ORIENTATION – what do we mean by that?

For our purposes we will define organization as: arranging in a regular systematic order, or acting directly to produce a minimum of waste, expense or effort.

Organization is a learned skill set. Organization isn’t something you are born with or not born with.

Learning organizational skills will not make you less busy.

Learning organizational skills will help you be more productive.

Top three benefits to being organized:

1. Time – when you are organized you aren’t spending time in clutter, you can spend time doing what you need to be doing.

2. Money – clutter and disorganization waste time which leads to monetary loss. Less productivity = less reward.

3. Health – organization removes physical and mental clutter.

   Like learning to drive a car, organization can become automatic or transparent, but first you need to spend time having your learner’s permit!

   You need to practice the skill of organization.

1st tenet of how we are going to proceed: Less is more. We have too much. This means both we have too much information and we have too much stuff.

2nd tenet: Mess doesn’t exist for us. We are either in a state of organization, or a state of clutter, or a state somewhere between the two.
We are not going to place judgments on those states. We are where we are, AND (this is the good part!) WE CAN CHOOSE SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

3rd tenet: If you do not practice, you will not improve.

4th tenet: We are capable of learning and programmed to learn!

Our self talk often inhibits our learning. STOP IT.

AND HOW? Begin to observe the things you are telling yourself around your ability to organize, and realizing that those statements are just your own judgments. They are not truth.

STEP 1: COMMIT TO GETTING ORGANIZED

- Develop a plan, outlining what you want to organize, why and by when.
- Set aside time to do it.
- Practice daily by catching yourself when you are adding to the clutter instead of the organization.

AND HOW? Begin to observe. So, at first, you might make no progress toward actually reducing the clutter, you might just start to observe your clutter and how you contribute to it. Changes in our physiological patterns begin by allowing ourselves to open to the possibility of change.

Make it fun.

Why? Because we are more successful when we are enjoying what we are doing.

Organization is not serious business.

Make it fun:
- Purchase a new notebook for your organizational goals and observations.
- Put a flipchart up on your wall with your goals outlined – use colors and happy faces or stickers.
- Put sticky notes (colorful ones) around to remind yourself of your goals.
- Adopt a new mantra: I am organized.
AGAIN – ORGANIZATION IS A LEARNED SKILL SET.
Now you might be thinking “I am not an organized person. I am not made that way….etc...”.

- Interesting Side Note: You can change your attitude in approaching a task by changing your physical stature.

**AND HOW?** Feeling incapable, intimidated, .and on and on….? (You know, more of that self-talk.) Sit back, sit up straight, open your chest by moving your shoulders back and down. Now, think about your task from this new body stance. Observe what happens. Observe the new possibilities you open yourself to by physically putting yourself in an *open* position.

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**STEP 2: GET THE TOOLS YOU NEED TO DO THE WORK YOU ARE SUPPOSE TO BE DOING**

**AND HOW?** Begin to observe. (Are you seeing the start of a pattern here?) Look at your work area or your computer or whatever you want to organize. Do you have the tools you need to do your work while in that environment? Start to observe what thwarts you while you are trying to get work done. What do you tolerate, that if you just took care of would make you more productive and more organized?

**TIP #1:** Make a list of 3 things you tolerate and stop.
(See the below example.)
(Don’t confuse tolerate with being tolerant! Being tolerant is a good thing. And don’t put people on your list – for our purposes here keep this activity to things.)

*Example.* I have a three-hole punch and the third hole never punches the hole all the way through. I use this three-hole punch on average four times a day, and spend minutes prying partially punched paper out of documents. Why? How much time and frustration can I save in a year by just purchasing a new $20 hole punch?

**TIP #2:** Less = more.
(See tenet #1, page #1.) There is great power in this type of minimalism.
TIP #3: Less is more, unless the less impedes us from doing our job. Make sure that your desk, work area, etc is equipped with the tools you need to do the job.

If you use a stapler fifteen times a day, but have to share one from a central area, buy your own!

Make it fun:
- Get pretty tools when you replace tools. (Colored staplers – imagine the fun of stapling with a purple stapler!)
- Be creative – need an “in basket”, but you don’t have the budget to buy one, what else could be an “in basket”?
- Customize your computer desktop or screen saver to something fun for you.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY WHAT YOU NEED AND WHAT YOU DON’T NEED.

This step is very fulfilling, but a bit scary.
Now take a deep breath. I promise that no one will have to give up their first born child here….but letting go of those things that impede our ability to be organized are fair game.

AND HOW? 1. Motivate yourself. What incentive can you give yourself for cleaning out and going through? Can you partner with someone to achieve results? 2. What mind games are stopping you? Sorry, but here we are again – observe. How can you turn drudgery (that word is from your head, not mine, I am of that odd breed that actually likes to get rid of stuff) into fun? 3. Start small. Don’t tackle your whole office or whole desk at once; start with a file drawer or a part of your desk.

Example. I can’t throw that away, that’s wasteful.
I can’t throw that away, I might need it.
There is too much to go through or to do. I don’t know where to start.

TIP #4: Be kind to yourself.
You don’t learn a new skill overnight. Don’t set yourself up for failure by taking on too much new learning at once. If you declare that you are going to organize your life, you will end up being crazy and need to be committed to a quiet padded place.
Think The Tortoise and Hare here; we are going for slow steady progress, with practice to LEARN A NEW SKILL SET. We organize to eliminate stress and make us more productive.

➢ Interesting Side Note: The word, disorganize (meaning to destroy or interrupt the orderly structure or hierarchy) was first introduced in 1793 during the French Revolution.

☑ TIP #5: Filter, filter, filter.

This one is easy. Instead of having to decide if you need something or not, stop it before it comes to you! Now there’s a revolutionary thought. In this age of instant and constant information, stop the flow! Or at least get the flow going to the right place.

- Mail that you don’t want or isn’t yours – redirect it, or stop it. (See Appendix for website on stopping junk mail.)
- Email that you don’t want – use your computer filters and spam blockers. (See Appendix for how to do this.)
- Phone messages – Put a succinct voice mail message on your phone.

Lose the “We are not here,” (They know that as soon as your message comes on!) and the “Please leave your name and phone number.” (They get that, too) and the “We will get back to you.” (Maybe we will, maybe we won’t – it depends on what they need from us. How about: “You have reached…..Please tell me how best I can respond to your call?”

AND HOW? Ways to go identify what you need and what you don’t need:

W-A-S-T-E

Worthwhile – Is this item worthwhile? If so, continue, if not, toss.
Again – Will you really use this again? If so, continue, if not, toss.
Somewhere else – Can you find this somewhere else, and your “copy” of it isn’t necessary? (A hidden way we accumulate is paper and electronic and email files of the same documents.) If not, continue, if so, toss.
Toss – Will anything happen if you toss it? If so continue, if not, toss.
Entire – Do you need the entire thing? If so, keep, if not, toss.

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1 From Bob Heavers, Priority Management, www.prioritymanagement.com
2 From Organization for Dummies by Eileen Roth
ONE YEAR RULE: You haven’t used it in over a year, and/or you are surprised that you even have it. Who knew? If you didn’t, then you probably don’t need it.

JUDGE: Conspire with a co-worker to help you and you help them. How this works is they get to play judge and you get to be the defense attorney. You have to make a case for items you are keeping and if you can’t, they get tossed.

IN THE SCHEME OF THINGS: Evaluate items based on the criteria: If your office/workspace or whatever environment you are applying organization to, was destroyed, would you need that item? If so, keep it, if not toss it. If you aren’t sure, keep it for now, and then later apply the one-year rule to it.

Please note: Toss can be donate, recycle, re-gift. It does not have to mean trash bin (physical or electronic).

Make it fun:
- Play basketball with the trash bin. SCORE, Reward yourself for every ten baskets sunk.
- Recycle paper by cutting it up into note pieces. Poke a couple holes in the top and tie together with a nice ribbon.
- Use a “gavel” when you play JUDGE.
- Play king or queen of it all while you go through W-A-S-T-E and use a wand to declare, “You may stay” or “You must go”. Feel your power.

STEP 4: IDENTIFY WHERE YOU WILL PUT IT.

After completing Step 3 you should have less stuff to put wherever. If you don’t have less, repeat Step 3.

AND HOW? By now, can you guess? We definitely have a theme going….now say it with me…..Observe. Observe where you reach, go, or look for things, and put them there.

- Interesting Side Note: It takes about three weeks (21 days) to adopt a new habit. Make it your habit to observe yourself. You adopt a new habit by practicing that habit.
Our bodies are programmed to work with what they know. We get cold, we shiver, and our internal furnace turns on. Right now your body knows how to live with clutter and disorganization. You are on a path to teach your body to know something different – organization. Adopting a new habit is changing a programmed response.

Example. In setting up my bosses’ files, I filed his library reconsiderations chronologically most recent at the front. He files things chronologically most recent at the back. For about a year, I would re-organize the reconsideration file my way, until one day I just realized how counter-productive that was. I now file the reconsiderations chronologically most recent at the back – his way because it is his file!

TIP #6: If you don’t have a place to put something you won’t put it in its place.
Now that just seems obvious, but how many of us have things, that don’t have a place and just live in the clutter?

TIP #7: Put it where it makes sense to you.
(Unless you share space, then you need to put it where you and those you share with will be able to find it.)

AND HOW?   Ways to identify where to put things:

P-L-A-C-E³

Purge – If you did Step 3, you have already purged.
Like with like – Organize things. You do know how to do this. Think of your kitchen.
Are your forks with your canned goods? Are your frozen foods with your spices? Of course not, you have them organized “like with like”.
Access – Placement for easy access. Where do you use the items and how often?
Contain – What will contain these items? You can “contain” things in sight or out of site. You can contain things on shelves, on a computer, in a desk, in drawers, etc.
Evaluate – Does it work? Organizing is an ongoing process.

Like laundry, you don’t do it once and then are finished. Organization is an ongoing process.

³ From Organization for Dummies by Eileen Roth
MAP IT. Draw a diagram of the environment you are organizing. Make a bunch of copies. Now play with putting this there and that there. Sit with it for a bit. Does it feel right? You are the architect of your organization!

DOES IT MAKE SENSE? If you share space: Will someone else be able to find it where you have put it?

Have fun:
- ✗ Play one of these things is not like the others, which one doesn’t belong while using the P-L-A-C-E model. If it doesn’t belong, do you need it, or does it just go with another group?
- ✗ Be creative about containers? Do you need a pencil holder or would a plant pot be more fun?
- ✗ When you MAP IT use a dollhouse or pictures from magazines.

STEP 5: SET UP THE PLACE WHERE YOU WILL PUT THINGS.

Here we come to the homestretch! Congratulate yourself.

You identified where you will place things, now you are going to make sure that the place is setup for handling that placement.

AND HOW?

Tools and Supplies: Do you have the tools you need? Or do you need to buy items to support you? For instance, do you have the “in box” for items coming in, or do you have the hanging files and files for that system, or do you have storage space for items you can store away?

TIP #8: Use ACTION and PENDING folders.
Set up “action” and “pending” files or places. These are powerful tools. Your “action” file or place will quickly direct you to matters that need attending to.

Check action files daily and pending weekly.

4 From Bob Heavers, Priority Management, www.prioritymanagement.com
Your “pending” file or place will remind you of things that you are waiting on something for the task to get done. Having a “pending” email folder is really a good tool, also.

How many times do you send an email and then consider it done – when it isn’t done, and you still need something back? If you cc: yourself and file your cc: email in your “pending” you will have a reminder.

By using a “pending” file and periodically reviewing the contents of that file, you will increase your memory 100%, and your productivity in getting things done that are dependent on other people!

In my “pending,” I also have a “calendar” folder for those items that I only need on a certain date. Marked by the date I need them in the top right corner and filed chronologically next to last.

**TIP#9: Use the same filing system/structure for physical files and electronic files.**

The more it is all the same, the more transparent it becomes – a behind the scenes tool to allow you to focus on those things you are *really* paid to do. This includes color coding of files (electronic or paper), using the same title, and having the same hierarchical structure.

**Physical Files:** What are properties of an organized and productive physical filing system?
1. Capacity – The hanging folders are appropriate to the capacity of files you will be putting in them. (Here we are talking length and thickness.)
2. Categorized – Some people do things alphabetically, others do it by department. (Here again, you have to observe yourself to know what will work best for you.)
3. Clearly labeled.
4. Color coded – Color is a quick visual cue. Use it to your advantage. But caution, three – five colors is useful, more than that and it isn’t.

**Electronic Files:** What are properties of an organized and productive electronic filing system?
1. Capacity – Can your computer memory handle what you are storing?
2. Categorized – Make file folders just like you would for physical files, and sub-folders! Keeping everything under “My Documents” isn’t conducive to learning organization. Think of your electronic files as an outline.
3. Clearly labeled.
4. Color coded – If your PDA allows for color coding of calendar appointments, use it.
Email Files: What are properties of an organized and productive email environment?

1. Capacity – Do you have enough memory to store emails you want to keep? Or do you need to schedule “file clearing out” more frequently?
2. Categorized and filtered – Setup file folders and sub-folders for email. Have email filter directly into those files. BIG EASY TIME SAVER.
3. Clearly labeled.
4. Use JUNK or SPAM filters. If you keep getting emails you don’t want, take the time to mark them as JUNK or SPAM.

TIP #10: Check email periodically, not as it comes in.
Checking email every time an email comes in distracts you from the task at hand, and unless the task at hand is your email, it is unproductive. Turn off any sound alerts to new email!

Mail: How do you handle the mail?

1. For optimum productivity, check your mailbox once or twice a day, only.
2. Sort – What is coming to you through the mail and what do you need to do with it? Do you need to re-distribute some of it? (If so, is there an opportunity here to permanently re-direct it?) Do you have to perform some action with it? (If so, do you have an “action” or “to do” place set up?)
3. Can you just take care of it right now?

Have fun:
• Use color

➤ Interesting Side Note: Color is 39% more memorable than black and white. Color increases attention span and recall by 82%. Color is a physiological stimulant. Red – priority/important; blue – calming/relaxed; orange – prosperity; yellow – happiness; green –harmony.

• Use a label maker – oh! It is like Playdoh for adults – honest. Once you use a label maker, you will ooh and ahh at the beauty of your creation.
• Track how many emails you get before filtering and how many you get after. Give yourself an M&M for every one less email you are getting.
STEP 6: PUT THINGS IN THEIR PLACE.

WooHoo. We are just inches away from the finish line! This step is fun and satisfying. Put things where they go!

AND HOW? Just do it.

☐ TIP #11: Commit to putting things in their place when you are done with them, or at the very least, once a day.

When my kids were little we played a Sesame Street Song, *It’s Time to Pick it up and Put It Away*. Put on some music that will support you to learn this new habit.

(Refer to our 21 day rule.)

☐ TIP #12: Keep it simple.

Too much is too much, including organization. Too much color, too much file hierarchy, too much complexity, defeats the goal of arranging to minimize effort.

Apply the Path of Least Resistance to your organizing.

*There is value in having a junk drawer.*

_Sometimes, we just need a place to allow things to be without order._

*Have fun:*

- Put on some music and dance it all away.
- Talk to the stuff as you place it. Here’s your new home, I know you are going to be so happy here. (Now I can hear that self-talk voice again – Talk to myself – is she kidding. Well frankly dear, you talk to yourself in your head all day. So is talking to your stuff so unthinkable?)
- Play “The Efficient One”. You have a place for everything and are putting everything in its place.
STEP 7: MAINTAIN YOUR ORGANIZATION
BY PERIODICALLY CLEANING OUT AND RE-ORGANIZING.

**AND HOW?** Go to Step #1 above and begin again! Life is about beginning again from a new place and a new perspective.

AGAIN – ORGANIZATION IS A LEARNED SKILL SET.

Observe where you were able to follow through and where you were not.
Have you spent at least 21 days forming habits that support organization?

1. Listening to your self-talk and identifying your judgments.
2. Creating new self-talk focused on being an organized person. “I am” statements.
3. Creating toleration lists and eliminating those items from your life.
4. Keeping it simple.
5. Being kind with your self and respecting the process of learning.
7. Checking email periodically and not every time an email comes through.
8. Minimizing the number of times you touch an item.
9. Picking up and putting away at least once a day.

For more information and 12 Tips to Organize Information for Optimize Productivity see the CAL Conference handouts on the CAL website: [http://cal-webs.org/handouts06.html](http://cal-webs.org/handouts06.html)
APPENDIX

How to Stop It
Stopping junk mail - [http://www.junkmailstopper.com/](http://www.junkmailstopper.com/)

(This site also gives some great “rules” to put in your email filter.

Thunderbird:
[http://wiki.mozilla.org/Thunderbird:Help_Documentation:Dealing_with_Junk_E-mail](http://wiki.mozilla.org/Thunderbird:Help_Documentation:Dealing_with_Junk_E-mail)


Great websites for organization tips
[http://www.mygoals.com/content/how-to-be-organized.html](http://www.mygoals.com/content/how-to-be-organized.html)

Doing Less = Doing More

**Natural Law: Path of least resistance** describes the physical or metaphorical pathway which provides the least resistance to forward motion by a given object or entity, among a set of alternative paths.

Book Resources

*Organizing for Dummies*, by Ellen Roth, copyright 2001
ISBN: 0764553003

*Mastery: the Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment*, by George Leonard, copyright 1992
ISBN: 0452267560