

Categorize to Minimize Office Clutter

by Vali G. Heist

Setting up your office space, whether in your home or at your workplace, is all about being organized. When you are organized, you are able to focus and be more productive on the highest priorities. Michael Woolery, author of *Seize the Day*, indicates that studies have shown that some executives will pick up a single piece of paper from their desk 30 to 40 times before acting on it. Who can afford to waste that much time?

Being able to categorize minimizes mental and physical clutter and saves precious time. You can simplify paper management in your workplace by using the "Five Times Three" method: five categories in three different groups. Here's how to break it down:

Five Incoming Documents

Most paper comes into your workplace in one of five ways:

1. Paper: all "snail mail" and papers from work, travel, meetings and workshops.
2. E-mail: in your e-mail inbox or printed out on paper.
3. Voice mail: handwritten from a phone message.
4. Verbal requests: from the boss, co-workers and clients that end up on paper.
5. Your ideas: your own projects and ideas that you place on paper.

The Five Decisions

Make one of five choices for all incoming documents:

1. Discard or delete: the basic premise to staying organized. Trust your judgment: do you really have time to read this or to take care of it?
2. Delegate or forward: can or should you delegate this to a co-worker? It may not be done your way, but it's one less thing on your desk.
3. Take immediate action: if it takes 60 seconds or less to complete, do it now. This is another basic premise to staying organized.
4. To be filed: no action required, but action will be needed for future reference. File in a simple filing system for easy retrieval.
5. Needs follow-up: additional work necessary (see below).

Five Follow-Up Categories

Keep follow-up documents in a place off your desk but very close by in a separate drawer – called a "Control Point Drawer." These are the papers from your desk, but instead of being horizontal and stacked up, they are fluid files, located off your desk and organized for easy retrieval. The point is to get them off your desk and off your mind so you can focus on one project at a time.

1. 1-31 files: file documents according to the day it must be done in the current month. Pull that paperwork each day to work on it.
2. January-December files: file documents for long-term projects. This includes reading material. When the next month comes up, put them in 1-31.
3. Boss, significant other, meeting and "other" files: when you think of issues for the boss, your significant other, a regular meeting (weekly, monthly, etc.), or other categories you designate, put them in these files to refer to at a later time.
4. Casual reading material: create a portable version of the "this would be nice if I had time" reading file. Grab it when you can read it on the go.
5. Waiting for response file: file documents here when you are waiting for a response from someone. Clean out daily and file in 1-31 if necessary.

Handling incoming documents is the start to successful organization of your workplace. Being able to focus gets your work done more quickly so you can move on to what's really important: time for yourself, your family and your friends.

Vali Heist is a Professional Organizer for homeowners and businesses and is a Certified GO System Trainer for businesses. GO simply means 'get organized'. Contact her for more information on attending a workshop or having a GO System training session in your workplace at 610-777-9640 or thecluttercrew@aol.com.



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