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*Make Your Home  
or Office a  
Place You Really  
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## Organizing Articles, Newsletters and Tips

Free Information from Space4U



### WORKING SMARTER, NOT HARDER

*written by Sue West, Space4U, LLC*

Before you leave work at night, do two things and your next day will be more productive. Look at what you got done today & what's on the plan for tomorrow; and look around at the files and papers you used today -- clean up and organize your work area, so when you walk in tomorrow, you're ready to go, and don't have to stop and clean up first.

A calendar is useful for appointments but you need a "to do" list of some type to keep track of your work done outside of client or other business meetings. Choose electronic or paper-based, but choose **one place** to list everything you need to do. Without a consolidated list, you'll miss items, you'll miss out on priorities, you'll be less efficient, and you'll never have a good idea of how much work you really have. Your brain will get more cluttered with little stuff instead of being creative.

**For strategic ideas, marketing ideas, or ideas you just don't want to lose track of,** it's also a good idea to have an "ideas" file or list. Use a folder you can drop notes into. Use a Word or Excel document to trap ideas if you're more electronically inclined. Whatever is the easiest way for you to trap those ideas, just do it.

For **long term or large projects**, make an appointment with yourself which you keep at all costs. And consider working on the project outside of your regular office environment.

Always **set priorities** on your list, for the year in the form of goals or a plan, for the quarter to ensure you meet the annual goals you've set, for the week and the day to ensure progress towards quarterly goals. Start with ABC to set priorities, and as the priority gets nearer to when you need to work on it, put a date or duration on it. This will help you figure out how many you can get done in a limited time. This helps you stay on focus and not spend time where others want you to, but where it's in your company's best interest to do so. **Goals are also a great way** to keep focused on the accomplishments vs. what you think you haven't done.

Block a certain time of day when you'll read through and take action on **regular mail and e-mail**. Quickly decide what to do with each piece of paper and get it done. If you can get through the mail but don't have the time to act on the decisions, either (1) change the time or (2) write on the top of each page what your decision is (or use file folders if you're on e-mail). Then when you pick up this pile again, you won't have to spend time remembering your good ideas.

**Answer e-mail** 2-3 times a day at regular times instead of getting distracted with it too many times during the day. It's like a lot of little interruptions instead of 2-3 longer ones.

## Organize Your Space and Time

You can keep yourself more focused on your regular work this way.

For **trade publications**, block a time of day or a time of the week. Learn to skim the table of contents and decide which articles to read -- now or later, but mark or tear out only those you're interested in. There is plenty to read, but you really only want to read what you need, when you need it. Use the internet to your advantage for archived articles as well.

15 minutes prior to **client meetings** or appointments, stop answering phone calls. This gives you last minute time to prepare for your meeting (your mindset and materials you need to bring). Taking a phone call at this time usually makes you late, and will distract you.

While **multi-tasking** sometimes has its advantages, it is often less productive overall. Be careful of how many tasks you have going on at once. If you're concerned you won't get some done, set a time period for each task.

**Interruptions:** if you work out of your home and find other family members are not treating your office time as seriously as you are, sit down and discuss the importance of your quiet office time. Use the local library as a place to get 100% uninterrupted time when needed (to write a presentation or report, for example). Discuss ways you can minimize these interruptions during the day. Realize that you will have interruptions; schedule as many of the "regular" ones as you can.

For every task, **think before you act**. Think backwards in time. What's your deadline? What smaller tasks have to be completed before you can meet the deadline? Write them down so you don't lose what you've done, repeat work, or forget steps.

If you have **a task you're dreading**, in the long run, it's better for you and for the quality of your work if you tackle it first. Get this one out of the way and you won't be distracted by feelings of "I should work on it" as you're working on your other projects.

**Internet research:** if you need to get research done, set aside a block of uninterrupted time. Write down the sites you want to visit so you keep track of what you've done and can limit your time. It is easy to go off on tangents and lose more time than is necessary.

In your office space, think **"zones" of activity** and assemble the supplies you need in each one instead of centrally. You need a regular workspace. You may need a client meeting space. You need a computer area. You need a supplies area. You need an area for each major portion of your job responsibilities. The area is set up for maximum effectiveness for the zone's activity.