

Take Back Your Office in 14 Days

A home office is often the most used and cluttered room of the house. It is the multi-purpose room where we store the stuff we need most alongside the junk that doesn't have a better home, stuff we don't know where it belongs, and things we don't know when to get rid of. The clutter creeps in, multiplies, and before you know it, there's a monster looming that is so scary you're afraid to enter the room at all.

Are your piles one inch? 5 inches? Up to your knees?

Even if your office isn't all that bad, this exercise can still help to reduce your piles and get your home office back in shape.

Take just a few minutes a day and you'll be on your way.

Day 1: PURPOSE / ASSESSMENT

Make a list of all the activities that happen in your office. These may include paying bills, sending email, filing, crafting, exercising, playing with toys, writing, and doing homework. Look around to see if you have the right furniture, lighting and storage for these activities. Make a list of things you will need to buy such as a desk, drawers for supplies, and file drawers.

Time needed: 10 minutes

Day 2: ELIMINATE CLUTTER

Delete anything in the room that you don't need for the purposes you listed on day 1. Move things out that belong in other rooms. Give away unwanted items. And be brutally honest about how many knick-knacks you need to have around.

Place the unwanted items into boxes marked for trash, charity donation, return to owner, and put away elsewhere.

Time needed: 2 - 4 hours.

Day 3: ZONES

Just like kindergarten, divide the room into zones of activity.

Decide what each part of the room will be used for. This way you will be clear about what belongs in each part of the room. Later, you will be setting up storage with ease-of-use in mind. Store office supplies in the office zone, craft supplies in the arts & craft zone, and exercise supplies in the work-out zone.

Just decide on your basic zones today.

Time needed: 10 minutes

Day 4: ROUND-UP

Imagine you are a cowboy and your paper piles need to be herded.

Put on your best cowboy wrangling hat and gather up all of your papers into a few boxes.

Mark the boxes:

- * to file
- * in progress (do, return, pay, etc)
- * trash
- * keepsake

Save the round-up for a day when you have a couple hours in a row.

Or do a little each day in 15-30 minute segments.

Time: 3 - 10 hours depending on amount of paper.

Day 5: ROUND-UP DAY 2

Continue the process of rounding up paper.

Go around the house collecting the nomads that have wandered off.

Look for the orphan papers that never had a home.

Time: 1 hour

Day 6: FUN SHWAY

This de-cluttering dance may become the highlight of your week.

Turn on your favorite fun song. Take a trash bag and find things to toss out as long as the song is playing. Items can be scraps of paper or broken pens. Everything counts!

Do this once a day until the clutter is clear (and forever on to keep it way).

Time needed: 5 minutes a day.

Day 7: FILE FLING

1) How much paper can you file in 15 minutes?

Make a 7 day chart. Set a timer for 15 minutes and go! Try to file more every day. Soon your piles will disappear.

2) How fast can you file 25 papers?

Make a 7 day chart. Time yourself each day and see if you can file a little faster each time.

Make filing silly and it isn't quite so bad.

*If you don't have a working filing system, now would be a great time to make one.

Categorize your papers into these main categories: Household, Medical, Insurance, Personal, Special Events.

Time needed: 15 minutes (Add 3-4 hours if you need to start a file system)

Day 8: DAWN OF THE DESK

Would you like to see the top of your desk every day?

One of the easiest ways is to create a desk-top file system to keep the paper clutter from spreading across every flat surface.

Use 10 hanging files in a desktop file box or a nearby drawer.

Pick your favorite color files to add some fun!

Label your files in these categories, or come up with your own:

- ~ To Pay (bills)
- ~ To do (errands, calls, letters)
- ~ Pending (rebates, claims, orders)
- ~ To File (reference)
- ~ To Go (parties, classes, tickets, travel)

Other useful categories:

- ~ Coupons to use
- ~ Receipts to process
- ~ Schedules/Rosters/Phone lists
- ~ Projects

You will add papers to the files on day 9.

If you don't like files, you can make the same kind of system using desk top stacking trays or wall pockets (available at office supply stores and organizing stores) Time needed: 30 minutes

Day 9: MOVE-IN DAY

It's time to sort your "In Progress" papers from the round-up.

(Day 4 & 5)

Look at each paper and ask yourself "what is the next action I need to take to get rid of this paper?"

Place each paper into the file that corresponds to your next action. If you come across a paper you aren't sure about, it may be because you need to take multiple steps to process the paper. Try to identify what the steps are.

Time needed: 1 hour plus 5 minutes daily when opening the mail.

Day 10: SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

Create a keepsake bin to store all the items that are important to you for sentimental reasons. Make one for every family member.

Place the important papers in the box. Remember when saving for children, only save a representation of their art and schoolwork, not everything they have ever touched. If you have trouble with this, ask yourself, "would my child want to look at this at age 35? Will it be significant in 10 years?"

Time needed: 10-20 minutes

Day 11: SUPPLIES

Gather up your office supplies, cords, batteries and other items that live in the average office. Use the desktop and the nearest desk drawers to store things you need every day such as pens, tape, stapler and staples, hole punch, blank CD's. Find desktop holders and drawer dividers to keep your items in sight, in reach, and in order.

The things you use once a week or less can be stored a bit farther away. Use containers to store lots of small things like batteries, files, file tabs, or to keep them from getting scattered. Use containers that stack to maximize your storage area.

Some useful categories for small bins are:

~ Filing supplies (tabs, files, label maker) ~ business cards ~ Things that keep stuff together (glue, tape, staples, paper clips) ~ writing (pens, pencils, markers) ~ computer cords and accessories ~ phone cords and accessories ~ small electronics - cameras, mp3 players

Time needed: 1 - 2 hours

Day 12: DOO-DADS AND THINGYS

There's always a bunch of stuff that just doesn't easily fit into a category. That's where the doo-dad and thingy box comes in handy.

Mark a small box to hold general office supplies for everything from key chains to the extra palm pilot stylus.

Time needed: 20 minutes

Day 13: BINDERS FOR CARDS, RECIPES, AND DISCS

A great way to get control of paper and CD's is to store them in binders.

~ Use basic 3-ring binders with plastic page protector sheets to create idea notebooks for decorating, projects and recipes.

~ You can create a business resource notebook using business card pages. Each page stores 9 business cards.

~ Cut your CD clutter with beautiful binders made for discs.

Categorize discs in a series of binders for software, photos, games and music.

Time needed: 1-2 hours each binder

Day 14: GET THE MESSAGE

Stop chasing little scraps of paper. They're impossible to keep track of. Use a spiral notebook to store your phone messages and notes from conversations. If you like to write on small paper, use post-its or tape the scraps into the spiral. Doing this creates a log of all the important conversations you have had, phone numbers you need, to do lists, etc. Organize it further by dating the front and the back of the spiral.

Enter important phone numbers into your address book or database as you go.

Time needed: 5 minutes

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