



The Organized Lawyer

Feeling organizationally challenged? Wishing those stacks of files and loose papers would magically disappear from your office — especially if a client happens to need to sit where the pile is currently stacked? Well, I've got good news and bad news for you.

The good news is that Kelly Lynn Anders' new book, *The Organized Lawyer*, is a tool that may help those who tend towards the messy.

By Kelly Lynn Anders |
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Reviewed by
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The bad news is that the clean up isn't going to do itself no matter how many books you read. But having a little assistance in getting started may be just what you need.

So where to start in this process? Ms. Anders suggests that you first analyze what type of paper piler you really are. Are you a "stacker," which is someone who piles things into specific stacks that are organized in a manner only discernable by the stacker? Or maybe you're a "spreader," which is someone whose office may resemble that of a "stacker," but with a less rigid (and less workable) piling system. Or maybe you're just an old fashioned "packrat" who can't let go of anything. A quick 10-question quiz will help you figure this out, and whatever your style of messiness, Ms. Anders has a regimen for you.

So what are some of the solutions? This may shock you, but the first mode of attack is to clear your desk — but not in the way you're thinking. Clearly Ms. Anders has some experience with the chronically messy because she knows that letting go of the "stuff" that clutters up a space is as much an emotional issue as it is a physical one. Her solution? Put a box in the floor next to your desk, and place everything except your computer, your writing instrument, and your telephone in the box, using small plastic bags to hold groups of small things like paper clips. Then very carefully and thoughtfully replace on the desk only those things that must be there to func-

tion efficiently, leaving the box at your side like an emotionally supportive best friend. Once you've made this change for a comfortable period of time, you can progress by throwing out (or recycling) anything in the box that you've realized you just don't need. This procedure is then repeated for all your desk and credenza drawers.

What are some other good tips? Here are a few:

Use different colored folders to organize your physical files (in my divorce practice, debts are filed in red folders and assets are filed in green ones, while all other subfiles are plain old manila).

Establish a routine for doing your billing if you can't make yourself enter it in real time, such as keeping a small notepad beside your phone and jotting your time entry on it in real time, thus eliminating the possibility of lost time.

If you work from home or use alternative offices, keep a portable office prepared and organized so that time isn't wasted looking for what you need.

Apply all these same principles to your electronic files, including your e-mail.

And last but not least, none of this will work if you don't maintain what you've started, which may be the toughest part.

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But the payoff is a good one if you can stick with it — you can set aside worries about clients misinterpreting what a messy office means, satisfaction abounds from the control you've gotten over your physical practice, and those

who pick up files behind you will sing your praises 

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