

# PR DUCTIVE

## Ignite! the productive office

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***Executives spend up to 6 weeks each year searching for misplaced, misfiled, or mislabeled paperwork***<sup>1</sup>. How much more productive could you be if you got organized and didn't have to waste time searching? According to the National Association of Professional Organizers 81% of people consider themselves organized, yet 83% say getting MORE organized is among their goals.

Your productivity and efficiency level is obviously helped or hindered by your organizing style.

**In my experience there are three ways that individuals will describe their office organization.**

### **The "Behind Closed Doors" Organizer**

**1** This individual likes to focus on one project at a time. They have all other papers and projects tucked away out of sight. In this office the bookshelves have doors; all files are in filing cabinets and their desk is clear of all but what they are currently working on. In most cases this type of organizer commits time to daily maintenance and consequently can find papers when needed and has a good handle on what needs to be done.

### **The "Stacks" Organizer**

**2** This individual has all of the paperwork in view. Normally this involves stacks of papers throughout the office space, often including the floor. Out of sight is out of mind to this type of individual. To an

<sup>1</sup>North Carolina's Brunswick Beacon, October 1994

# Ignite! productive office (cont.)

outsider it looks like just a bunch of paper piles, but to this type of organizer it is semblance and order. "If I can't see it I might forget it or worse yet lose it!" is a comment often made by this type of organizer. It is surprising to many when this organizer can locate a certain piece of paper without much shuffling. If you look in this persons file cabinets you will find anything but papers and files. You may find phone parts, software boxes, and excess office supplies.

As long as this style does regular maintenance on their stacks they can still be quite organized. Although this individual can keep up to date and organized in their own fashion the trouble comes when they are on vacation or out due to illness.

No one else understands the "stack system" and consequently others are not able to locate documents when they are needed.

## 3 The "Running Papers" Organizer

Maybe using the word organizer here is inappropriate. This individual has papers in view alright; as a matter of fact, it is difficult to view anything but papers in this office. Papers may be stacked, but more often than not the paper in this office is spread out covering any and all flat surfaces. As one client once said to me "I need you to come before I am buried alive when these papers all slide off my desk!" Take a peek inside these file cabinets (once you locate them) and you will most likely find items that are no longer needed in addition to loose papers that were thrown in when this individual was last asked to clean up the office. The cleanup deadline came and quickly the papers found their way into this hiding spot or were tossed in a box and hidden in a cabinet. On first judgment you might suspect this individual of being lazy and yet studies show that often this is not the case. Life skills as well as medical and health issues can often contribute to disorganization.

# Ignite! productive office (cont.)

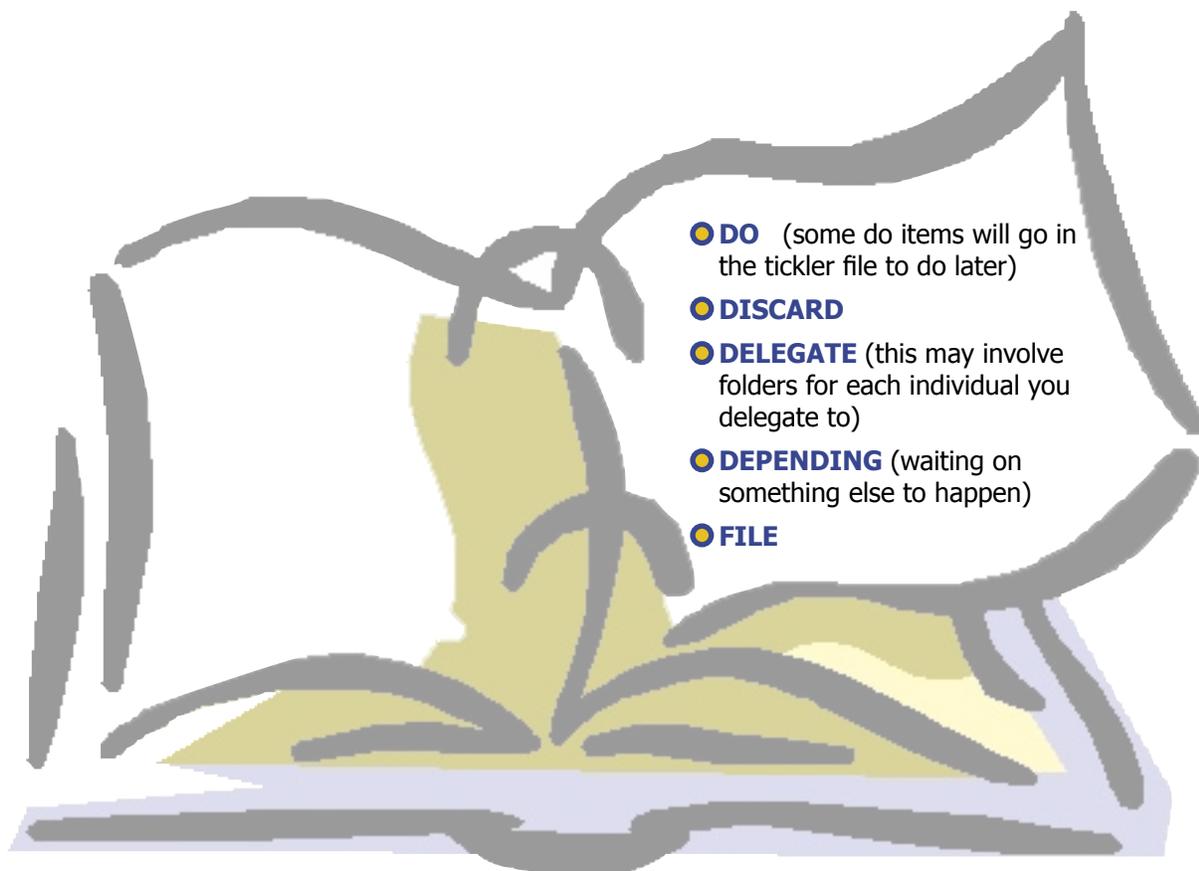
Asking for assistance from an organizing consultant or health care professional familiar with these types of issues can be a great investment in your time and your future.

You may feel that you just don't have or have never learned organizing skills or you may think that you do not have time to organize. The truth of the matter is that losing over 6 weeks a year because of disorganization shows us we don't have the time not to be organized!

More than likely you find yourself in a combination of these styles, maybe for the most part you are the "Stacked" type and yet at times when deadlines are upon you and the project load is heavy you become the "Running Papers" type. Even the most severe "Behind Closed Doors" type can become the "Stacked" type during the workday.

The key to any organizing style is maintenance, committing a segment of time at the end of your day to organize the paperwork and projects for the next work day. Granted, it takes time to file and sort and yet it is only a small portion of time compared to the time we gain.

**To simplify the paper sorting process all paperwork can be sorted into the following bins or folders:**



# Ignite! productive office (cont.)

## today's to do list

**In addition to sorting papers, take 10 or 15 minutes to make tomorrow's plan by deciding what needs to be noted on your calendar and to do list. I also recommend sorting your to do's in order of priority for the next day.**

Be sure your filing system has an index for easy location of documents whether you are filing or retrieving the document or someone else is. A tickler system is also effective if you are deadline driven on many tasks or projects. A tickler system involves having a file for each month in addition to files labeled 1-31 for each day of the month. Paperwork is then placed in the appropriate folder for addressing at that time. Those items that need to be done this month are placed in the dated folders and those projects that are scheduled for later months are placed in the appropriate month's folder.

So take a look around today and see whether your office and your organizing style is saving or costing you time. Invest some up front time to better organize your space and create new habits that will in the long run give you time.



As a Professional Organizer, Cyndy Ratcliffe works with home and small business owners in organizing their homes, offices and time. She received her bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Ashland University in Ohio and was a senior level manager for approximately 20 years before launching Organizing Solutions, Inc.

Cyndy assists individuals to reduce stress, boost their image and me more productive through speaking, training and hands-on coaching of organizing techniques.

She has received certificates of study in Basic Attention Deficit Disorder and Chronic Disorganization through her membership in the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization. She is also a founding member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, North Carolina Chapter.

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