

Paper Management Made Easy: Help for the Homeless

By Sara Fisher, Certified Professional Organizer

Paper. Funny how such a small word turns into a big obstacle for many of us: piles of catalogues we never get around to perusing. Stacks of junk mail that get bigger every day. Consider this! The average person receives only 1.5 personal letters each week, compared to 10.8 pieces of junk mail. Even necessary paper like bills, school permission slips and medical files can overwhelm us when we have no system to manage them. It's the homeless paper that bogs us down.

Step 1: Help the homeless papers find their perfect living space by first determining the categories of paper you find yourself buried under:

- Bills to be paid and bills already paid are usually the first and easiest ones to create. After that, the designations are as individual and unique as you are.
- Need a category for each of your children's schoolwork? Make each one a file or box.
- How about a category for items that you need to keep around for reference? A household category? An action file that includes tickets to future events or reminders for doctor visits? Do whatever works for you.

Got your categories? Now give them a permanent home. How about the kitchen counter, your office desk, or a nook in the hallway? This spot becomes your command central. Use labels on folders, boxes or shelves to keep categories neat. This also lets others know what goes where. Soon you'll find that everyone begins to use the system!

Step 2: Keeping up with paper is the next step in taking back control. In a perfect world, every piece of paper magically finds its way into your pre-determined categories. But we live in the imperfect present. So, when new paper comes in, put it in the appropriate folder, shelf or box right away. Then schedule time to manage your paper and even your categories just like you would a lunch with friends or a dentist appointment. Use this scheduled time with your command central to take action on the action items and file the papers in the "to file" folder or box.

Step 3: Reduce the amount of paper. Receive your regular bills and bank statements via email or view and pay them online. Review your newspaper, magazine and catalogue subscriptions and cancel those you never read or order from. Can you peruse your magazines online instead of waiting for the paper version?

Better yet, remove your name from lists altogether - 44% of all junk mail is thrown in the trash, unopened and unread. Three services show you how:

- The Direct Marketing Association (www.the-dma.org) offers a way to get off many lists.
- Opt Out Prescreen (www.optoutprescreen.com) will remove your information from many credit card solicitations.

- For just \$15.00 Greendimes.com can cut your junk mail up to 90% and plant 10 trees to renew our forests.

Categorize, manage, reduce. Three simple steps to giving homes to the homeless papers that threaten to overwhelm us every day.

Sara Fisher and A Simple Space de-clutter and organize the Atlanta area. Over 80 clients have discovered that when your physical space is simplified, your mental space reaps the benefits, too.