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Guest Opinion

10 effective organizational habits for the new year

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It is said every year, "If only I had more time to get organized." The key to organization is for it not to be one more thing on your to-do list but to incorporate it into your daily habits, just like getting your coffee in the morning or looking at e-mail. Below are 10 organizational habits you can begin to incorporate into your work day so organization becomes part of your daily life.

Habit 1: Be consistent with file systems. In today's data world we now get information in three primary forms; paper, e-mail and electronic documents. In order to efficiently manage your data, it is wise to set up one file structure and replicate it in all three areas. Having similar structures is less time consuming to maintain and easier to retrieve, and file, the data that you need. Get in the habit and keep your file systems consistent.

Habit 2: File immediately. No one wants to file a "to file" pile. And it will always be the last priority on your task list. Don't create a "to file" pile, and get in the habit of filing your data right away. The time you will save by putting data where it goes means you always can find what you need, when you need it.

Habit 3: Track all your tasks. There is too much to do in today's work world to keep it all in your head. Begin to track your tasks either in your e-mail software (i.e., Outlook, ACT, Lotus Notes) or in your day planner. Tracking tasks makes it easier for you to focus and plan your day and week, so you begin to get done what you want to get done.

Habit 4: Assign dates with all tasks. In our urgent and immediate work culture, we need a method to know what to do next. Assigning due dates to all tasks helps you know what to take action on next. Assigning priority level also helps, but we are more prone to taking action on items where due dates have been assigned.

Habit 5: Create task time. Once you begin tracking your tasks and assigning dates, it is important to give yourself time in your week to get those action items done. Avoid filling your calendar completely and leaving no margin for office time. Create a "standard" time for working on tasks, such as Tuesday and Thursday mornings, that is uninterrupted and focused time on your task list.

Habit 6: Prepare for your week. Get in the habit of taking five to 10 minutes to prepare for your week. Look at your calendar, task list, e-mail and paper on your desk and highlight the top five to seven items that are priority to get accomplished. This is a key

habit to keep you focused and well-prepared every week.

Habit 7: Get the e-mail out of the in-box. Your e-mail in-box should be similar to the in-box on your desk. It is for information to come to you and for you to move out. Keep only those e-mails that you haven't read or need to take action on in the in-box. Everything else should be removed, whether filed or deleted. Remember to follow the "3-R rule" with managing the in-box: Read, respond and remove.

Habit 8: Avoid delaying the decisions. We get so much data and information on a daily basis, it is important that we don't procrastinate decisions. It only piles up making another thing for you to sort, manage and deal with at a later date. Force yourself to make the 4-D decisions with all information: Delete, delegate, defer or do!

Habit 9: Put away items in their proper home. Take time to put items and data in their proper home immediately; delaying the action creates piles and one more action for you to do later. When you write down a telephone number, write in your address book right away. When you finish using office supplies, put them back where they belong.

Habit 10: Do the hard things first. Research shows that the best time of day when we are at the highest brain function is between 9-11 a.m. Our lowest times of day are later in the afternoon. Instead of trying to do multiple small things in the morning, consider working on that one item that is time intensive and high priority in the morning when you are at your best.

The key is to make organization a part of your day. Begin to incorporate some of these habits in your day, and you will begin to feel more control and efficient in your daily work life.

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