

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

The adage "A place for everything and everything in its place" is a perfect motto for your work space. Organizing your papers, supplies, manuals, and books so you can locate what you need creates a less stressful and more productive environment.

The worst clutter is usually paper. Everyone hates to file, but the main purpose of a filing system isn't to store data, it's to arrange your papers so you can retrieve information quickly and easily. Getting paper clutter off the floor or desktop is a bonus, but it's really about having what you need readily accessible.

Remember: The Small Business Administration estimates that **80 percent of filed papers are never looked at again**. Before you print and file e-mails, articles, and documents, think about saving the information electronically, finding it online, or getting it from a co-worker or associate if you ever need it.

So, how do you organize the documents you decide to keep?

Plan your system before you start filing.

Think about what kinds of paper you need to do your work – marketing material, reference articles, billing files, client/customer files, vendor information, etc. You can't decide what filing categories, type of file furniture, or space you need until you know what you plan to file. (You may need to house active and inactive files separately if you have a lot of paper.)

Don't copy someone else's file system.

Look at systems already on the market, but don't just blindly follow them. You may not need the same categories or storage space. Although multiple folders and tabs may look impressive, that may be more complicated than you need.

Use labels that mean something to you.

You have to be able to immediately know what is in a file based on the label. If you have to open the file to see what types of paper are in it, you're wasting time. Don't use generic titles unless they work for you.

Use file furniture that is functional and convenient.

Four-drawer vertical file cabinets use the same floor space as two-drawer cabinets if you need more storage. Active files need to be within reach; if you don't have room in or by your desk, keep files on a mobile file cart and roll it over when you need them.

Don't procrastinate on filing.

Stack papers to be filed in a shallow box. When paper reaches the top, you file. Or plan 30 minutes every week (you pick the day) to file. Make it part of your routine.

Don't file papers you don't need.

Check with your CPA or financial adviser about which papers you must keep for how long. Also, ask yourself if the information will be outdated when you need it, and if you can find the same information elsewhere at any time (usually on the Internet). If so, then don't keep the paper.