a bad habit that keeps you disorganized at home or at work. Once we discover the problem, we can work to correct our habits and change them for the better. By making slow, incremental changes, we begin to gain more confidence in ourselves and feel more empowered to kick bad habits once and for all.

Characteristics of a bad habit:

- Doesn't offer an immediate benefit
- Creates more work to do later

- Doesn't make us feel more confident
- Contributes to procrastination or disorganization

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Roberta decided to go see her friend, Charles, at his office. When she walked inside, she was amazed at the mess his office was in and how disorganized everything was. She asked how his office got this way, and he exclaimed that there wasn't a problem with it.

"You are so disorganized! I bet you don't get rid of anything and try to keep everything!" Roberta said.

"Only the things I think I'll need later." He answered. *"Besides, I started a new organization routine, but I haven't been able to do it every day."*

Roberta explained how keeping everything and not sticking with a routine can cause further disorganization. She offered to help him develop a plan to kick the bad habits and work on developing newer, better habits to get organized.

"Once you form better, more helpful habits, you'll be more organized in no time!" Roberta said.

*What it lies in our
power to do, it lies in our
power not to do.*

ARISTOTLE



DISCIPLINE IS THE KEY TO STAY ORGANIZED

Organization doesn't happen overnight and it is not an easy destination to get to. As we've said before, it takes hard work, discipline, and lots of good habits to keep on the path of good organization. This is why the process can seem overwhelming at first and seem like a real challenge, but it doesn't have to be impossible. With some of the following tips and techniques, we can feel more empowered to stay disciplined in your organization.

STAY WITHIN YOUR SYSTEMS

When we set our minds to become more organized, the first step is finding the right system that will help you reach that goal. Once you find one the system that works for you, the key is to keeping up the momentum to maintain that system. Over time, it is normal to need to re-evaluate or tweak your system in some way.

Develop a more updated system periodically based on your changing priorities, needs and to-do lists. When organizing your home or office, stay within the system that you've adapted so that your routines and actions are consistent and work together.

LEARN TO SAY NO

Often times we can become disorganized by taking on too many projects or activities, which can take a toll on our time management. It is important to learn the need to say 'no' when asked to help with a request. While you may feel the need or desire to help everyone that you can, realize that you can best serve others by sticking with the areas in which you have the most to offer and can do the most good. If you over-extend yourself and your skills, not only do many people miss out on the great things you have to offer, but it keeps you from feeling more confident and organized in your life.

Sample phrases for saying No:

- “No, thank you.”
- “Sorry but I am already committed to another project.”
- “That area is not one of my strengths.”
- “Thank you, but I am needed for (project/assignment) right now.”

HAVE ORGANIZATION BE PART OF YOUR LIFE

Organization doesn't happen every once in a while or when the occasion arises; it is something that is continued and carried out each day. In order to stay organized over time, we must make organization part of our everyday life. Organization is in everything we do, from daily activities such as sorting out documents, to more long term activities, such as reorganizing a department. When we practice these good habits and

helpful tips every day, we are making organization a regular thing in our lives and letting it help us build a better future for ourselves. Don't wait for things or tasks to clutter up your life before you decide it is time to get organized again.

PLAN FOR TOMORROW, TODAY

If you're waiting for the beginning of the following day to start your organization plan, chances are you are already headed to disorganization. Start today and make a plan for what you want to do in your life, including on a daily, weekly, monthly and even a yearly basis. When you determine what you want (such as becoming more organized!), you can make plans today to reach those goals in the future. Make a to-do list and plan a time to tackle it instead of waiting for the 'urge' to do it comes along. Make plans on how to motivate yourself to keep going and plan rewards for productive behaviors. Set deadlines for yourself and stick to them. When we plan ahead and manage your time effectively, the stress and anxiety of becoming more organized will feel much lighter and a lot less like a chore.

Tips:

- Make short and long term to-do lists.
- Plan ways to execute each list.
- Find ways to keep yourself motivated to stay on task.
- Don't forget to plan deadlines or plan to meet those already in place.

PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

“I finally did it!” exclaimed Joshua.

Joshua had finally organized his office in preparation of starting on a new client account in a few weeks. He knew he would need a clean and organized office to work in, so he realized he needed to take care of it sooner rather than later. Once it was ready, he made a daily and weekly to-do list that he must do in order to keep it organized, such as arranging his desk area and putting away any tools or supplies he used. He decided to stay with his current systems for several weeks, or several meetings or projects, and then see how they worked in his favor. Then he would see if anything needed to be changed or altered.

As he was finishing up, Joshua received a call from his friend, Corey, asking if he wanted to help him paint his garage this weekend.

“No thanks” Joshua said. *“I’ve got to get my office and myself in order if I’m going to be ready to take on this account on time!”*

*Life begins at the end of
your comfort zone.*

NEALE DONALD WALSCH

CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **Marilyn Paul:** A large part of getting organized is learning to act from a place of self-esteem; knowing what we want and don't want to do, knowing what we can and can't do, and taking good care of ourselves.
- **A. A. Milne:** Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.
- **Marva Collins:** Excellence is not an act but a habit. The things you do the most are the things you will do the best.
- **Vaclav Havel:** Vision is not enough; it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps. We must step up the stairs.



Rick Chisholm made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



Tala Chisholm is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.

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