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Getting Organized

An e-newsletter of organizing tips for faculty members. June/July 2006.

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"Have you ever noticed that on your last work day just before going away on vacation, you get three days' work done?"

-- Alec Mackenzie, Author of *The Time Trap*

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

Editor's Note

Those Poor, Tired Batteries -- The screen on the digital camera read, "*Your batteries are exhausted.*" While using the camera at a recent Faculty Development event, this warning popped up on the screen, and I was so amused by the wording. It made me think how helpful it would be if we all came with similar warning labels. Then we would know when our own batteries were exhausted and needed recharging.

In this time of summer vacation, recharge your batteries by taking a vacation. The people around you would probably appreciate it if you took one too. Many people pride themselves on not taking all of their vacation time every year, but in the end, they're only hurting themselves. Research shows taking vacations improve your productivity and effectiveness. So in other words, don't check your work e-mail while you're on vacation.

You don't have to go anywhere to take some time off. With high gas prices, some people are opting to take vacations closer to home or just staying at home. For some tips, see [Get Away Without Going Away](#). Whether you're traveling around the world or to your backyard, just get out of the office for a week or two and not think about work -- before your batteries become "exhausted."

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Summer Organizing Projects

In her book *You Can Find More Time for Yourself Every Day*, organizer Stephanie Culp outlines a plan to organize your home in eight weekends. If you are taking some time off to do work around the house, you could use this guide as a way to tackle those projects.

Use this list as a jumping off point and modify it to your needs. If you don't have a basement, attic, or garage, you can substitute another project, such as organizing photos or doing the kids' rooms, or just add an extra week with paper, closets, or another area needing extra attention.

Stephanie's list includes: closets, cabinets and drawers, basement and attic, garage, fix everything, paper, read, and correspondence.

Closets

- Tackle all of those closets
 - Don't leave out the linen closet or pantry.
- First, empty your closet and make sure you're using how you want to use it
 - Is it for clothes or is it an all-purpose closet?
- Add any shelves or hooks if needed
 - You don't need to buy a fancy hook when a simple nail will do.
- Use an over-the-door shoe bag hanger for an all-purpose closet
 - I have one in my foyer closet, and that's where I stash batteries, my cell phone charger cord, umbrellas, vacuum cleaner bag, etc. Cut a small hole in the bottom of one pocket to hold longer items, such as longer umbrellas.
- Label everything so you can see it standing in front of the closet
 - This saves you time from having to dig through boxes when you're looking for something specific.

Cabinets and Drawers

- Go through all of those cabinets and drawers in the kitchen, bathroom, home office, and bedrooms
 - If you don't have many drawers or cabinets, take a look at your bookshelves.
- Approach them like you would a closet
 - Empty everything, and make sure it's being used for how you want to use it.
- If you use something every day, make it easy for you to grab it
 - If you don't use it every day, put it further away from you.
- Use drawer dividers or shallow boxes to carve out storage spaces in a drawer
 - Use Velcro to keep drawer dividers and boxes from sliding around.
- Wire baskets and plastic totes are great ways to stow items in cabinets

Basement or Attic

- In Houston we don't have basements, but you need to postpone the attic until the temperatures are a little cooler
- Use plastic totes in the attic, basement, and garage
 - Paper boxes attract pests and break down far easier and faster with moisture and heat.

Garage

- Hit the garage first thing in the morning when it's cooler
 - Again, you may want to make this a fall project.
- For proper disposal of chemicals and paint, please check the [What Not to Put in Your Garbage Can](#) section of the City of Houston's website

Fix Everything and/or Charity Drop Off

- This is your weekend to fix items that need to be repaired
→ Or to take them in to the tailor or shop.
- If you don't have anything needing repair, this could be your weekend to drop off charity donations
- Don't forget to get a receipt for any donations you make
- Sell your books, CDs and DVDs to make a few bucks
→ This is not a way to get rich, but at least you can take yourself to lunch for working so hard.
- To recycle items, including computers and other electronic equipment, check out the [Westpark Recycling Center's requirements](#)
→ You will need a copy of your electric bill showing that you live in Houston. For those who live outside of Houston, please check your local city's listings.

Paper

- Shred, purge, and file all of your papers
→ Most shredders can be used for about 15 to 20 minutes at a time, and then need to cool off. Otherwise, you will overheat your shredder. To be sure, check your owner's manual.
- Since you need to keep tax and banking information for seven years, anything before 1999 can go
- If you haven't already, create a folder to keep receipts and other information in for the current tax year
→ This will save you some time when tax time rolls around again.

Read

This is the weekend to go through all of the magazine and book stacks.

- Decide what you're going to spend time reading, and what you're not spending time on
- You can donate old magazines and books to M. D. Anderson and other hospitals, or you can recycle them

Correspondence

- Catch up on those notes and e-mails you've "been meaning to write"
- Mail out those overdue school pictures to relatives
- Place any orders you've been meaning to make as well
- Update your address book

Wrapping Up

When wrapping up each project, put any items to be donated to charity in your car or call a charity to schedule a pick-up time. Get it out of the house as soon as possible so it doesn't become part of the landscape. And when you're all done, reward yourself. You did a great job and lightened your load! Go and celebrate!

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Hurricane Preparedness

The Gulf Coast area is prepping for a busy hurricane season, and here are a few websites to help you prepare yourself, your family and your home:

- [Hurricane preparedness advice](#) from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- [Disaster preparedness information \(prepare.org\)](#) from the American Red Cross
- The Red Cross suggests having an [emergency preparedness kit](#) of items you will need for up to three days after a hurricane
- Pick up [Organize for Disaster](#) by Judith Kolberg
→ This book came out last year and has great tips and suggestions on preparing for hurricanes and other disasters.

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Learning Your Past

For those history and genealogy buffs, [Ancestry.com](#) has now added Census data from 1790 to 1930 to their website databases. Since the government doesn't release the records for 72 years after a census, the 1930 census is the most recent one available to the public.

Ancestry.com has spent the last 10 years digitizing this information, and you can look up relatives and review their complete census information, including the handwritten notes of the door-to-door Census takers.

Ancestry.com is not a free service and charges about \$155.40 for a yearly subscription. Families or groups of friends interested into digging into their past may want to combine their resources and buy one membership.

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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](#) (jsimon@mdanderson.org).

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

Happy Organizing!

-- Janice

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