

Taming the Messy Monster: Bring Order to Your World

Order relates to your level of organization: your ability to sort, filter, and process information effectively. It also involves your ability to find what you want when you want it, and how tidy your work area looks -- especially to the people who matter. Here are a few ideas to help you control the paper, email, reading material, and inputs that flow into your office.

1. **Realize that some people aren't born more organized than others.** Understand that organization is a skill that can be learned, just like riding a bike. Getting organized is a process of trial, error and persistence, but you can master it if you're serious about it.
2. **Keep a clutter-free work surface.** You don't have to be creative *and* disorganized, if you're willing to learn and the pain is bad enough. No matter what you've seen on coffee cups, a clean desk is NOT a sign of an empty mind.
3. **Know how to organize "pending" items requiring future action.** Create a tickler file, an indispensable system that will remind you which papers require your action today, and allow you to forget the rest until their time has come.
4. **Maintain orderly and organized files,** so you can find essential information when you need it. If you've ever taken more than three minutes to find anything you need, then it's high time to reorganize.
5. **Sort, process, and store incoming information quickly and easily.** Every piece of paper, email, voicemail, and fax that you get is simply a piece of information. There are only six things that you can do with any piece of information: discard, delegate, do, date, drawer or delete (the 6-D system).
6. **Discard information quickly and easily.** Don't be a packrat. If you doubt you'll ever use or read something, don't be afraid to toss it.
7. **Touch paper only once.** Be very decisive, and have a home for each type of information. Sort it using the 6-D System, decide immediately where each item belongs, and put it away.
8. **Avoid using sticky notes or scraps of paper to record messages or tasks.** Temporary notes should be for temporary things, like writing down a number you'll use only once, or marking comments in a document. Consolidate your system using phone logs and organizers.

9. **Know the contents of every cabinet, drawer, and storage space in your home and office.** The only way to do this is to go through every item you own and give away, put away, toss, or store it. This is an effective way to "poison the packrat" and complete projects that have gone undone for too long.
10. **Have a systematic plan to stay organized.** Staying organized requires ongoing practice and planning. The most effective way to control clutter is to say no -- to new tasks, belongings, magazine subscriptions, whatever.

It's critical that you learn to organize everything associated with your work. Not only does a messy office make it more difficult to find what you need when you need it, it's a career deterrent: people with messy work areas are less likely to get promoted. Remember, perception is reality these days. Leave your office messy all the time, and your career may stall. And you still won't be able to find what you're looking for!

© 2009 Laura Stack. Laura Stack is a personal productivity expert, author, and professional speaker who helps busy workers Leave the Office Earlier® with Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. She is the president of The Productivity Pro®, Inc., a time management training firm specializing in productivity improvement in high-stress organizations. Since 1992, Laura has presented keynotes and seminars on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is the bestselling author of three works published by Broadway Books: *The Exhaustion Cure* (2008), *Find More Time* (2006) and *Leave the Office Earlier* (2004). Laura is a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, and Day-Timers®, Inc and has been featured on the CBS Early Show, CNN, and the New York Times. Her clients include Cisco Systems, Sunoco, KPMG, Nationwide, and 3M. To have Laura speak at your next event, call 303-471-7401. Visit www.TheProductivityPro.com to sign up for her free monthly productivity newsletter.