



<http://www.bakersfield.com/business/story/2479833p-2527526c.html>

From clutter to clean

By ERIN WALDNER, Californian staff writer
e-mail: ewaldner@bakersfield.com

Saturday January 18, 2003, 04:05:04 PM

Can you find something at your desk in 30 seconds or less?

If not, your workspace may need some organizing.

You're not alone if you're swimming in a sea of paperwork.

"We have paper flow out of our ears," said Janice Kemmer, a professional organizer in Chino. "We don't call it the information age for nothing."

It's estimated that modern professionals receive more information in one day than people in the 19th century did in a whole year.

Lynn Gross-Cerf, a San Jose-based professional organizer, agreed that it's extremely common for people to be unorganized at work. The reason, she said, is that most people don't have infrastructures or systems in place to support the information they receive.

Why bother getting organized at work? Why does it matter if your in-box outweighs your out-box?

"You save time, space and money," Kemmer said. "You can't go to the store and buy those things."

Eliminating time usually spent looking for something at your desk gives you more time to be creative at work, Kemmer said.

Also, an organized desk "reflects on you as an individual and as an organization," added Vic Ryberg, an assistant manager of learning and development at State Farm Insurance Co.'s regional office in Bakersfield.

So if your resolution for 2003 is to get organized at work, here are some professional tips:

* Before you start organizing, get yourself mentally prepared, suggested Jessica Duquette, a professional organizer in the Los Angeles area. Ask yourself, why are you doing this? If you're doing it for someone else, you're more likely to resist organizing.

Make sure you're "signed on to the process" before you start organizing, Duquette said.

* The next step, Duquette said, is to ask yourself what you want to achieve by organizing your work space. Do you want more space or more time? Do you want less stress in your life? This will help motivate you to get organized, Duquette said.

* When you're ready to organize, set aside two or three hours when you can focus on the task. Maybe go into the office on a Saturday to get the job done.

* Initially, you might want to go through your paperwork and see what can be thrown away, said Gross-Cerf, who refers to this as the "vacuum approach" to organizing. She said if you have a file drawer collecting dust, chances are most of the stuff inside is probably out of date and can be tossed.

"Now you've got some space," Gross -Cerf said.

* Duquette also supports purging your papers. Bring in a few bags or boxes and label them "recycle," "goes to someone else," "garbage" and "file." Then go through your papers piece by piece and separate them accordingly.

This might be enough organizing for one day, Duquette said.

Come back later and go through the bags or boxes. File the items that need to be filed, for instance. Toss or recycle the stuff that you don't need anymore.

* Don't buy any organizing tools, such as drawer dividers or special shelves, until you get through the purging step, Duquette said. You don't want to buy something you don't need.

To avoid having to make returns, measure your workspace before you buy anything for it.

* Put a paper flow system in place. Kemmer said a piece of paper has a birth, a life and a death. The birth is when the mail arrives. The life is when you open the mail and deal with it. Maybe you put it in a reference file or an action file. The death of the paper is when you trash it or refer it to a colleague. Many people don't have a paper flow system, Kemmer said, so their paperwork is scattered.

* Look at your workspace as a piece of real estate with several levels, Gross-Cerf said. The first level is the top of your desk, where you should put things you use on a daily basis, as well as sentimental items.

Gross-Cerf cautioned against displaying too many pictures or knick-knacks. Otherwise, you'll be adding clutter to your desk. The second level is drawers near where you sit.

These should contain items you need on a weekly basis. The third level is a place you might need to move a little bit to get to, like a bookcase or another workspace. This holds items you need on a monthly basis. The fourth level, a place you may have to walk to, contains temporary projects or projects you work on now and then. The fifth level of real estate is a place where you can store things you rarely use, like past income taxes. Box these things up and inventory them so when the time comes, you can find what you're looking for.

* "Be efficient. You want things within easy reach," said Ryberg, adding that a lot of organizing plays into ergonomics. "You don't want to have to stretch for something."

* Don't clutter your workspace with a lot of boxes.

* Put away confidential items. Don't bring valuables to work.

* Use color-coding. You can find something 40 percent faster if you color code your files, Gross-Cerf said. Personalize your colors. You might want to mark your financial files with green tabs, for instance, because you associate green with money.

* When organizing, "think about what makes sense to you," Gross-Cerf said.

Organizing is very personal, agreed Duquette. Don't be jealous of a co-worker who's more organized than you.

What works for him or her may not work for you.

* Ultimately, what you want to achieve is a lean, mean workspace, Duquette said.

* To stay organized, take a few minutes before you leave work every night to clean your desk. You'll be able to get to work right away when you arrive at work the next morning.

Copyright © 2003, [The Bakersfield Californian](#) | [Email the Webmaster](#)
[Privacy Policy Statement](#) | [Terms of Use](#)



[Lightspeed Systems](#)