

# It's Time To Get Organized

By Robert Elsenpeter

**Every spring the task is the same:** Roll up your sleeves, grab a trash bag, and start thinning out the mess that's been piling higher and higher over the year. While the image of spring cleaning might connote a kerchief on the head, comfortable work clothes, and a bucket full of sudsy water, it isn't just your home that needs some attention. Take a look at your desk. Yes, it needs work too.

Looking at your work space, you might be wondering how to tackle this insurmountable task. Here's another way to think about it: How do you eat an elephant? The answer's simple: Just take a bite.

How do you get organized? Just get started.

Some people avoid the task of organization because it seems to be an all-or-nothing job.

"People are perfectionists and avoid the project because they don't think it'll be perfect," says organizing consultant Jennifer Swanson ([www.jenniferswanson.com](http://www.jenniferswanson.com)). "Doing something is better than nothing."

## Make Time

Audrey Thomas is an organizing consultant ([www.organizedaudrey.com](http://www.organizedaudrey.com)) and the author of "The Road Called Chaos." She advises the first step toward getting organized is to block out some time to do it.

"A lot of companies will designate time for spring cleaning," she says. "The company will bring in supplies, employees dress for the occasion, and they make a day of cleaning."

Swanson recommends starting at the top of an area — like a desk or credenza — and working your way down.

"Pick a starting place and work your way around," she advises.

Getting rid of old magazines and catalogs can free you of the burden of clutter. Don't worry about having to toss catalogs.

"Trust me, they'll send you a new one," says Swanson.

## What To Toss And What Not To Toss

When you start digging through old paperwork, it's important to know what to keep and what you can get rid of. Some companies have well-defined retention policies that dictate how long a document must be kept.

"Know your retention policy," says Thomas. "The company might have a different length of time for different records."

If you're getting rid of sensitive paperwork, how you get rid of it is important.

"Not everything can just go in the garbage," says Thomas.

You may have to arrange for some quality time with a shredder.

## E-trash

Computers present another world of disorganization. Though you're not filling up a filing cabinet with papers, a disorganized computer can be hard to navigate and will, in fact, run out of room.

"We tend to think of our hard drives as infinity," says Thomas. "They really can run out of storage."

Don't make a habit of filing a hard copy of computer files — it just creates more clutter. If you're worried about losing something, find out your company's computer backup procedures.

## Maintenance

Once you're organized it's easier to stay organized than try to eat that elephant again.

Swanson and Thomas both advise blocking out time for organizing each week and avoiding interruptions — don't even answer the phone.

"Every time you're interrupted you have to restart," says Swanson.

*Robert Elsenpeter is a freelance writer from Blaine.*

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