CONQUERING THE PAPER PILE-UP

How to sort, organize, file and store every piece of paper in your home or office.

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Main Theme

Millions of people are awash in a sea of paper and are looking for simple solutions to this time consuming fact of life.

The answer lies in:

1. Developing an effective paper handling system that allows you to process paper as it comes in, before it can become a problem for you.

2. Maintaining creative and efficient ways of organizing and storing all paperwork.

3. Once you're organized, keeping a system in place and in good working order.

If you control your paperwork, you can be more productive and reduce the stress of forever facing mountains of paperwork. Your overall efficiency can be vastly improved.

Part 1 - A Paper Handling System

There are only five actions you can take with any new piece of paper that comes to hand.

You can;

- Do it.

- Pay it.

- Read it.

- File it.

- Throw it away.

A good paper handling system will encourage you to put paper in the proper place immediately when it comes into your hands.

You need to create a work place geared towards the easy flow of paperwork into any of the five categories listed above. This can be achieved equally efficiently in either an office or a home setting.

You also need an effective filing system for any paperwork you decide to file for the future. Your system should include;

- Action files.

- Tickler or due date files.

- Project files.

- Chronological files.

- Permanent files.

- Archival files.

- Pending files.

Part 2 - Paper from A to Z

Suggestions on how to handle specific items of common paperwork are listed in alphabetical order.

There are a number of creative ways to track paperwork so it doesn't become a problem. You need a simple system that is effective, but that won't require a lot of time or capital to implement.

Part 3 - Keeping Paper In Its Place

Once you have developed a paper processing system, and an effective filing system, you can follow a few simple guidelines to keep up-to-date with incoming paperwork.

This process involves:

1. Sort mail immediately when it is received.

2. Overcome the desire to hoard paper.

3. Be realistic about your reading.

4. Don't create paper heaps.

5. Set priorities on paperwork.

6. Quit procrastinating.

7. Avoid the urge to photocopy.

8. Never use files as dumping grounds.

9. Keep it simple.

10. Be selective about what you keep.

11. Purge paper collections regularly.

12. Don't let paper build up to major proportions.

Introduction

We are in the grips of an Information Age, and paper is being produced at a faster rate now than ever before. We are literally bombarded with pieces of paper from all directions demanding our immediate attention. Paper is the vehicle that delivers information for a majority of people, and even the advent of computers has served to increase rather than decrease our uses of paper.

With the volume of paper that comes into everyone's personal and professional lives, there is the danger that we can develop attitudes that paper should be piled rather than filed, and that every piece of paper is of utmost importance and should be hoarded at all costs. Taken to extremes, these beliefs can lead to a form of information anxiety, in which the need to know information far outweighs the benefits obtained by applying the information already gathered.

The common sense solution is to develop an effective system for handling paperwork in our lives. This doesn't need to be complex, only effective. If it works well in the office or work place, it should also be flexible enough to work in the home environment where paper can be just as much of a problem.

Preparation

When you have decided to put your paper work handling house in order, the first step is to prepare to attack the problem. The steps are;

1. Set aside a block of time which you can devote to the task without interruptions. Once you pause for a minute, you will probably never get back into it so concentrate on this task alone.
2. Make a mental promise to stick with any heap you are working on until completed. Otherwise, you'll end up shuffling paper from one heap to another all day.
3. Don't take any phone calls, don't make any.
4. Don't meet any visitors or watch TV or read a magazine article during the time you have set aside.
5. Don't snack while working.
6. Confront your fears right at the start. Hoarding paper can be mentally exhausting and can get in the way of your success. Give up the need to become a self contained library in the quest for excellence.

The System

The paper processing system is a common sense approach, based on the fact that there are actually only five things you can do with any piece of paperwork.

You can;

- Do it.
- Pay it.
- Read it.
- File it.
- Throw it away.

The Work place

To make the system work, you need to have everything close at hand so that you can instantly action each piece of paper that comes to hand. In the context of the system;

1. TO DO.

   You need somewhere to put important pieces of paper that you will need to action. This may be a "TO DO" basket on your desk or an "ACTION" file in a desk or file cabinet. The important thing is not what you use, but that you have a designated place to put every piece of paper in this category. If you regularly have a large volume of active paperwork, you might set aside a drawer in a filing cabinet. Once again, the important thing is to have one location.

2. TO PAY.

   You need one location for bills to be paid. The same rules apply as for the action paper - make it as large or as small as required but have a designated location. For small to moderate volume, a second basket on your desk might be appropriate. Larger volumes may require a drawer in a filing cabinet.

3. TO FILE.

   At the very least, you will need a two drawer filing cabinet for the filing, and many people require multiple filing cabinets. However, as filing is usually done at suitable times rather than constantly, you should also have a box, basket or other container close at hand in your workspace for paper that needs to be filed later. Above all, don't scatter filing paper amongst other types of paperwork. Put this type of paperwork into a designated location so it is ready for filing when you have the time, the urge or the need.

4. TO READ.

   This often includes magazines, technical reports and other background information. As for your filing paperwork, have one clearly marked location into which all reading material is stored. If this is a basket, you can then pick it up and take it with you when you go home or anywhere you may have some time for reading.

5. TO DUMP.

   Your paper processing system can only work effectively if you have a rubbish bin or bag ready for the dumping of any paperwork. Without this, you are tempted to hold on to far more material than you should. A convenient rubbish container encourages you to get rid of surplus paper.

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