

Spring Cleanup

Reduce excess clutter and improve time management to maximize your business.

By Joanne Eglash

If you find yourself frequently searching through a disorderly desk or scattered storage space for an important document or special merchandise request, chances are you need to better organize your time and space. A person with a messy or cluttered workspace spends, on average, 1-1/2 hours per day searching for items, or approximately 7-1/2 per work-week, according to "Time Management Facts And Figures" (www.balance4time.com), written by personal productivity and time management expert Donald Wetmore.

The good news: Getting organized isn't impossible. And the even better news: It can improve self-esteem while saving time and money. For example, once you get organized, you can stop financing the locksmith's new car with your need for replacement office keys.

"Being organized is not a skill you are born with; it can be learned, and the investment can transform the way you live and work," says Ann T. Sullivan, owner and director of ATS Organizing Services. Begin by evaluating the best use of your time. It is only when you have identified what it is that you are trying to accomplish, both in the short term (in the next hour) and in life, that you can maximize your time.

Take Five

Barbara Hemphill breaks organization into the following:

- ◆ Design your vision.
- ◆ Eliminate excuses.
- ◆ Commit time.
- ◆ Select tools.
- ◆ Maintain success.



Sande Nelson, a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO), suggests that you think of time management as "the key to having freedom." She recommends making a "to do" list daily, but to keep it realistic, noting only the tasks that can actually be done in one day. A scheduling calendar is also very helpful. This will enable you to keep track of appointments and data while freeing your mind to focus on customers' needs.

Once you have found a method for organizing your time, the next step is deciding which items in your store and office are truly important to the success of your business. The path to a clutter-free work environment begins by overcoming what some call the "pack-rat syndrome," or fear that if you throw something away, you just might need it, whether it's within the next month or in the next year.

Consider the following: "You can keep everything you want to if you are willing to pay the price: time, space, money and energy," says Barbara Hemphill, CEO of Hemphill Productivity Institute and co-author of *Living Clutter-Free Forever*. "Since all of us have limits on each of

those areas, we have to make choices about which things are worth the effort."

Take, for example, a one-year-old grocery receipt. "Recognize that if you have not used it, or even remembered it was there over the last year, its value is probably not very high," says Nelson of NAPO. "There is something very rewarding in throwing things out or giving them away. Indulge in the luxury of giving away the things you don't need or use."

For those items essential to your store, proper organization and aesthetic arrangement can make your space seem twice as large. Sullivan of ATS suggests the following steps for cleaning up your office area.

- ◆ Develop a filing system alphabetically by category for all your reference materials, including financial documents. (If your office space is limited, invest in four-drawer vertical file cabinets.)
- ◆ Create a desktop filing system for action files, such as phone calls to make and bills to pay.
- ◆ Process and route paperwork to the appropriate destination daily to avoid overflow.



Passing The Test

If any of the following scenarios sound familiar, you may suffer from fear or lack of organization:

◆ You haven't seen the surface of your desk in more than a year, but worry that if you toss out even one receipt or letter, you might need it ... someday. . . .

◆ Your store is immaculate, and customers often comment on how easily they can find the dancewear and accessories they're seeking. What they don't know: Your home office contains more clutter than your grandmother's attic (example: the left-over promotional items from Christmas 1994).

◆ You've considered renting storage space for all the excess items, like those three rusty letter openers that you can't bear to part with.

◆ Hang up a bulletin board for information that you frequently need to access, such as phone lists and shipping information.

◆ Place a shelf about 9" below the ceiling to store merchandise samples or materials that you don't often need.

Once you have tackled the office space, you can now focus attention on the most important area—the selling floor. Remember to peruse your store with the mindset of a customer. Take note of how merchandise is displayed, hung and grouped together. Is it easy to find a certain size, color or manufacturer? Will certain displays prompt impulse buys?

Proper organization will not only ease your life, but will raise the standards of your store. Start space and time management today for a smoother business tomorrow. ■

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