

Clutter bugs trip over resolutions

Inside Tucson Business January 2, 2005



Anyone who tells you they know where everything is in their cluttered office is fooling two people – you and themselves. Sure, anyone can pile up clutter in the middle of a big push on a tight deadline. If that is the case, the clutter will

disappear as soon as the deadline is over. The diehards keep their clutter until the office or the employee physically moves out of the space.

Take a stroll around your workspace and you'll see the offenders right away – you may even be one! So what's the problem with a cluttered disorganized space? The main problem in a disorganized environment is that there is no space for new things – ideas, projects, directions – to enter. Also, it is impossible to manage time well. Studies show that workers in disorganized spaces spend 40% of their time looking for things and 20% of their time regenerating pieces of information they “misplaced.”

At this time of the year, many of us resolve to get organized. Most will give up around February and be in a hopeless heap by April. There is no need to ask those who have always been neat and organized – clutter bugs lack their gene and there's no compensating. We need the experience of those who have clutter tendencies and have mastered those tendencies. I asked my clients who used to be disorganized and who now manage well, “How did you do it?” We also asked Jill Janis, Principal Consultant and professional Organizer. She as well as my clients offered these best practices guaranteed to work for even the most hardcore clutter bug:

1. Start slowly by taking action on every single paper on your desk, in your piles, in the drawers, in the closets – do one area a day even if it is just one drawer or one pile – go through it and make decisions on every piece of paper!
2. Pick up the paper and decide what to do with it – file it in storage boxes, in a current file, put in a recycle box or throw it away.
3. If you don't know which file to put it in, create a new file.
4. Throw or give away unneeded items – that includes the big stacks of unread magazines.

To the truly disorganized, the task seems impossible but by doing a little bit each day you will soon be organized. Once you have a system, it is amazingly simple, even for the organizationally challenged, to keep it that way.

The belief that it is the sign of creativity to have a disorganized space is a rationalization. What is true is that in order to have new ideas and to be creative, you need a vacuum – you need space around you. It is so exhilarating to get rid of the mess – you will have new energy and be more creative.

Papers are the biggest challenge for most of us. The best practice that my clients find useful is to maintain a container for shredding. Many files and papers are confidential and they cannot just be recycled. Often they clutter files because of the disposal issues. There are two needs: to have papers shredded and to KNOW they are properly shredded. Along with the growth of identity theft is the growth of companies that come to your office and shred your papers, files, etc. giving you the option of watching the document destruction through glass panels on the truck.

If all else fails, hire a personal assistant and have an expert like Jill Janis to train him or her to keep you organized. One of my clients, who does not want to be identified in print as a clutter bug, said, “Janis helped me set up a system that works. Two years later, and with minimal help from my assistant, I am maintaining my organizational goals – in January and throughout the year.”

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