

GETTING ORGANIZED

“Nothing is easier than being busy and nothing more difficult than being effective.”

- R. Alec Mackenzie

With all the day planners, computer programs and seminars around these days, you may be wondering why on earth you still cannot seem to get yourself organized. Even if you have the most elaborate planner possible, it alone cannot transform you into an organized person. You need to develop some basic skills, and using the following tips will help you get started.

- Use a planning system. Although it is not everything, it is a great start. Whether you purchase a pre-made planner or develop your own system, have an outline for daily, weekly, monthly and yearly calendars. Then, use it. List all your commitments when they are scheduled. A planner does not do much good sitting in your closet.
- Paper flow - touch once and end it! Whether it is mail at home, at work, or in the SOC, you should not touch it more than once. If it is a bill, pay it. If it is something being routed through your department, look over it and pass it on to the next person. If it cannot be filed or passed on, throw it away! Do not create new piles.
- Purchase a notebook. If your planning system does not have an “Ideas” section, break down and spend that hard-earned \$.65 for a small memo pad or notebook that will fit in your bag. Every time you have an idea – a paper topic, a phone call you need to make, what to buy on your next trip to WalMart – record it in this notebook. It is much easier to keep track of than millions of sticky notes, napkins and paper scraps that you find to write on!
- Clean your desk (and your head!). Before sitting down to work on a paper or project, clear everything off your desk or table. It is amazing how a clutter-free workspace can lead to a clear mind!
- Just say no. Do not let yourself be bogged down by trivial tasks and requests. It is OK to say no if it will save you time and sanity.
- Make a to-do list. Before you go to bed at night or when you get up in the morning, make a to-do list of all the items you want to accomplish that day. Prioritize the list in order of importance, then do them in order.
- Routine does not equal boredom. Set up a daily routine whenever possible and stick to it. If your most productive time of the day is early morning, set aside 7-9 a.m. to do homework. You will be amazed at how much you can accomplish in a short, interruption-free period.
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Break addictions. Do you check your email seven times a day? Play computer solitaire until 4 a.m.? Set limits for yourself. Only check your email once per day. Allow yourself to play one hour of solitaire if you finish that big paper.

- Why avoid it? Often we have tasks that we know must get done, but for some reason we think if we put them off long enough, they will do themselves. Identify these items and determine why you put them off: are they difficult? Unpleasant? Unrewarding? Look for ways to make the tasks more enjoyable or at least bearable (scrubbing the floor isn't so bad if you crank up the stereo!). If all else fails, you can use the "get it over with" attitude and jump in to accomplish it.
- Organize your group. If your group is in need of help in the area of organization, bring in someone to give a presentation on tips to get organized. Another effective technique would be to instruct each person to bring in three ideas or tips that help them stay organized personally and share them all with the group.
- Control interruptions. Maybe you think you are unorganized or can't complete tasks because of interruptions that are out of your control. If that is your angle, you need to remember that most interruptions are in your control. Every time you don't communicate that you are busy, you are making the decision to be interrupted.
- Set goals. Write down goals you have for your personal, educational and professional life. Now look over your commitments listed in your daily planner. Which ones are not helping you achieve your goals? Consider whether they are truly worth your time.

Don't think becoming an organized person must be an overnight metamorphosis. Take it a step at a time – each step will carry you further than you think.

Reference:

Alexander, R. (1992). Commonsense Time Management. NY: AMACOM.

Wilson, S.B. (1994). Goal-Setting. NY: AMACOM.

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