A Better Way to Organize Your Workspace

Don't mess with your success. Use these tips to cut the clutter and improve productivity.

Matt Alderton

Staples Worklife Magazine

The average American works 8.8 hours per day, but most of us are truly productive for only a fraction of that time. One secret to getting more done in fewer hours is keeping an organized workspace—and you don't have to be Marie Kondo to achieve it. Even a few small changes to your desk setup can yield surprising results.

Replace piles with files

It's a digital world, but analog artifacts still pile up. Instead of stacking important papers on your desk, use magazine holders to create a desktop filing system, suggests Katy Winter, founder of Katy's Organized Home. Label folders with actions—to call, to file, to read—and set a daily or weekly reminder to address their contents.

Rise to the occasion

Winter recommends a riser for your computer or monitor. When you elevate large items off your desktop, you can store everyday items such as Post-it notes, staplers and paper clips underneath them to free up desk space.

Don't be a pack rat

To keep your desk clutter-free after you've cleaned it, Betsy Fein, president of Clutterbusters.com, offers a handy mnemonic: RAT. Every piece of paper that crosses your desk should immediately be retained (i.e., filed away), acted on or tossed.

Roll with it

Store everyday items on a tiered rolling cart to keep your desktop clear and your office supplies handy, suggests Marty Basher, organization expert at Modular Closets.

Cover the walls

Store fewer things on your desk and more on your wall, Basher advises. Install an oversized corkboard above your desk where you can pin everything from calendars and correspondence to family photos.

Store strategically

If you use something daily, keep it on your desk, Fein suggests. If you use something weekly, store it off your desk, but reachable from it. If you use something monthly, store it farther away but still in your workspace, perhaps on a bookshelf. Store items you rarely use somewhere else entirely, such as in a storage closet.

Play the wellness angle

Comfort is a prerequisite for productivity, says Catherine Avery, owner of Productivity by Design. Follow the 90-90-90 rule for optimal ergonomics: Adjust the height of your chair, desk and monitor so that your elbows, hips and knees form 90-degree angles when you're sitting.

Shape for success

If your space allows it, opt for an L-shaped desk, suggests Avery, who recommends storing office supplies on the short arm of the L—to your right if you're right-handed, to the left if you're left-handed—for easiest access.

Illustration by Ryan Peltier

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