

Ask SCORE

I've never been a terribly neat or organized person in my personal life, but now that I'm running my own appliance repair business I think those habits are reducing my productivity. What can I do to clean up my act?

Do you see a cluttered desk or office as a sign of success? Many small business owners do because it shows that there is much that has to be done. However, it doesn't take long for the office clutter to go from a sense of pride to an overwhelming mess.

According to professional organizer Chris Perrow, most business owners are on information overload, working long hours without thinking much about simple productivity issues of how and why things get done. "When they stop to analyze the situation, they often find much could be delegated, eliminated or done at a more efficient time," she says.

The key to eliminating clutter is to have a system in place to keep that helps you get and stay organized. Organizing Coach Carol Halsey suggests a five-step approach to dealing with office paperwork that she calls DRAFT, for Discard, Refer, Act, File and Table.

1) Discard—If it's something you'll never retrieve again, trash it, don't file it. Your files should be a "resource holding tank," *not* a dead storage place.

2) Refer—If someone else needs the information or can handle it for you, pass it along.

3) Act—If it requires action by you, *do it now*. It's inefficient to delay and handle the paper a second or third time.

4) File—If it's important and you will truly need it later, file it in a proper filing system that allows you to find things quickly.

5) Table—If it's something you'll need in the near future (but not today), place it in a simple follow-up system for easy, quick access.

Because organizing is such a pervasive challenge, there are a number of resources available to help you improve both daily habits and overall efficiency. Some helpful and inexpensive books include *Organize Your Office* by Ronni Eisenberg, *File...Don't Pile* by Pat Dorff and the *Office Clutter Cure* by Don Aslett. You can also find specialized one-on-one assistance from the National Association of Professional Organizers' automated referral service at www.napo.net. You can search for a professional organizer by location or specialty (e.g., home, type of business, special skills, etc.).

This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business counseling and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit www.score-manchester.org for information on counseling, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

Have a question you'd like answered in this column? E-mail it to info@score-manchester.org, with "Ask SCORE" in the subject line.