Start the New Year Organized

No matter how crazy or chaotic your work life feels during the last quarter, the start of a new year is the perfect opportunity to clear out the clutter from your office and regain control over your schedule. Here are a few simple suggestions for starting the new year out the organized way!

Clean Out Your Files

It's easy for your cabinets and folders to become overstuffed with outdated paperwork, so it's important that you take time once a year to purge the old and make room for the new. Start with your reference, client, and financial files. Ask yourself whether or not those documents will be relevant to your work in the coming year – completed projects and last year's receipts should not be living in your active files! If you might need to refer back to those papers at some point in the future (for legal, tax, or other reasons), move those items to an archive file out of your office in permanent storage. But obsolete journal articles and memos that serve no real long-term purpose can be tossed or shredded. And if you find papers that have no logical home in your filing system, create a new folder with the appropriate category. When January 1 hits, you should be able to file any new document in seconds!

Take A Look At Your Office

Office clutter can take over throughout the year – you get busy, create a few piles here, a stack over there, and suddenly you can't see a single horizontal surface! Go around the room and collect up every homeless item you find, creating a set spot for each:

- Supplies and equipment: Only keep what you use on a regular basis at your desk - then store the "extras" in a cabinet or closet.
- Books and periodicals: Store journals in a magazine holder grouped by title or topic.
- Reference manuals: Keep loose brochures and sets of papers in expanding files or 3-ring binders with Index Dividers between topics. Try Smead's durable TUFF™ Expanding File® for frequently accessed items.
- Multimedia: To save space, remove CDs and DVDs from their jewel cases and store them in file folders with self-adhesive CD/DVD pockets.

- Blank stationery items: Neatly stored in either stacking trays or a document sorter.
- To-do's: Set up adesk file sorter or hanging files with categories for each type of action – "to call," "to pay," "to file," "to read," etc.

Having an assigned storage space for everything makes it easier for you to maintain order after the first of the year. Just take a few minutes at the end of each day to put things away (not hard when you know where everything goes!)

Make Some Plans

If you're ending this year wishing you had accomplished more, now is the time to take a look at what got in your way. Endless interruptions throughout your work day? Or did you just have a hard time getting started on those bigger, more important projects? Decide now what you would like to accomplish in the next year, then plan some uninterrupted time in your calendar to work toward these goals. Let your boss know that you would like one day (or a half a day) each week to work on capturing a big account, implementing a major marketing strategy, or completing a large research project for the company. You might need to shut your door, turn off your phone, ignore your email, or even work from home on that day – but your boss will probably be so thrilled at your initiative that she'll do whatever it takes to help you succeed!

Make sure to check out the Start the New Year Organized Checklist..