



Organize Your Desk, Organize Your Life

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The secret to working efficiently may be right in front of you - on your desk. A 5S workspace makeover may be what you need to reduce stress and increase productivity.

The 5S methodology is a Japanese-based system for organizing, cleaning, developing and sustaining a productive work environment. Most often applied in industrial work environments, it can also be quickly and effectively applied to office work areas as well.

The 5S's are:

- Sort: Getting rid of clutter
- Set in Order: Organizing the work area
- Shine: Cleaning the work area
- Standardize: Creating and use standard methods
- Sustain: Maintaining through commitment and discipline

The first step to an efficient workspace is to get organized. Find a large block of time so you can complete the organization process in one day. Next, break your job down into a few basic categories (training, sales, clients, graphics, etc.) and begin to organize around these categories.

“One of the most important categories you may want to consider is ‘pending,’ for important, time-sensitive items,” Smagacz said. “This area should be inside a drawer of your desk, to remove the stress of looking at it all day.”

While organizing, make piles for each category - including a trash pile - on the floor, and sort through everything. Find places other than your desk to store projects. Finally, organize each pile into subcategories.

“Once you are organized, it takes discipline to stay organized,” Smagacz said. Here are some tips to keep your workspace efficient:

- Put away right away. Don't fall into the “I'll do it later” trap. It never works out that way. If something gets put in your inbox, put it in its “pending” file. Whatever you're not working on at the moment should be put away. As items sit on your desk waiting to be put away, be aware that they are a drain on your productivity in every other area.
- Touch paper only once. Don't spend time rearranging paper, and don't have sticky notes all over. If you pick up a piece of paper, decide where the information on the note needs to be and put it there. Learn not to do anything else until you decide what to do with that note. “This is one of the most difficult skills,” Smagacz said.
- Keep things current. Decide how often you need to update your desk and set aside an hour to go through your files. Relocate anything that's out of date and look at everything in your pending files.
- Clean off your desk. Every night before you leave, make sure your desk is clear. Although you may think you're saving time by leaving out a project to pick up the next morning, you're not. It is always less stressful, and therefore more productive, to walk in to a clean desk. Make sure when you're cleaning it off, however, that you put things away where they go. Don't just throw them in a drawer.