

JANUARY IS NATIONAL GET ORGANIZED MONTH!

Part 3 - Is The Paper Monster Living in your Home?

- 80% of papers that are filed are never referenced again.
- Your four-drawer file cabinet, when full, holds 18,000 sheets of paper.
- There are over 150,000 books and 10,000 periodicals published annually in the U.S. and the list grows longer every year.
- The average time to retrieve and re-file a paper document is 10 minutes.

We are surrounded by paper, at home and at work. Just opening the mailbox can be a frightening experience for some people. We are constantly bombarded with newspapers, magazines, faxes, junk mail, advertising flyers, bills and personal correspondence. What do you do with it all?

One of the first things to do is prevent as much paper as possible from even entering your mailbox and your home. Send your name and address to:

Mail Preference Service
Direct Marketing Association
P. O. Box 282
Carmel, NY 10512

Ask them to remove your name and its variations from the direct mail preference list. This process may take about 6 to 8 weeks. After that you should see a real decrease in the amount of paper coming into your mailbox. Especially noticeable will be the lack of credit card offers. And just think, you'll be helping to save a tree somewhere that won't have to be cut down to create paper for more junk mail.

Okay, you've cut down on what's coming in but what do you do with the stuff that you cannot avoid and must deal with? Most of us don't have the luxury of a secretary to open and sort our mail at home (and seldom in the office either). It is our own responsibility to examine, sort, take action and file all the information that comes into our lives.

Many people ignore paperwork and filing until a crisis occurs and then they are forced to take action. Have you ever lost a vital document, received a collection notice, or had a utility terminated? You may have cleaned up the paperwork problems in the past, but they more than likely required a great deal of time, frustration, extra expense and stress before everything returned to normal.

Where do you open your mail - the kitchen counter? Your home office? The dining room table? Wherever it is, set up a convenient desktop filing system to immediately handle your incoming correspondence. Set up some hanging files in a plastic crate just to get started. You can always buy a fancy metal, leather, or wicker container later when you have refined your system. Use one week's worth of mail as a trial period. As you go through the mail each day, set up folders to hold the items that seem to occur on a regular basis. Suggestions for folders are: Bills to Pay, Calendar Items, Calls to Make, Meetings to Attend, and To Read. You might also set up one file for each member of the family. Whatever you do, you can very easily personalize it to your situation.

The next step is to use this system for three to four weeks and see how it goes. Do you need to add additional folders? Do the titles of the folders give you enough information to file things appropriately? Do you have too many folders? Can you easily retrieve information when you need it? You want to keep your desktop filing system simple and flexible. Don't feel that once you set it up, you can't change it. See what's working and what needs to be changed.

Some other quick tips about handling paper are:

- Set aside a specific time to open and sort your mail every day.
- Immediately toss junk mail, flyers and other items you don't want or need. Put these items in the recycling bin. Don't forget to shred items (such as credit card offers and applications) to prevent identity theft.
- Place items requiring an action on your part in the appropriate "To Do" file as soon as you go through the mail.
- The ideal situation is to make a decision on each piece of paper as you read it. However, many times you are not sure exactly what you have to do with a piece of paper the first time you see it. Set up a temporary folder and check to see if it can be filed with other information later.
- Try to avoid printing off all your emails. Set up folders on your computer to store the information while you decide what to do with it.

These ideas should give you a starting point to put that paper monster in its place.

Check back next week for Part 4 – Finding More Time in Your Life

Don't find yourself saying, "I've got to get organized!" again. Make 2007 the year you set a new goal and develop a plan to change your life. Simplify and reach your goals with help from S.O.S. Please check the calendar at www.organizeclutter.com for classes in the area and information on the clutter support group starting in January as well as the next scheduled Simply Organized three hour seminar.