

# Faculty Development

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## Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. December 2006.

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→ Some pages will open in a new browser window. M. D. Anderson does not endorse external sites.

**"Nothing is stronger than a habit."**

-- Ovid

**"It's hard to make a difference when you can't find your keys."**

-- Marilyn Paul

Many clients ask me, "Can I learn to be more organized or am I just made this way?" The answer to both questions is yes. We are all wired differently. Some prefer more order than others, just like some of us prefer chocolate over vanilla. Organizational and time management skills can be learned, but it takes practice - or what's called "deliberate practice."

In a recent [Fortune magazine article](#) "What It Takes to Be Great" by Geoffrey Colvin, deliberate practice is defined as an activity that's "intended to improve performance, that reaches for objectives just beyond one's level of competence, provides feedback on results and involves high levels of repetition." In the study the article cites, greatness isn't just for the few. It's for anyone who wants it.

The Fortune article highlights several greats: Tiger Woods, who changed his golf swing twice; Michael Jordan, who continued to practice even after the team had finished; and Winston Churchill, who obsessively practiced his historical speeches. These people may have had a certain amount of natural talent, but they worked for their achievements. All of us have had to practice at everything we've learned how to do. People who have an interest in fine cuisine don't become incredible chefs overnight. It takes a few burned cookies to become a great chef.

Any change you want to make in your organizing and time management skills takes practice and consistency. First, you have to decide what you want to improve. When Dr. Marilyn Paul, author of *It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys*, decided to change her chronically disorganized ways, she started with her keys. She put up a shelf with a drawer for her keys and pledged to put them away every night as she came into her house. She faithfully practiced until she didn't even think about where her keys were since they were automatically placed in their home. Then she went on to tackle the next problem area.

Marilyn Paul did it one area, one step at a time until the chronic disorganization was eliminated from her life. Like her, you can approach each task with a new goal in mind. For Paul, her goal was to put her keys away everyday. Making critical changes and tackling new goals are not enough. "The first is going at any task with a new goal: Instead of merely trying to get it done, you aim to get better at it," Colvin writes.

As we make resolutions for the new year, believe that greatness is within your grasp. You can be

the Tiger Woods or Winston Churchill of your own world. And sometimes greatness begins with finding your keys.

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### **Holiday Gifts**

The Center for the New American Dream website, which features advice on consuming resources responsibly, offers a holiday survival guide for those looking to lighten up during the holidays. The guide includes ideas for eco-friendly, creative, and inexpensive gift ideas; their booklet "Simplify the Holidays;" and their own "Gift of Time" cards you can print and send to those you want to spend more time with. The site also has a link to remove yourself off junk mail lists, but I don't think many people would be crazy about their idea of giving junk removal forms as a present. Visit their [website](#) for more information.

### **Re-gifting**

Interested in re-gifting? Here is a [website](#) with guidelines about re-gifting. On the flipside, another [website](#) is having a contest for those with the "best" re-gifting story.

### **Gift Cards**

Gift cards make great presents, especially for those who are hard to buy for on your list. While picking up a couple of gifts cards, I noticed more and more companies are jumping on the gift card wagon, including Jet Blue Airline, Southwest Airline, Marriott Hotel and Travelocity Hotels. Gift cards for travel make great presents for the travelers in your life, those who want to become travelers, and those you want to come over for a visit.

So far, I have never met a gift card that I haven't liked, but if you get a gift card that doesn't work for you, you can sell back your unwanted gift card at this [website](#).

### **The Goodie Bag**

Here's something to think about. A couple of months back, I had lunch with Monica Ricci, an organizing friend of mine and author of the book Organize Your Office in No Time, and our conversation steered toward a personal crusade of hers -- ending the birthday party Goodie Bags. When we were all kids, you had some friends over, ate a little cake and ice cream, and opened up a few gifts. The modern phenomenon of having goodie bags at kids' birthday parties becomes a burden for parents and a competition of sorts. Parents are expected to provide goodie bags, which can become expensive, and those on the receiving end wind up with extra clutter underfoot that their child either ignores or breaks..

One of my friends, a mother of a three-year-old, agreed. "You have to take home a bag of what essentially becomes clutter, and then everyone expects you to hand out goodie bags at your child's party," she said. "It's too much." It only takes one brave person to start a new trend.

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### **Got Clutter?**

I have developed 15-minute, 30-minute and 45-minute presentations on organizing and time management. Moving to a new building? I also have a 15-minute presentation on preparing for a move for your department.

I also do one-on-one sessions in your office and help you come up with a solution. To schedule a presentation or a one-on-one appointment, call (713) 792-8061 or e-mail [Janice Simon](mailto:jsimon@mdanderson.org) (jsimon@mdanderson.org).

To subscribe to this newsletter, e-mail [Janice Simon](mailto:jsimon@mdanderson.org) (jsimon@mdanderson.org).

*Happy Organizing! And Happy New Year!*

-- Janice

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