

Being Organized—Oh, the Irony

By Sian Brannon

Have you found that quite a few people who work in libraries, especially librarians, are extremely disorganized? I find it particularly ironic that this happens in institutions based on classification and order. The job responsibility doesn't matter—secretaries, circulation clerks, supervisors, librarians—everyone needs to start being more organized. Organization leads to increased productivity (happier supervisors!) and less frustration (happier staff!) Basically, you can't provide information if you can't find it, so here are some steps to get you on the path to being an organized library worker...

Start simple. For those of you that are severely organization-challenged, here's your first step. Clear off a spot anywhere on your desk (preferably near the phone) for your first "Brain." The Brain is your new pad of paper where you will write everything. Don't throw pages away, and don't lay anything on top of the Brain! Phone messages, to-do lists, and reminders are perfect for the Brain. From this point on you will have one spot to look when you can't find a certain phone number, can't remember what tasks you are working on, or need to remember a deadline.

If you already have a Brain, try making a spot for one in-box on your desk. Make sure other staff know where it is. Now you have one special place where others can leave things that need your attention. Also, you will have one incoming pile, instead of a mish-mash of papers laid about your desk. If you do not already have a filing system in place, try not to move things from your in-box to another pile on your desk. Leave them in the in-box until you are ready to handle them. The incentive here is to handle things before they overflow...

For those of you who are overly sentimental or afraid of losing access to something, this next step will be hard: use your trashcan or paper shredder. Save your emails on your computer instead of printing them out. Use your Brain to take notes from important articles (see above). Check your organization's records retention policy and start shredding old documents. Instead of printing out every monthly report, try burning them to a CD. With less paper on and in your desk, you have more room for pictures of your dog, a Zen garden, or whatever giant coffee mug you like.

If you have made it this far you are ready for a big step: supplies. Purchase your own file folders and organization supplies. Investing money helps you to invest interest in using the objects (at least for a little while). Also, if you take the time to find supplies you like and find attractive, you will enjoy using them more. I would rather look at hot pink file folders that drab olive. I would rather have my pens and highlighters in a cool flowerpot than strewn around my desktop. For your filing system, you can start simply and just have a few different files (present, past, and future) or get more specific (articles to read, personnel, committee work, random, etc.). Each situation is different. I suggest you coordinate your supplies in theme and color. It will look less crazy.

That is enough organizing to get started for now. You are going to have to make an effort to continue to use these ideas and not just try them one time. I am hyper-organized, or organized to the point of being anal-retentive. Annoying? Yes. Effective? Yes. Being addicted to office supplies is helpful when you work in a library. In today's popular culture of organization shows and do-it-yourself magazines, it is easy to find advice on how-to-get organized. The first step is admitting you have a problem...

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