



Getting Organized

by Alexander Hiam

A new Office Depot survey of more than 1,500 workplace respondents revealed that the number one concern is to “get more organized.” In fact, this was the most popular business resolution for 2005 (51% of respondents chose it).

If you look at the top five workplace New Year’s resolutions, all are relevant to the challenge of getting organized:

- 1) Get more organized
- 2) Manage my day more effectively
- 3) Spend more time with my family
- 4) Find a way to respond to colleagues/clients in a more timely manner
- 5) Separate work and play

These are all aspects of the struggle to take control over our work, rather than to feel like it has control over us. Work today is characterized by three factors that make it challenging to feel organized and in control:

- We are doing more with less: usually with less people, so everyone is working harder and being more productive than they were five or even ten years ago.

- Work is characterized by fast rates of change: we tend to work on shifting priorities and projects, so our old systems don't fit our current challenges very well.
- Work is far more cooperative than it used to be, and the volume of communications between us is going up exponentially.

The old steel cabinets aren't much use when you work on new projects every week and have to respond to dozen of emails, phone messages, memos and mailings every day too.

[How to Regain Control Over Your Work](#)

Here are six tips for regaining control and reducing stress and distractions:

1. Prioritize your tasks each day, then do the most important one first, for as long as you can before other things distract you.
2. Print out and file important emails (either by customer name, date, or project). People who depend on emails tend to waste time digging through their computers trying to find old messages; a hard copy is usually more durable and easy to access.
3. Create temporary project files using portable plastic file boxes. Keep the boxes for your several most important projects within reach of your desk, and immediately file all papers as they come in. Pull folders when you work on the project, then re-file. Or bring the entire box to a project meeting or work session.
4. If you are a piler, stop using your desk for your piles. Instead, use a rolling plastic set of file drawers, label each drawer, and put your

piles in the drawers. This leaves your desk free for one project pile you are currently working on, allowing you to feel focused and effective.

5. Make meetings more efficient by agreeing in advance to a single, important purpose or agenda item. Meetings are optionally productive when they have a single purpose, and a total waste of time if they not allowed to have more than three agenda items.

6. Set goals. What do you want to accomplish this week? This month? This year? The Office Depot survey revealed that four out of five people do not set work goals for themselves at the beginning of the year. Goals are the secret to feeling proactive instead of just reacting to the latest request, demand, or emergency.