

Column *BUSINESS OF LAW*

The Organized Lawyer Gives Hope to Law Offices Everywhere

BY MARY LOUISE C. HOPSON

Then there's the joy of getting your desk clean, and knowing that all your letters are answered, and you can see the wood on it again.

— Lady Bird Johnson

Lady Bird nailed it. Look around your office. If a client were to come in, what clues would he or she pick up from your office's appearance about your level of professionalism and skill?

If your office is not a picture of order and organization, help may be on the way in the form of a useful little book written by Kelly Lynn Anders, Associate Dean for Student Affairs and a professor at Washington University School of Law. In addition to lots of detail about how to set up an office and keep the paperwork flowing smoothly, the book, published by Carolina Academic Press, offers a new way to look at one's surroundings to enhance the chances of keeping things neat and tidy.

Why should you be organized? For starters, you will have a greater sense of control over your work, which creates a more peaceful, serene work environment.

Having an organized workspace also may keep one from being sanctioned for actions that may actually be related to disorganization: Commingling of funds, inability to produce requested records, late

filings. Inexcusable, but not malicious, says Ms. Anders: These problems are a result of being disorganized.

Ms. Anders, who grew weary of her "Grand Canyon of clutter," found herself yearning for a peaceful office and set about finding out how to create one. She realized that information overload often begins in law school, with new students struggling just to keep up with the sheer volume of information. Add that to the rapidly changing work environment, with the demand for instant communication, and it's easy to see how anyone could feel overwhelmed.

But it's not just a question of buying boxes and bins and suddenly feeling organized. One has to know one's organizational style to truly conquer the clutter.

Organizational Styles

A questionnaire comes to the rescue in chapter two that categorizes workers into one of four styles. Are you a "Stacker," who likes to see everything stacked in piles nearby, giving the appearance of order and a sense of control? Or do you need to have everything relevant to a project spread out over your desk? If so, then you're a "Spreader." Soon there are so many documents that look alike that the Spreader can't find anything, often in the presence of bosses or clients. It's difficult to handle more than one project if

you're a Spreader.

"Free Spirits" have one or two specialties and are very focused on them, to the detriment of the appearance of their office. They often use numerous Post-it notes to jot down random ideas as they occur.

"Packrats" are emotionally tied to their things and like to fill in empty spaces with their stuff. Many have items, such as movie memorabilia, that in large quantities can be distracting to visitors.

Knowing which category you fall into is essential to getting a better handle on your organization, explains Ms. Anders. There aren't "wrong" ways to work, she says, just different styles.

Furniture can be tailored to fit the needs of all organizational types, with nooks and crannies for Stackers, lots of flat surfaces for Spreaders (but stay away from the conference table!), closed storage for Free Spirits, and both closed and open storage options for Packrats.

The Path to Organization

The first step after this assessment of organizational style is to clear off your desk, Ms. Anders says. See what you actually use in your day-to-day work, and note what items really need to be on your desk. Weed through your things and decide to keep, toss, or archive. Use a metal step file holder instead of the typical in/out

boxes, to corral daily work, current projects, and other items.

The book offers suggestions for office layouts and furniture arrangements, in all types of settings from cubicle to corner office, for different organizational styles. Ms. Anders gives ideas about how to manage the sheer volume of information, including file systems, financial record-keeping, and timekeeping records, with tips on the use of planners and electronic organizers. She also covers home offices and portable work environments, library organization, and hints on marketing, entertaining and personal appearance.

Honest reflection about your own personal style of organization and a clear picture of how that organized space will stay that way are keys to success. If you have better control over your work environment, your clients may feel more confident entrusting you with their important legal matters. What's not to like about that?

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To order the book, which costs \$20 and is in paperback, call 800-489-7486. ISBN # 978-1-59460-430-0. Save 10 percent when you order online at www.coplw.com.

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