

Conquer Your Chaos – Keep Stress at Bay

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Stress is quickly becoming an epidemic in North America. Today, 75 - 90 per cent of all doctor visits are stress related. Conditions like high blood pressure, allergies, migraines, ulcers, skin problems, and more have all been related to stress. That's not to mention the fact that stress has been linked to all the leading causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, and accidents.

In addition to causing all sorts of health problems, stress also creates lost revenues for businesses of all sizes. This is because over 60 per cent of employee absences are due to psychological problems such as stress. This results in an estimated 1 million workers who are absent on an average workday. With this in mind, job stress is estimated to cost the U.S. industry \$300 billion annually, as assessed by absenteeism, diminished productivity, employee turnover, direct medical, legal and insurance fees and more. These figures still don't include the average of **150 hours of time wasted** on searching for lost documents per employee each year.

Sitting down at a disorganized desk can immediately increase your stress level before the workday has even started. And we all know that this is not the time of the day to start taking on additional stress. That will happen easily enough throughout the course of your day.

The start of each day is the time to feel fresh and confident in your ability to make progress on your daily tasks. This feeling of purpose comes easily with an organized workspace. Disorganization, on the other hand, washes all good intentions away in confusion and stress, and sets the tone for the rest of the workday.

How is it that a few stacks of **disorganized paper** can create a mass of stress in just minutes? It's because disorganization is actually deferred decisions. Each piece of paper on your desk represents an action, something you haven't taken care of yet, which adds to your level of stress.

Left unchecked, these piles of paper can become mountains of stress, leaving you completely overwhelmed and swimming in chaos. By this point, you may not even know how or where to start with the de-stressing process.

Worse yet, the greater the stacks of paper, the greater chance there is for you to miss something important. Also, customer service may be compromised if not handled in a timely and efficient manner. Perhaps you misplaced a critical document that is needed for a meeting just minutes away, or you forgot about a bill that is past-due, or, you could even lose track of where you are on a significant project with an immediate completion deadline looming.

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Then, we must address the **electronic chaos**. Spam assassin's aren't diffusing all of the spam anymore, the convenience of networking has created duplicates in local folders and network folders, stored documents on CD are almost impossible to retrieve and dare we enter the gloom of contact lists, emails and the "convenience" of archiving.

With all this in mind, now, more than ever, is the time to protect your health and business by Conquering Your Chaos. Getting organized is one giant leap towards dealing with stress effectively.

Through organization, none of the above scenarios come into play. The next action on each piece of paper is dealt determined and then filed, scheduled or acted on accordingly. You are left with more free time, because you're able to get things done in less time. You are also able to focus on your goals and priorities, delegate projects clearly and effectively, and generally be on top of your game. This obviously relieves a great deal of stress, while creating a real feeling of empowerment.

Here are a few tips for reducing stress through organization.

Know your priorities and then schedule time for those tasks in your calendar. You don't have to complete your list in one day, just focus your energy on what matters most and work your way down.

If Paper Chaos is your biggest challenge:

1. Take all of the paper piles you have on your desk, counter or table and place it in a box.
2. Pick up the first piece of paper and apply the FAST principle™ - ask yourself if you are going to File, Act, Schedule or Toss this piece of paper? If it's file, then write trigger word(s) in the top right hand corner of the paper. Put it in a pile called "File". If you need to take action, write out all the action steps on the top right corner of the paper or use a post-it-note and put it in a pile labeled "Action". If you need to schedule this into your calendar then write it into your calendar and toss the paper. When you've sorted the entire box you should have 3 piles – File, Act, Schedule and I'll assume that your wastebasket is overflowing!
3. Once sorted, start with the action pile and begin to handle each piece of paper - filing it in your action files or scheduling the next action into your calendar. You can also use the Tickler system to file these into on the day you plan to take action (for more information on the tickler system visit www.simplyproductive.com).
4. Next go to the filing pile and file them into your appropriate files using The Paper Tiger software or your traditional A – Z filing methods. Use the 2" rule – if a file is larger than 2", break it down into smaller files (for more information on The Paper Tiger software visit www.simplyproductive.com).
5. Acquire a copy of the new "Conquer Your Chaos" workbook from www.simplyproductive.com so that you can keep a consistent handle on your paper chaos and learn additional tips on how to get organized in your office.

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If Electronic Chaos is your biggest challenge:

Fortunately, there's a lot you can do to take charge of your computer and abolish all electronic disorganization this month. To start, block off at least an hour in your day planner before taking the following steps.

1. Review your computer files/documents and make a backup of all the documents that you know you will not refer to again (such as draft documents that have now been completed, files with out-of-date information or duplicate information in different file locations). Once a backup has been created, delete all of these electronic files.
2. Remove any programs that you don't use. To do so, select "Start/Control Panel/Add or Remove Programs". Simply highlight the unused programs and click "remove".
3. Run Scandisk weekly and create a backup.
4. Make space in Internet Explorer by removing temporary files. To do so, go to "Tools/Internet Options/Temporary Internet Files" and click "Delete Files". Say "yes" to "Delete all offline content".
5. Take a few minutes to organize your files within your e-mail program. Create these additional files: action; read; waiting for a response; and templates. Each morning, delete unnecessary e-mails (spam/junk), respond to any e-mail that will only take two minutes or less to respond to, then move all other e-mails to their designated files, leaving a completely empty inbox. Then schedule time each day to deal with those e-mails.
6. Use only one calendar, either electronic or paper. A good idea is to use an electronic calendar that can be easily synced with a handheld electronic organizer, such as a PDA, on a daily basis.

Whatever you do to Conquer Your Chaos around the office or home, don't over schedule. Delegate tasks when appropriate - you don't have to do everything. Leave time free in your calendar for the unexpected and perhaps for a break now and then. Streamline your office for success!

Contact Sherry today at 604-233-7076 or email at info@simplyproductive.com for more information.