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Getting Organized

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

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"The unfortunate truth is that you can't change someone who doesn't want to be changed."

-- Stephanie Culp, author of *How to Get Organized When You Don't Have the Time*

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Other People Syndrome (OPS)

Organizing would be easy if it weren't for those Other People. You know the ones I'm talking about. I always hear people say, "I'm organized, BUT my (you fill in the blank here) is not. It's making me crazy!"

Ah, yes, Other People Syndrome (OPS). Disagreements over who's messy and who's not has strained or ended many relationships, and clutter, even if it's not yours, causes a great deal of stress in any kind of relationship, whether it's at work or at home.

For those who are more organized, the idea that people don't seem to be bothered by dirty clothes on the floor or multiple stacks of files on their desk is mind-boggling. The relationship between people and stuff is complex and varies from person to person. For one person, leaving the house with dirty dishes in the sink causes a twitchy and guilty feeling. For other people, they don't give it a second thought.

First of all, take stock of your own organizing skills.

Are you extremely organized? If there was a pile of paper on your desk, would it drive you crazy until you got rid of it? Do you consider yourself a perfectionist? The beauty of perfectionists is their love of meticulous detail, but on the down side, perfectionists find others who don't share their high standards lacking. Make sure you're judging others by reasonable standards. You may think someone is chronically disorganized when they're only moderately so.

Are the Other People really disorganized?

Perception is one thing and reality is another. Compulsively organized people face prejudice because people look at their empty desk and think, "Well, they're not doing anything."

On the other hand, chronically disorganized people also have others looking at their endless piles and think, "Well, how can they get anything done?"

Those who find themselves on either end may be wildly productive, but they may be harshly judged.

Is there something else going on?

Sometimes disorganization issues have nothing to do with organizing. Major life changes, such as a divorce or death in the family, and changes in the office -- downsizing or someone leaving which results in extra work -- can result in organization issues.

Other issues -- such as depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD, and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders -- can lead to issues with organization and hoarding. Hoarders are those who keep everything, such as years' worth of newspapers, magazines, bags, and even hundreds of animals.

In these extreme cases, you may need to seek the help of a therapist and a professional organizer. [Clutterless Recovery Groups, Inc.](#) also has clutter support meetings all over the U.S., including [Houston](#).

Who's the enabler?

Who's contributing to the problem in any way? I've seen firsthand how people in an office setting will use the "messy" one in the office. They're always bringing the disorganized person stuff they themselves don't want to keep.

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When You're Organized and Your Employee Isn't

As a manager and a leader, it's important for you to delegate tasks to your staff. This not only helps alleviate your schedule but also provides staff development opportunities. With delegation, you will need to focus on the end results and not how you would have done it. As long as the end result is the same and they're being productive, it doesn't matter how they got there.

Have a 10-minute, uninterrupted staff meeting with your employees, and this way you can check on any work you delegated to them and set deadlines. Since priorities can shift on a daily basis depending on the nature of your work, you can use this time to clarify which tasks have priority over others. This gives your employees focus so they know what's important and what's not.

Communication is always key, particularly since no one is a mind reader. You can't assume people know what you're thinking unless you spell it out. Write clear instructions on the work coming out of your office. It doesn't have to be paragraphs detailing all of the work required. It just needs to be a sentence or a couple of words. For example, it could be "To File," "Set up meeting on this," or "Add to calendar."

Stephanie Culp, author of *How to Get Organized When You Don't Have the Time*, suggests you and your assistant spend the last 15 minutes of the day putting things up and tying up any loose ends. She also suggests setting the example for your colleagues and employees on being organized.

At M. D. Anderson, contact Records Management, who can help you come up with a records retention policy in your department. Then there will be a policy about what to keep and what to throw away. Their extension is 3-2261.

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When You're Organized and Your Boss Isn't

Schedule daily or weekly meetings to clarify any questions or priorities. Before the meeting, make a list of any questions or issues you need to discuss so you can save time. During these meetings, ask what the priorities and deadlines are and the results they expect.

- Be sure to organize your own paper, piles, and files

- You want to be a good example.
- Start small
 - It's best to start with the small stuff, such as gathering up all of the items needing signatures into one folder.
- If you're the one picking up the mail, eliminate the obvious junk mail right away
 - Divide the other items into three stacks:
 - Action
 - Reading
 - Not Sure/Could Be Junk Mail
- You may have to ease them into it
 - For example, pull out a couple of older files and ask them to take a look since you're "trying to make some more room and get organized." If they show interest in cleaning out the entire file drawer, ask them to take a look at the whole thing. Otherwise, just show them a few files at a time.

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When You're Organized and Your Significant Other Isn't

Actress Dixie Carter once said the secret to a successful marriage is separate bathrooms. Some may even take that a step farther and say separate closets, separate rooms, separate houses. If you give a deep sigh each time you pass the Other Person's clutter, they may sense there's a problem.

When one spouse is organized and the other is not, it can get very emotional, and I've heard stories of people coming close to divorce court. Someone recently told me how she and her husband, who is a chronic hoarder, came up with an extreme way to deal with the issue. They divided up everything in their house so each item in the house belongs to one person, and that person makes any decisions about whether it stays or goes.

It's always best to set boundaries, and you have to decide what you can live with and what you will accept. Usually this means that the Other Person gets a room that they can fill to their heart's content, and the other spouse can just shut the door and ignore it. On mutually shared space, it's best to negotiate a compromise, which means someone has to loosen up and the other has to clean up.

Get a mediator if it gets ugly. Hiring a professional organizer who is not emotionally attached to the situation is a great option, but just remember that organizers are not marital counselors. It works better if both of you agree to hire the organizer. I've heard too many stories about one half of a couple hiring an organizer for the other half as a "gift." You can imagine how well that works out.

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When You're Organized and Your Teen Isn't

Teens always operate by their own rules and goals, much to the chagrin of those around them.

Children seem to evolve into teens overnight, and their needs change just as quickly. Suddenly, they need less room for toys and more room for books, CDs, computer equipment, etc. Fortunately, places like Super Target and Ikea aim at making baskets and storage units for teen stuff.

- Set a timeline
 - Work with them on sorting and purging.
- When sorting, set a timer so you don't lose time
 - Let 'em race the clock.

- Shelves are a great way to handle collections and to create extra storage space
- Call a professional organizer if you find yourselves bumping heads too often
→ Let's face it. Most teens will listen to anyone else but their parents -- even if they say the same thing.
- Another great resource is Julie and Jessi Morgenstern's *Organizing from the Inside Out for Teenagers*
- If all else fails, just keep their door shut

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When You're On Time and Others Aren't

Now I'm not talking about being a couple of minutes late. I'm talking about those people who go past the 10- to 15-minute mark or beyond.

This gets annoying pretty quickly. It makes you feel like the other person doesn't value you or your time, and it's not very nice. The oldest trick around is telling them you'll meet at 6:30 p.m. when you really mean 7 p.m.

If it really bugs you:

- Leave when they don't show up on time
- Go ahead and order your dinner
- Bring a book along if you plan to wait
- Just flat out tell them that it makes you feel crummy and unimportant when they fail to show up on time

If you're the late one:

- Set reminders on your PDA, your pager, or your watch to remind you to leave for appointments
- Set a timer when you're on the phone or doing tasks so you can remember to stop and get going
→ This is particularly important for those who have ADD and "lose" time.
- Don't stop and do "just one more thing that won't take very long"
→ Uh-huh. We've all heard that one before. When it's time to leave, you need to go. *Now*. Especially if you ever want to see your loved ones again.
- Time yourself how long it really takes to get somewhere
→ You may be underestimating how long it takes you to walk to another building or drive across town.

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It's a New Year!

The most popular New Year's Resolutions are losing weight, improving finances, spending more time with family, and of course, getting organized. It's easy to break a resolution, but it's tougher to keep it. Tough -- but not impossible.

Break your goal into smaller chunks. Let's say you want to get organized for the new year. That can be very overwhelming especially when you start looking around your office and home. Your first step might be to toss all those old newspapers and magazines into recycling or empty one box. You are more likely to stick to it if it's manageable and reasonable.

Here's a way to get started on your goals for the new year:

Losing Weight

I can speak on this from first-hand experience. There are a multitude of resources out there, everything from Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig to books and websites. It helps to buy a small notebook and write down everything you eat each day. It's very eye-opening. With exercise, start small with 30-minutes of cardio three times a week and some strength training exercises. Increase your intensity each month.

Finances

[MSN Money has a great article](#). It has links to even more articles about going paperless with financial records, how long to keep records, and other great resources and tips for you. This will point you in the right direction.

More Time with the Family

If you have an intense, calendar-driven schedule, make an appointment with your family. It may sound silly, but if you're not in the habit of breaking your appointments, why would you break one with yourself and your loved ones? Set an alarm on your calendar to remind you when to head for home.

Getting Organized

I'm always here for you. In addition to the oodles of books, television shows, and websites out there, [past issues of the Getting Organized E-Newsletter](#) are also available.

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Life. Organized. Seminar

Mark your calendars! The National Association of Professional Organizers-Houston Chapter presents *Life. Organized. Houston's Organizing Forum* on January 20-21, 2006 at the Sheraton Brookhollow, Highways 290 and 610.

The first day of the seminar is for professional organizers and those interested in becoming organizers, and the second day is for anyone who is interested in becoming more organized. Barry Izsak, author of *Organize Your Garage in No Time*, and Donna Smallin, author of *Organizing Plain and Simple*, will be the keynote speakers during both days.

For more information and registration, check out the [NAPO Houston](#) website.

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).

Happy Organizing!

-- Janice

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