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Supporting a Healthy Organization

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Staying ORGANIZED

For any type of business, orderliness drives progress and development. Establishing an organizational strategy makes it easier to share information and work efficiently without wasting time correcting mistakes or recovering from disruptions. As a business leader, organization gives you and your team proficiency and control.

Staying organized demands continuous attention. Meetings eat up large chunks of the day, papers pile up and unexpected matters arise. If you often find yourself managing crises, wrestling with last-minute demands and playing catch up, it may be time for an organizational check-up.

Tools of the Trade

No matter how expert you may be at your job, organizational tools enhance effectiveness and reduce errors. A well-designed checklist, flowchart or matrix can guide you through a project, delineate and prioritize tasks and improve outcomes.

Checklists compensate for the limits of human attention and memory, thus ensuring consistency and preventing omissions or mistakes. A basic example of a checklist is the "to do list," on which you draw check marks next to items as you complete them. A more advanced checklist would be a schedule that lays out tasks to be done according to time of day or steps in a procedure. Checklists help workers monitor quality and safety. Pilots use pre-flight checklists to ensure critical items are not forgotten. You can record checklist items in priority order or assign priority after listing them. Alan Lakein, a well-known author on time management, advocated the ABC method: "A" items are most important, "B" next most important, "C" least important. Items in each group can be further prioritized with numbers, such as "A-1," "A-2." A particular way of applying this method assigns "A" to tasks to be done within a day, "B" a week and "C" a month.

With your checklist ready, assigning roles and responsibilities to team members will be easier and should improve communication and collaboration. When you assign a task to someone, always include a precise context of what the task entails. For example, if you are asking your team to resolve a problem, specify the circumstances and attach evidence of the problem, such as a screen shot or customer complaint form. Break complex tasks into subtasks to guide workers. Prioritize tasks and allocate them according to each worker's skills and abilities. Successful task assigning reduces stress for everyone on the team.

Task assignments need not be a top-down only process. A junior employee should be able to assign tasks to the manager, just as the manager is able to assign tasks to everyone else. For instance, if a junior employee needs her manager to review a section of her work, she can add it to the manager's task list. Assigning tasks lets team members know that there is something requiring their attention. The ability to assign tasks to each other is the foundation of collaborative work.

Divide and Conquer

Sometimes a project may seem so overwhelming that you don't know where to begin. Here's the secret to taming any project:

Start Somewhere.

Simply starting at all will help you build the momentum you need to get things done.

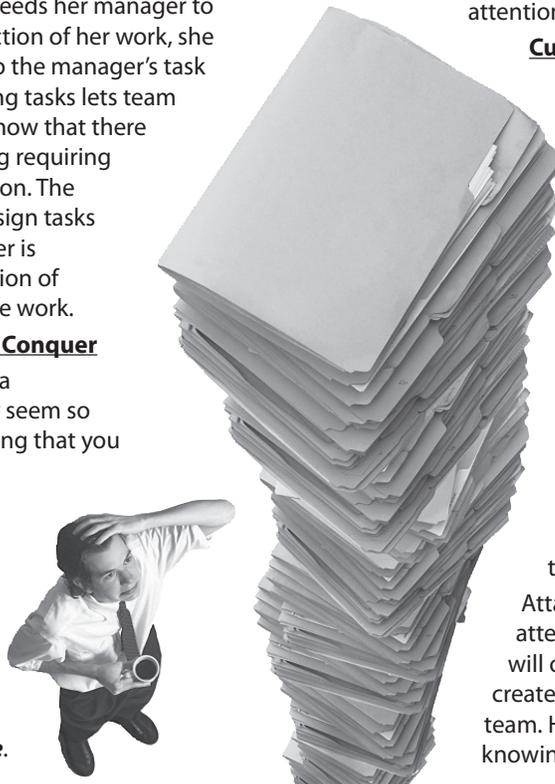
Think Small. Divide your project into increments. Identify the smallest block of work. Determine the goals of that block and give yourself a deadline to complete it. Each accomplishment will be your starting point for the next iteration.

Find Your Pace. Determine when you or your team members are most productive and what helps you focus. Do your employees do their best work in the early morning when everyone is fresh? Do mid-day pep talks inspire your team to persevere? Do you find yourself on a roll in the late afternoon with soft music playing? Knowing when and how you function best will help you organize your time so that you can do your most important work when you have the most energy and attention.

Curtail Time-Wasters

Beware the biggest time-drain: The unexpected task. Certainly, things will come up that you didn't plan on. We all know that urge to pick up the ringing phone, read the email that just came in, or view the notification that pops up. This unintentional task switching eats up a lot of time. Information scientists at the University of California found that it takes an average of 26 minutes to recover from trivial interruptions.

Attacking whatever needs attention at any given moment will only derail your progress and create stress for yourself and your team. Having plans in place and knowing where you're going will



help you identify time wasters and maintain control through those unforeseen occasions so you can continue moving toward your ultimate goal. More importantly, your team will know what you expect of them and everyone will be on the same track to success.

Tame Technology

Computer apps, social media and email make some work easier, speed communication, and facilitate information sharing. They also create tremendous distraction, interrupt thoughts and divert attention from meetings and conversations.

The average person who uses email for work sent and received 115 emails a day in 2013, and 19% of those messages were spam, according to a 2015 report by The Radicati Group. Researchers estimate business email volume rises 11% each year.

You can't escape it, but you *can* control the distractions. Here's how:

Bulk process. Instead of checking email continuously and from multiple devices, schedule specific email times when you're at your computer with access to files and calendars. Once or twice daily, go through social media updates and triage the backlog. Issue quick responses and referrals so that other people can start working on tasks, and delete the stuff that is informational or unimportant.

Clear your inbox. Read and respond to *important* messages and then put them where they belong — in file folders, archives, or your calendar. As that's done, your inbox empties and clutter disappears. Treat junk email like unwanted postal mail — send it from the mailbox to trash sealed and unread. Better yet, "unsubscribe" or set up filters so spam skips your inbox altogether.

Streamline apps. If you use social media tools like Twitter and Linked In, microblogging tools like Yammer, and chat tools like Lync, you may have too many apps to navigate efficiently. Make notifications from multiple applications appear in one place. Shut off popup notices on your desktop and mobile devices so they can't interrupt your train of thought.

Conquer Clutter

For some people, a jumbled, disorderly workspace inspires creativity. But neuroscientists report excessive clutter limits ability to focus. If your personal workspace clutter is out of hand, it might be time to take control. Streamline the mess and keep your workspace orderly with these tips:

Establish zones. Create spaces for different functions, such as spot for your computer, a library section for books, and storage areas for supplies and archives. Clearly label file folders and put them in the cabinet. Hang gear bags on hooks and designate drawers for specific provisions.

Set limits. Look in and around your workspace for things you don't actually need, and put away items that aren't used or needed right now. Shred or recycle anything that is outdated or unnecessary, like draft versions of a completed report. When filing cabinets start overflowing, eliminate or scan files older than a year. Once you've filled a bookshelf, remove a book for every new one added.

Keep at it. Prevent clutter from accumulating. Set a recurring reminder on your calendar to tidy up the workspace for 15 minutes each week. Toss trash, sort and file loose paperwork and put things away.

Banish Burnout

Going full tilt throughout the workday or running from back-to-back meetings drains energy and creativity, for both individuals and the entire team. Everyone needs downtime to avoid mental and physical fatigue and stay focused. Taking time for leisure generates a

positive flow of creative energy. Bringing this energy back to work will help you pursue your goals more passionately.

On and off the job, aim to make wellbeing a priority for everyone on your team:

Integrate wellness. Is everyone getting proper exercise, nutrition and relaxation? Incorporate physical activity and healthy meals and snacks into the daily routine. Inspire co-workers to exercise with you by hosting walking meetings, weekly bicycle rides or an after-work volleyball league. Carve out time to enjoy social connections, community involvement and rest.

Schedule breaks. Block off time on your daily agenda for stretching, walking, eating, drinking water and taking a 10-minute time out to do something relaxing — close your eyes and listen to music, meditate or do a crossword puzzle. Making these breaks a routine increases predictability and enhances mental acuity.

Work offsite. When you or a staff member needs to research a topic or write a document, the absence of office interruptions may improve concentration.

Protect your time off. Make a conscious decision to separate work and personal life. At home or on vacation, put away the laptop computer and cell phone. Set boundaries and remind yourself that you don't have to be everywhere and do it all. Reserve time for activities you enjoy, such as traveling, reading or watching your kids play sports. Encourage your employees to do the same.

Time and energy spent on staying organized save energy and time later. When you understand your personal and work priorities, have clear objectives and use a system for tracking responsibilities and tasks, you'll get more done and feel better about all that you do. A well-organized manager exudes confidence and control, creating a proficient, productive environment.

RESOURCES

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Apply these strategies to stay organized on and off the job:

- Use task lists to ensure consistency and reduce errors.
- Break complex project into small steps and focus on completing one step at a time.
- Identify time-wasters and develop a strategy to avoid them.
- Keep your work area uncluttered and establish zones for materials and supplies.
- Limit email use to pre-set times during the day, and streamline social media.
- Switch off popup notifications on your desktop and mobile devices.
- Set boundaries and incorporate downtime to stay energized and avoid burnout.

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