Improving Organizational Skills

Improving ones' organization skills can have a dramatic effect on many other aspects of ones' endeavors. It may take many attempts to change such habits, but the rewards of doing so can be well worth the effort. Here are some suggestions to consider and, hopefully, adopt.

1) **Choose a Calendar System**: Everyone is different. Decide what works for you. Whether it's a big calendar pad, a handheld device, an appointment book, or your cell phone, stick to one system but stay organized. It's essential! NOTE: Many companies use their own online calendaring and schedule meetings that way.

2) **Make Lists, Check Them Off**: Take inventory and keep a master to-do list. Unburden yourself from having to remember things. Get in the habit of writing things down.

3) **Commit to Priorities**: Start each day by identifying the one thing you absolutely must do and do that first. If ambitious, list three to five things and take the same approach. It's that simple.

4) **Set Deadlines**: Commit to a specific time to complete tasks. Be sure to make it manageable from the onset so you have no excuse to miss any. Be in the habit of respecting all deadlines.

5) **Look the Part:** Try the "organize as you go" approach. It takes a little extra effort after each task to put things where they belong. Keeping your work area clean will not only make you look organized, but you will feel it too … and that's just positive reinforcement.

6) **Apply the 80/20 Rule:** Pareto's theory of predictable imbalance has since been applied to almost every aspect of modern life. When applied to work, it means that approximately 20 percent of your efforts produce 80 percent of the results. Learning to recognize and then focus on that 20 percent is the key to making the most effective use of your time (See Time Management Best Practice Tips).

7) **Don't Be a Packrat:** Before filing any paper, decide whether you'll ever see it again. Ask yourself if anything on it requires action or if it's just for information purposes. Determine whether the information exists elsewhere and, if not, how difficult it would be to get it again if needed. If you can live with the answer to knowing the worst thing that could happen without that piece of paper, then toss it.

8) **Choose Filing and Naming Systems:** Label your hard copies, electronic files, and contact lists in such a way that you'll never have to check or look twice to find them again or have any trouble identifying the contents. Remember that your employer will probably want your files when your internship is over, so keep careful notes and be professional!! No doodling in the margins.

9) **Consider a Database:** There are many simple programs to help you do such things as keep more detailed personal information on contacts, automate mailings, or simply stay better organized. See if one can work for you.

10) **Remember to Back-up:** Ask yourself how easy you could recover information if something happened to your cell phone, date book or data on your computer. Then take measures to avoid any catastrophic losses. The best way to manage a crisis is to prevent it.

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