

Organize and Thrive By Grace Brooke

Beware: Clutter—piled up on your desk and floor, in drawers, in your briefcase and bursting out of closets and consuming the garage—will overtake your mind, cause your thoughts to be muddled and potentially stop you dead in your tracks.

Disorganization can put a block on every facet of your life and make it difficult to see new ideas, opportunities and successes. Clutter will deny you peace of mind, erode you spiritually and monopolize time. It's clutter that makes us forget what's really important. Recently, the media has been abuzz about various degrees of clutter, from an office and desk littered with papers to a home filled to the brim with assorted possessions, allowing for only a narrow pathway to and from the front door. The things you buy, items you value and the possessions you gather are all a reflection of you, your life, your business, your career and your aspirations. You're not made up of your things, but your things reveal a great deal about who you are and what you value. Your surroundings are a metaphor for your life. In business as well as in daily life, disorder can stymie your ability to move efficiently toward your goals and ambitions.

The cost of disorganization

Getting out of your own way is as simple as taking that first step toward slaying the clutter monster. Purging and getting organized goes beyond having a neat and tidy desk or workspace. It can mean the difference between a thriving business and one that's struggling to stay afloat. Think clear, clean, minimize and downsize.

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According to Jane Von Bergen in the article "So Many Reasons to Neaten Up..." [*Boston Globe*, March 2006], 43 percent of Americans categorize themselves as disorganized and 21 percent have missed vital work deadlines. And nearly half say disorganization causes them to work late at least two or more times each week.

Clutter creates an out-of-control and unprofessional image; is depressing and overwhelming, builds stress and reduces motivation; and wastes money as we run out and re-buy what we can't find. Getting and staying organized is a highly common trait among successful professionals, according to *The Ultimate Home Based Business Handbook*, by James Stephenson. To be successful, businesses large and small need systems customized to their specific needs. Processes should be kept simple so everyone can follow.

Even with the best intentions of getting organized and instituting efficient spaces, I find clients often can't see the path to organization clearly. Though experts in their own field, when it comes to devising a plan to clear a chaotic workspace, many just don't know where to begin.

I recently worked with clients who wanted to start a home-based business but were completely paralyzed by the myriad boxes, assortment of office equipment, and other odds and ends that filled their potential office space. Overwhelmed and confused about where to begin, my clients struggled, which

impaired their ability to plan and create an inspiring and productive workspace. By the time they contacted me, they were fully frustrated and looking for guidance and support.

The first step

Before doing anything else, we sat together and created a vision: How did they want the office to feel, look and function? Then we systematically and (constructively) purged and relocated items to create more space for reference material, office supplies, files and

projects. We took advantage of a unique, 7-foot niche, where we installed floor-to-ceiling shelving that included cubbies for various projects in progress. We used an assortment of attractive trays, bins and baskets to hold all supplies. We installed a system to manage incoming papers in a clearly labeled file sorter. We discussed in detail exactly how much space was needed to store files, and agreed a two-

drawer cabinet would be sufficient for current files and allow enough room to grow. Planning with future growth in mind is a suggestion I make to all my clients.

Truly be clutter-free

Two important keys to having a well-organized workspace are having a clear working surface and plenty, plenty, *plenty* of storage. We made this possible by installing shelves for commonly used items above an L-shaped desk.

To eliminate visual distractions, the walls were kept sparse. However, we added a special touch of inspiration by framing enlarged printouts of the clients' personal "Dream Plan," created when first envisioning their new business five years ago.

At the project's end, they gave me a big hug, smiled and said, "Thank you for helping make dreams come true." Today, we meet once a month to maintain the systems we created. Clutter has a mind of its own and will come back to haunt you if you let it. Taking a proactive approach and scheduling time each week to deal with the new materials as they constantly flow in to your life and space is important. My clients are now plowing through projects, goals and action steps...and business is thriving.

You're your greatest asset. Investing in yourself to get and stay organized will reduce frustrations and chaos while increasing clarity, focus and productivity. If clutter is keeping you from success, make the commitment to clean and clear up your surroundings and gain time to do more of what makes you happy.

Grace Brooke is an efficiency specialist and professional organizer with more than 20 years' experience. She currently consults with businesses and residential clients in Sonoma County to create effective efficient spaces to maximize productivity, space and gain a sense of order. You can contact her at grace@gracebrooke.com or (707) 321-4232. Visit www.gracebrooke.com for more information.



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