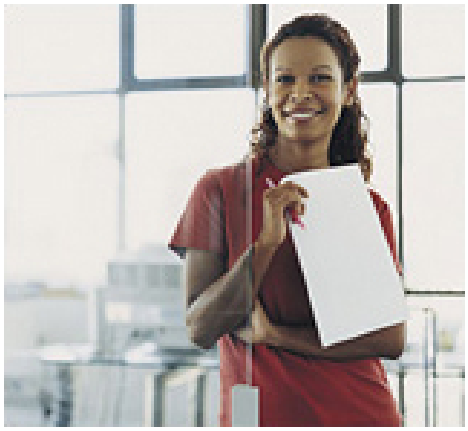
Organizing Paper Files: Sorting through the stacks of paper



Organizing paper files is a task that will inspire most of us to procrastinate. Paperphobia. The fear of having to deal with organizing paper files on your desk can be a debilitating disease, but the quickest cure is a little “sorting therapy”. Don’t worry, I promise organizing your paper files will be painless!

TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME

The best way to start organizing paper files is to pick a stack, any stack. We’re going to go through each piece of paper in order, and decide what to do with it. Don’t worry about all the other stacks – we’ll get to them. Don’t even worry about the other items in this stack. We’re just dealing with the one piece of paper that you have in your hand. When you’ve decided what to do with that one, we’ll move on to the next.

ASK YOURSELF IF IT HAS VALUE

When organizing paper files, the biggest challenge is recognizing when you’re keeping something out of fear or habit, rather than reason. As you are organizing paper files, ask yourself some simple questions about each document:

- Is the information still relevant to my life?
- Has it become outdated?
- How easy would it be to replace if I needed the information later?
- What is the worst thing that could happen if I got rid of it?

Organizing paper files allows you to break free from the paper shackles! Give yourself permission to let go of all the old projects that will never be completed, outdated catalogs, canceled checks from 20 years ago, and other clutter that serves no purpose in your life.

MAKE USE OF THE CIRCULAR FILE

Your most important file is the little round one that sits on the floor next to your desk. About 80% of the paper that comes into your life is meaningless. Junk mail, donation requests, inserts stuck in your utility bills and even the envelopes that the mail came in can be recycled. Throw them straight into the recycling bin as soon as you are organizing paper files for that day (that much less paper to deal with later!)

LIMIT YOUR DECISIONS

A lot of people make organizing paper files harder than it needs to be by creating too many categories. This first pass through is a “rough sort”. We’re just culling the junk and deciding what to do with the rest. You will create more refined categories in your system for organizing paper files later. For now, there are only 4 things that you can do with a piece of paper.

- Refer (give it to someone else to deal with)
- Action (bills to pay, calls to make, etc.)
- File (papers to be filed away for reference)
- Toss (trash, recycle, or shred it)

Create a folder for each (except toss – you know what file those go in!) And as you sort, place each document in the correct folder based on what you need to do with it. Once you’ve gotten through the piles, the only step left is to empty your folders, make your calls, pay your bills, file, etc. How do you make sure it all gets done? That is for another day….today, just give yourself a pat on the back for successfully organizing paper files and finally clearing the

desk!

by Ramona Creel