

Your Desk Shouldn't be Just Another Pretty Space!

Pam Vaccaro, MA, CSP

Is a clean desk the sign of an organized desk? What your desk looks like and how it functions are two different things. There are two kinds of people...those who like their stuff inside of drawers and cabinets and those who need everything out. Both can be highly organized or disorganized.

Is there really such a thing as a well-organized desk? We are starting to accept the fact that technology did not deliver on its promise for a paperless society. And according to Bill Gates, that reality is still fifteen or so years away.

You attempt to organize your desk. You arrive early; stack all the papers on your desk in front of you in a large pile. You look at each paper, maybe throw away some items where the deadline is long past, but then decide that you need to keep most of the pieces of paper. At the end of this exercise--more than likely—the stack of papers has now moved about nine inches away from the original site. Nothing in this pile is urgent. Each piece needs your attention at some future date. Or perhaps, you are procrastinating. You convince yourself that this is just not the time to do this particular thing.

You go about your duties assured that you are going to remember what is in the pile. Your colleagues or staff see your efforts and smile knowing that two weeks later you will go through the same drill not remembering at all what was in the pile of papers. This pattern repeats itself at home. Frustration!

Take these steps towards an organized desk:

- Decide you really want a system that moves papers through to completion not just a desk that looks tidy for short periods of time.
- Take everything off your desks and tables. This creates a sense of re-designing your workspace as opposed to just re-arranging your stuff! This is a very important step.
- Set up a place where all your paper begins instead of dropping stacks of paper in available spaces on your desk.
- Take your index finger and draw an arc in the area immediately in front of you as you sit at your desk. Say out loud, "This is my command center." No matter what else is going on on your desk, keep this area clear so that you can focus your attention on whatever is the task at hand.
- Use step files so that your works-in-progress folders (current projects) can be seen all at one time. Step files are graduated file slots that enable you to see all your folder labels at one time. Purchase these at any office supply store.
- Use the famous tickler file system. A file sorter having divisions 1-31 and January through December. This heart of a good desk management system guarantees that you can remove any size stacks of papers on your desk. You assign paper items to a future month or a day within the current month. Purchase these file sorters through online office supply companies. Very few if any carry them in their actual stores. Smead and Globe-Weis make these kinds of files. They can be found in the "file sorter" section of their online catalogs. Office Depot always carries them.

- Use binders, classification folders, or expandable files with tab inserts to divide your project files. Take the time up front to organize your working files to avoid repeated going through the file repeatedly each time you want to find an item.
- Everything on your desk should say **action**. Any stagnant piles of paper are a source of trouble and a clear red flag that you have not implemented all of the steps just suggested in this process.
- Choose electronic devices that you will use. This November the long-awaited *tablet PC* hit the market. Do you really need this new technology or is your paper planner still as effective?

Avoid the following methods when organizing your desk:

- Rarely try to handle a piece of paper only once unless that is all you have to do with your time. Give the items to a “tickler file.”
- Don’t be afraid to print out your emails. Put them in your works in progress or your tickler file. This is less work than returning to them in your electronic office.
- Avoid, avoid, avoid setting up files that say, “to pay,” “to read,” “to write,” “to send,” “to whatever.” You can be guaranteed that you will end your month with a lot of overweight manila file folders on your desk.
- Throw out most of your horizontal stack files unless each slot is for one kind of paper such as forms you may need for special prescriptions.
- Do not keep archival files in the active area of your desk at home or at the office.
- Do not buy planners that do not have a weekly planning section. A success desk requires a paper or electronic planner that includes planning by the week. You make adjustments by the day and you constantly ask yourself if you are doing something that gives you a good return on your time.

You carefully chose the tools of your profession. Your desk is another tool. Keep it in the best working order.

Pam Vaccaro, CSP is a professional speaker whose expertise in managing time and attention brings her before audiences internationally. She is a Certified Speaking Professional, the highest earned designation by the National Speakers Association. Her company Designs on Time challenges companies and associations to rethink traditional time management. She is most known for tailored programs and innovative ideas.

www.DesignsOnTime.com

Permission to reprint is granted if this bio is attached to all reproductions of this article.

Pam Vaccaro, MA, CSP