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## **PUGET SOUND** **Business Journal** *Business Leaders Get It.*

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### Staying organized

# Now it's official: It's the week to get organized

Puget Sound Business Journal (Seattle) - October 1, 2004 by [Laura Leist](#)

Is the top of your desk covered with piles of paper that have no rhyme or reason? Maybe the floor has stacks of paper? Do you have trouble quickly locating documents or files? Are you typically late for meetings?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you might benefit from a bit of office organization. There's no time like the present to get started.

Oct. 3-9 is "National Get Organized Week," a great time to assess the organizational needs in your office and begin the process to implement some small changes that can have big results.

Webster's Dictionary defines "organization" as "to give a definite structure, arrange, put in working order." To that definition, I add "efficient and functional."

There are many degrees of organization and what is comfortable for some may not be comfortable for all. One of the most important steps in being organized is being able to maintain the "system (s)" on a daily basis. If systems are created that do not work for the individual, they will not be maintained and will break down.

If you are ready to give your office a "clean sweep," keep in mind that organizing is a process, not an event. The piles of paper did not land suddenly on your desk yesterday and most likely they will not be gone tomorrow. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- Start small. If you have a lot to organize it can be overwhelming. Sometimes the hardest part is knowing where to start. Tackle one drawer, pile of paper or shelf at a time. Once you've conquered one small area, leaving you with a sense of accomplishment, you can move on to the next area until eventually your entire office is organized.
- To be filed. There are regulations that state how long certain types of paperwork must be kept. If you are not sure, go to [www.arma.com](http://www.arma.com), the Web site for the Association of Records Management Association.

Armed with a clear understanding of how long to keep records/information as well as what should be kept, designate a location in your office for paper that is "to be filed." This means that those papers require no further action, other than to be filed. It will keep them from cluttering up your desk or floor until you have a moment to file them.

- Plan ahead. Spend 10-15 minutes at the end of your day wrapping up, putting things in their place and planning for the next day.

- Use colors when scheduling appointments. If you use the calendar in Microsoft Outlook to plan your day, try using the "show time as" feature that gives you the ability to show whether you are "busy," "out of office," "tentative" or "free." Using this feature will let you quickly see your schedule at a glance so you know if you are busy with meetings in the office or out. If your entire office adopts the policy of using this feature, it will make scheduling group meetings more efficient.
- Manage e-mail from sent file. If you use Microsoft Outlook for e-mail, a copy of each e-mail you send will automatically be saved in the "sent" folder, unless you have changed the settings. Set aside some time on a regular basis to quickly scan your sent e-mails. Delete those you no longer need. Those that remain most likely require follow up action because you did not receive a response, or they just need to be filed in an appropriate folder for documentation purposes.
- Follow up. Create a file for follow-up items. Those are items that you have taken action on, but cannot proceed until someone else has done their part. You may determine that you need more than one; one for paper or projects and one for e-mail. Whatever files you choose to use, the most important part is to use those systems on a consistent basis so nothing slips through the cracks. Creating a simple system such as these allows you to keep those types of items together so that you can quickly look at all follow up items at a glance, rather than having to search for them.

There is no right or wrong way to organize your office. Instead, it's about creating systems and processes that you can maintain on a daily basis.

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