

Faculty Development

Career Tools

[Faculty Development](#)

[On Being an Oncologist](#)

[Future Programs](#)

[Career Tools](#)

[Grants & Writing](#)

[Contact Information](#)

Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. July/August, 2008.

In this issue:

[The Big Move](#) :: [Finding Time the Zen Way](#) :: [On the Web](#) :: [Got Clutter?](#)

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

The Big Move

My little department has experienced a great deal of change this summer. We were among those to move into the Pickens Academic Tower in July. Shortly after the move, we migrated from Lotus Notes to Microsoft Outlook. So our brains are processing all of this change. Change can be overwhelming, even if it's a positive and happy one, and it always seems we never experience one change at a time. The universe heaps on several changes at once, as if to test our mettle.

While no one has wandered back to our old building (or at least has admitted it), we still have to remind ourselves to push the right button in the elevator or how to find our contact list in Outlook. The good thing is we are among colleagues going through the same changes, and we've all helped each other.



I did learn a few things about the move. Being both a professional organizer and the department's move coordinator was too much for some of my co-workers to take at times. You see, there are two types of people in a move: those who pack early and often, and those who throw everything into a box when the movers appear in the doorway. Guess what kind I am? Fortunately, we all survived my perpetual nagging to purge and pack, and everyone was ready to go when the movers showed up.

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Secondly, we all keep way too much stuff. We found things deep in our storeroom that we had forgotten about and filled several large bins of garbage, and numerous things were sent to the warehouse. Here are a few other thoughts:

- We keep things out of habit. Think of the small presents and tchotchkes you've received over the years, the pictures and cartoons you've put up, and the old files and papers lurking in drawers. This is the kind of stuff that builds up to become a desk shrine. Not sure what to give up? Take away five to 10 items and see how that feels.
- Even books expire. It's perfectly okay to part with outdated books.
- I took home the pictures of my nieces and nephews from their baby and toddler years and exchanged them for current pictures. Instead of having several pictures frames, I opted for a collage frame.

- Anything typewritten, mimeographed or printed on dot-matrix printers needs to go. Let's be honest. No historical data was ever printed on a mimeograph.
- During an office purge, it's NOT okay to dig through the dumpster to see what people threw away. Let it go. You're not responsible for it and don't have room for it anyway.
- If you don't use the phone book, recycle it. If you look up the numbers on the web, chances are you don't need the phone book itself. I use www.whitepages.com and www.yellowpages.com.

Tom Peters, author of *The Circle of Innovation* and *In Search of Excellence*, says change is an opportunity for renewal. He often encourages companies to invest in change as a way to renew their creative juices. When you're knee deep in boxes and covered in dust and sweat, it's hard to imagine yourself being a creative agent of change. You may not realize it at first, but moving to a new office changes how you work, how you think and how you interact with colleagues. Before long, pushing the right button in the elevator will become automatic, and you'll be ready to face the next opportunity life tosses your way.

[Back to Top](#)

Finding Time the Zen Way

A friend told me about the [Zen Habits blog](#), written by Leo Babauta of Guam. He writes daily about productivity, weight loss, debt reduction, and other life issues with honesty, insight and realism. He's been there, done that and made a deliberate decision to get out of the rat race. If you need to make a major life change or just need a small pick-me-up, check out the blog. There's always a timely tip you can use.

Recently, he wrote about "Reclaim Your Time: 20 Great Ways to Find More Free Time." He writes, "The truth is, we all have the same amount of time, and it's finite and in great demand. But some of us have made the time for doing the things we love doing, and others have allowed the constant demands and pressures and responsibilities of life to dictate their days....It's not hard, though it does take a little bit of effort and diligence."

Here are just a few of the 20 tips he outlined:

- **Find your time-wasters.** See what tasks and activities you can "reduce, minimize, or eliminate," and you can make room for the more important tasks.
- **Cut back on e-mail.** Check your e-mail certain hours of the day and find a way to reduce the amount of time spent on checking e-mail. Dr. Edward Hallowell, author of *CrazyBusy: Overworked, Overstretched and Ready to Snap*, suggests keeping e-mail hours as a way to reduce interruptions and increase productivity.
- **Learn to say no.** This is self-explanatory. Say yes to the important stuff.
- **Declutter your schedule.** Just as your office or house can become cluttered, so can your schedule. Weed your schedule and leave "big blank spaces". Even children need to look at their schedules. Children have headed back to school. Do you need to limit the amount of activities they participate in for your sanity and theirs?
- **Do your biggest rock first.** Doing the worst first is the same concept as Brian Tracy outlined in his book *Eat That Frog*. If you take care of the Big Rock sitting on your desk before opening e-mail, you will give yourself a sense of accomplishment. Many times when we tackle The-Thing-We-Hate-Most, we find out that's it not so bad.
- **Disconnect.** Turn off the Internet when you're trying to complete tasks.
- **Make use of your Golden Time.** Babauta discovered the morning is the best time for him to exercise, write and blog. "Schedule it for the morning, and it'll rarely (if ever) get pushed back," he writes. Other "Golden Time" opportunities are right after work, right before bedtime, and lunch breaks. Find your own Golden Time to exercise, spend time with your family and friends, doing a hobby, or just being quiet

[Back to Top](#)

On the Web

The Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine recently published "[Take Charge of Your E-Mail!](#)" -- an article about e-mail, spamming and e-mail etiquette. One of the tips the authors offer is to categorize e-mail as reference items, notices about events or meetings, and action items.

Merlin Mann, founder of 43folders.com, also talked about e-mail in a [website article](#). He quotes a New York Times article about how companies are declaring e-mail free days to give their employees a break. Some of the stats in the article:

- A typical, desk-bound information worker turns to his e-mail program more than 50 times and uses instant messaging 77 times.
- Interruptions by things that are not urgent or important take up 28 percent of an average worker's day.
- Meetings take up 20 percent of an average day.

Lance Armstrong wants to dare you to do something. If you have to get healthy and become more active, check out the Lance Armstrong's website – www.livestrong.com. You can join groups and post your profile either privately or publicly and take a "dare." The dares include eating healthier, staying younger, becoming active, quit smoking, and saving money, just to name a few. To take a dare, sign up on the website.

[Back to Top](#)

Got Clutter?

I have developed 15-minute, 30-minute and 45-minute presentations on organizing, time management, and productivity. 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 your organizing problems. 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). Follow me on [Twitter!](#) Look up JaniceSimon. For [Facebook](#), look for Janice M. Simon.

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

Happy Organizing!

-- Janice

[Back to Top](#)

[Back to Previous Issues](#)

[Back to Career Tools](#)

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