



Never Put Off Until Tomorrow . . . (Part III)

Welcome to the third installment of my series on learning to manage your life better. Two months ago, we discussed Procrastination and how fear-driven it is. Last month, we discussed Time Management and the three magic questions you should always be asking yourself (you can see the previous articles on my Solutions Counseling Facebook page).

This month, I want to address your belongings and some techniques for managing them better.

It's no secret – I love to organize! I can't think with clutter, and don't fool yourself into thinking that you operate better with a little mess either! Below are the rules I live by when thinking about all the stuff I own:

1. Everything must have a home.

And that home cannot be a pile on your desk, the floor, or the dining room table. A home indicates a place you are going to put an item after you've used it – every time. Think about how much time you waste looking for things – if those things had a home, you'd know exactly where to go! If you can't find a home for something, you don't need it.

2. Free yourself. We are all prisoners of our past until we make the choice to free ourselves from the lessons with which we grew up. Did you grow up in an obsessively neat house? Or was your house messy all the time? Maybe you remember your parents always frantically running around looking for lost items

(keys, important papers, etc.). When we grow up like that, typically one of two things happens: either you blindly follow the path your parents have laid before you (and wonder how you ended up exactly like them), or you make a conscious decision to be different. As with most things in life, the middle ground is the best. Be organized to the point that you can find things without wasting time, but not so obsessive that no one can stand to live with you!

3. Organize by broad categories.

Whether you have a hard copy filing system, or your computer (or both), create folders for broad categories. When I am looking for that handout to give clients on modifying a child's behavior, I just go to my "Parenting" file then sort from there. When I am looking for my worker's comp insurance policy, I go to my "insurance" computer file as a starting point. When you're looking for that illusive article or document, you no longer need to remember the exact name of the file, just the broad category it falls in.

4. Have a schedule. You must at least have a template of how your day should go. What do you need to do first? And after that, what will you work on? That way if you get interrupted, and you will get interrupted, you can easily remember what you were working on based on where you are in your schedule. Others will get used to the schedule, too, and learn when you typically work on certain things, like projects or returning phone calls.

5. Prioritize. Everything you do in the course of your day falls into one of three categories: "must do", "should do", or "nice to do." You need to begin to organize your day based on these categories. "Must do" items are necessary to your goals, and typically have a deadline attached. Prioritize them and work on them first. No "must do" shopping! Work on your #1 item, even if you can devote only a few minutes to it. "Should do" items are important, but don't have a deadline. They can be worked on after the "must do" stack is completed. "Nice to do" things are those items you would enjoy doing, or that would be fun when you have free time, but they are not necessary. Those are tackled after the first two categories are complete. Obviously, you need to review each category regularly as items will move from category to category (deadlines get attached or moved, or priorities change).

People who are less organized tend to work on the "nice to do's" instead of the "must do's". The "nice to do's" are more fun and appealing. But all those "must do's" are still waiting on you, no matter how much you avoid them.

So, to wrap up this series: face your fears and stop procrastinating, use the three magic questions to help you manage your time better, and use the above five tips to help you manage your stuff better. There! Now, we're all organized and ready to be successful!