

New Year's Resolution for 2004: 'Time to get organized at work'

"Where did I put that telephone number?" "Has anyone seen our contract?" "What time was my appointment?" And finally ... "Where did this day go?"

Switch to Jan. 1, 2004: "I've got to get organized."

Getting organized is a common refrain echoing throughout offices and homes each new year. After all, a key to accomplishing any goal depends on the ability to find what is needed when it is needed — organization. Consider three steps in changing an office routine: paper management, computer files and time techniques.



**OFFICE
ORGANIZATION**

**DENISE
LANDERS**

PAPER MANAGEMENT

For a business, organization is directly tied to the bottom line. If an office, or even one employee in a department, is buried under a mound of papers, time is wasted each day looking for what is needed. Research shows that the average person spends almost six weeks per year looking for misplaced information. Multiply that time by the number of people in the office, continue calculating for each year, and the true cost of disorganization for a company is obvious.

And the situation is not going to improve. According to research cited by Abigail Sellen and Richard Harper in "The Myth of the Paperless Office," by the year 2005 there will be 50 percent more paper in offices than there was in 1995.

Accumulated stacks of papers represent postponed decisions — something is set aside to deal with "later." In reality, there is not going to be more time, so Step One in reorganizing an office begins with paper. A system needs to be put in place now because one will never be a good time manager until the paper dilemma is solved.

An effective process for dealing with the daily paper flow involves:

- Having a place to put every paper that comes in.
- Being able to retrieve that paper - within seconds.
- Knowing when to follow up on it.

After establishing one process to deal with the daily paper flow, a flexible, easy-to-use filing system like Taming the Paper Tiger software eliminates those stacks of paper and brings order to the file cabinet.

An effective filing system enables users to:

- Find anything quickly from a month, a year or 10 years ago.
- Easily explain to others where it is located.

Implementing a single system for handling paper that is simple, straightforward and easy-to-access immediately increases productivity by at least 10 percent.

COMPUTER FILES

After a method for managing paper is developed, move to Step Two of the organizing process by considering computer files, another area where software like Enfish can track any document or e-mail without the need to create multiple folders.

TIME TECHNIQUES

Step Three focuses on time management tools and techniques. The average person uses 13 different ways to track time, resulting in conflicting appointments and stress from trying to remember too much. The key again is to develop one system, one calendar.

Another issue everyone struggles to deal with is constant interruptions. As a business grows, interruptions increase, but the techniques used at the beginning are never modified to accommodate the increasing demands on time.

While no one will ever achieve 100 percent control of interruptions, it is safe

to say that approximately 80 percent of the interruptions can be eliminated and the other 20 percent can be controlled so they consume less time. Limiting daily disruptions can be accomplished by:

- Turning off the sound on an e-mail program.
- Arranging a desk to avoid direct eye contact.
- Scheduling blocks of time for returning phone calls and e-mails.
- Grouping other routine activities.
- Getting to the point quickly with drop-in visitors.

These small measures can produce large gains in productive hours.

TOOLS AND TRAINING

Organizing is common sense, but it also involves specific tools, training and techniques. Hiring a professional organizer can be vital in helping an office get and stay organized. A good organizing specialist has a business background and the training to work within a company to develop systems that tie in the company's paper and time management routines while still remaining adaptable to individual work styles.

The biggest obstacle cited for not getting organized is a lack of time. Yet the small time investment required to reorganize is gained back within a few weeks, resulting in better company financials coupled with increased employee and customer satisfaction.

Personally getting organized and getting the company organized is a great resolution with long-lasting results. Ring in the new year with a new outlook and new tools that increase productivity and decrease stress every day. There is no better time than now to make positive changes.

DENISE LANDERS, a productivity trainer and organizing specialist, is owner of Key Organization Systems Inc. (www.keyorganization.com).