

# CLUTTER CAN BE CONQUERED:

*Committing the time is key to getting, staying organized*

It's time to launch a few attacks on organizing and managing your office space or cubicle. According to organizational expert, Elaine Jermy, president of Organized Evolution, it takes only a strong desire to be able to find things, a little willpower, and dedicated time to manage clutter to make a difference to your work area.

Elaine recently tackled a challenge on behalf of the Human Resources (HR) employees at head office in Burlington. HR had a large storage area that held everything from stationery supplies to books, forms, some records and many odds and ends. It was a jumble that often was cleared out only to fill up again. Elaine worked her magic of clearing out useless, excess and outdated items, and sorted and organized the useful items into labeled 'departments', including a resource library, stationery and office supplies, and payroll area. Now, the closet is an easily maintained showpiece.

"Out of sight is not out of mind, and hidden doesn't mean the items have gone away," says Elaine. "The longer you wait, the longer the task of organizing takes. In your home or office, consciously notice the cluttered area that causes you the most stress and tackle that first. The results will be instant.

"Block off and commit to a period of time and minimize distractions from auto-response e-mail, telephone calls or visitors. Even a small amount of time makes a difference if you focus on the task."

### Here are a few secrets of office organization:

- Paper clutter is unfinished business and it piles up quickly. Take one piece of paper at a time and figure out the action required to handle it. The goal is to act on it, file it or toss it.
- Deal with some items immediately. If you can't, then start a 'to do' list and place the paper in a brightly-coloured action file on your desktop.
- Create "files not piles" and file items immediately. It takes minutes to file one item but may take hours to clear a 'to be filed' pile. Create a place for everything and put the appropriate items there when you are finished with them or at the end of the day.
- Prioritize your 'to do' list; assign time estimates and then schedule blocks of time on your calendar for tackling each item.
- Stay organized by dedicating a few minutes at the end of each day to file and tidy your desk area. Starting each day with a clear desk will help you focus on what's important.
- Create a place for everything and put the appropriate items away when you are finished with them or at the end of each day.
- Group like items together or establish 'departments'. Keep items used together in one place, for example, materials for a specific project.
- Use clear yellow hanging folder tabs for greater visibility.
- Don't store more office supplies than you can reasonably use; even necessities become clutter if they lack a 'home'.
- Buy storage boxes that are see-through and stackable. For easy identification, label the contents.
- If you have professional or personal magazines/newspapers, set a retention period for the collection, for example, a two-year supply of issues. When you add a new issue, discard the corresponding one from two years before.
- Instead of storing entire publications, clip the 'must have' articles and store them in sheet protectors in a binder by subject categories.