



Ten Easy Organizing Steps for More Focus, Time, & Success

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With a shrinking workforce, an expanding workload, and change coming at warp speed, you need an edge – some kind of advantage to keep up with the demands of your career and to stay ahead of the competition. You may have looked for a solution that would permit you to be more productive and profitable with less time and effort, and without sacrificing the enjoyment of your friends and family, recreation, and life itself, only to decide it is an impossible dream.

Well guess what? It's not a dream...and the solution is so simple that most people overlook it. Fortunately, a ten-step solution exists that every business leader, manager, and professional can master for greater personal and professional effectiveness.

Order is our society's foundation and the underpinning from which all else emanates. In fact, order is so basic to our way of life that we often take it for granted. Just as countries in chaos strive to restore order so as to build their nations, individuals must instill order and organization in their lives to thrive and prosper.

The question is, how do you do that? The answer: You organize your work, your play, your thinking, and your being. Organization is essential for



building and sustaining a great life. It is a fundamental survival skill and, when maintained, it is a distinct competitive advantage.

Test Your Level of Organization

Running your life effortlessly requires organizing proficiency. No substitute for this skill exists. While you may have an administrative assistant to help you from 9-5, he or she cannot be with you 24/7. If you're uncertain of your own level of organization, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you often misplace keys, files, important documents, or other items?
- Do you have piles of paper scattered on your desk?
- Do you consistently miss deadlines without someone reminding you of them?
- Do you run late for meetings or miss appointments?

- Do you let opportunities pass you by?
- Do you regularly feel overwhelmed and overworked?

If you answered “yes” to any of the previous questions, then an organizing makeover will substantially improve your life.

A Lack of Organization Comes with a High Price

Clutter is chaos. And if you have physical clutter, then you likely have mental clutter as well. Such clutter and chaos cost you more than you may think. Clutter zaps your time, drains your energy, prevents you from being your best, and causes stress. In fact, opportunities may be parading in front of you right now, and you may not recognize or pursue them because mental and physical clutter blocks your view or consumes your time.

Eventually, this clutter results in strained relationships and diminished work capacity.

But hold on...you needn't feel embarrassed if you are organizationally challenged. Organizing competence is not a matter of instinct, but of education. Unfortunately, few schools include organizational skills as part of their curriculum. Therefore, you must take the initiative to learn it yourself.

The Benefits of Organization

Good organizing skills can transform your life in a short period of time because you can apply them to all parts of your daily routine. For example, you can organize your work area, your files and other important documents, your computer, your briefcase, your calendar, as well as projects, telephone calls, meetings, your home, and your car. You can improve virtually anything in your life by organizing it.

The benefits of organization are well

worth the effort because you will be more focused, have more time and energy, be more productive and profitable, have more control over your life, and be happier. In fact, no downside to organizing exists!

How to Get Started

The easiest way to organize your life is to start with something tangible and then move on to organizing the intangibles. Your office is a good place to start because it is tangible; it is where you spend the majority of your waking hours and where productivity and profits are at stake. Use the following ten steps to begin:

1) Identify eight major categories of items you keep in your office/work space.

Be sure to select no more than eight categories, otherwise you will find it difficult to remember what category an item belongs in. Designate each category with a name that has meaning for you and that represents a broad grouping of similar things. The following is an example of an effective grouping strategy:

- Operational – company strategy and action plans, policies and procedures, passwords, and phone numbers.
- Financial & legal - budget reports, purchase orders, coupons, receipts, and contracts.
- Supplies – writing instruments, paper clips, stapler, ruler, scissors, paper, forms, and business cards.
- Records – client, employee and vendor files.
- Product materials – brochures, product guides, and portfolios.
- Resources – tapes, articles, magazines and books.
- Projects – past, current, and future ideas.
- Tools of the trade – things

unique to your profession.

2) Physically sort every item in your workspace into the eight categories identified in step one.

Collect eight large boxes and mark each with the name of a category. Then, sort the most visible clutter first. Pick up each piece of paper, each file, and each item in your workspace one at a time, and put it in the appropriate box. Next, sort the items concealed in your desk drawers, file cabinets, and/or overhead bins. Again, sort one item at a time until EVERYTHING in your office is in one of the eight boxes.

3) Eliminate unnecessary items.

This is the most important and often difficult step. Challenge yourself to keep only the essentials and get rid of the rest. Define the criteria you will use to cull each category. For example, you may want to dispose of anything you have not accessed for a year or more, discard all broken items, and return all extra supplies. Most of the unnecessary papers will probably go into the shredder. However, if there are some things you want to give to others in your office, donate to charity, or send to storage, make a separate pile for each one. Then, when you're finished sorting, move 'em out!

4) Arrange the items in each category.

Go through the materials in each category one by one and put them in order. You can put each category in alphabetical order, date order, subject matter order, or number order, or use any system that corresponds to the way you work. Just be consistent.

5) Make a rough sketch of your workspace and appoint a place to store each category of item.

Ask yourself three questions before deciding where to store each item:

- Where is the most convenient place to store this category?

For example, if you need access to this material while on the phone, the ideal arrangement is to put it in a container you can reach while talking on the phone.

- How frequently will I need access to this category? The less you access the material the farther away from your desk you can store it.
- Will the volume of material in this category easily fit into the container I have available? If not, consider another storage option.

6) Purchase storage units for any leftover categories of materials.

To best utilize your space, think vertical. A wide variety of vertical storage systems are available at organizing and office supply stores.

7) Create an outline or table of contents for each storage area.

List the major categories, as well as any subcategories. Once you're in the habit of putting everything back into its assigned space you won't need to refer to the outline.

8) Place each category of item into its new space in your office.

Once you have completed this step, stand back and admire your work. You will feel energized by a new sense of control and accomplishment.

9) Spend 5 to 10 minutes at the end of each day putting all materials away into their assigned space.

When you do, you won't dread walking into your workspace each morning, and you won't waste time looking for materials. Another benefit is that people who visit your office won't wonder if the material they leave with you will end up lost in a heap somewhere.

10) Repeat this entire process bi-annually, annually or whenever

you take on new assignments.

Remember, organizing is not a one-time project. It is a lifelong process and habit, requiring a few minutes of your time every day.

Endless Possibilities

You can use the described organizing technique to organize any space within your workplace or home. Simply change the names of the eight major categories to apply to the specific materials you will be organizing. If you prefer collaborative projects, you can always seek the services of an Organizing Coach, who has the expertise to guide and support you through your organizational makeover.

Organize Today!

Effective organization enhances your sense of control and competence, and it increases your energy and

productivity levels – all of which are prerequisites for greater career success and profitability. Now that you have mastered the process of organizing your workspace, you can move on to other areas of your life. Consider all of your daily activities as potential targets for increased organization and simplicity, and start improving your life today with the organizing skills you have learned. You'll quickly find that the effort is well worth the reward.

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Pam is a respected authority on personal effectiveness. She has mentored hundreds of executives, managers, and professionals over the last three decades. Now, through her business, Smart WorkLife Solutions, she is helping individuals at home and at work to declutter their space, their schedules, and their lives. As a result, clients have more balance, a more

focused approach to work and play, guilt-free time for themselves, and live their best life every day.

Pam also speaks to associations and business audiences on "decluttering" and "strategies to eliminate stress from the inside out."

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