

## **HELP..... MY DESK DROWNS!**

by Ruud Jansen

### **Bomb crater**

Not sure how the situation is with you but I frequently meet managers and business owners who are accustomed to run their business from the total disorder on their desk.

They often tell me that they know exactly where everything is and at the moment that they need things, they perfectly can pick it up out the mess in front of them (they say!). It is even easy and efficient to leave everything on your desk, after all that saves the walk to the closet! The desk of such a manager usually reminds me of the unclean room of my teenage son, like a bomb crater! Be sure however that it is really proven that with chaos on your desk, you cannot be productive!

In my good old office days it was very suspicious to have a clean desk; it suggested that you had nothing to do so when you would enter an office, first thing in the morning you would usually see people put piles of paper on the corners of their desk; this all to avoid the impression of not being busy.

Chaos on the desk usually was associated with “hard working” and be “very busy”. And you felt embarrassed to ask people who work in such an unorganized environment to ask to do things for you; they were so busy!...

I sometimes thought that people did this all on purpose and created deliberately the mess so that you would not even dare to bother them (busy, busy, busy). Later, with the introduction of time management principles and clean desk policy this all became much better; particularly the use of the pc brought more structure in the work and in its filing systems.

However, even now I still meet a lot of people in the business who have no control over their desk, although they hate to admit that and would love to find the time to structure it all.

Sometimes they ask their secretary or someone else from the staff to do this for them but usually this means that the whole mass of paper is being lifted up and be put on an empty shelf somewhere in the closet. Finally the door is safely closed and from that moment on, vital information has disappeared for ever.

### **Loose an hour a day by trying to find your info**

Are you as business owner or manager also member of this club? Did you know then that you lose more than an hour a day on average in finding your info?! How many times last week you were called and when he or she asked you something you had to say: “wait a minute, I will get this in front of me, it should be somewhere here...”. but 5 minutes later you decided to call that person back as you were not able to find it. Such a simple telephone call of a few minutes results into a complete search action of sometimes hours which makes you more and more desperate. It eliminates all your good energy for the rest of the day!

Do you know that you could drive in a beautiful car or have a great vacation somewhere on a tropical island from all these hours you lose by not organizing your work environment?! Or that you could pay some more extra on outstanding debts or would be able to pay college for your kids?

So please give yourself this salary increase by structuring and organizing your working environment and this all should starts with your own desk!

Unorganized and unstructured working does not only cost you a lot of time (so money) and gives you a lot of frustration but it brings you gradually in a mood of losing control on everything. You are behind the facts and the business is controlling you rather than you control the business. And after all you become more and more unproductive and you lose confidence and get tired.

## **6 Steps to get control on your business**

You want to be successful in your enterprise, and have the feeling to control your work and be even sometimes at home before dinner? Please follow these steps to get the organization back in your work:

### **1. Make an appointment with yourself**

Plan a weekly appointment with yourself for 1 hour and put these series of appointments in your agenda. Take care for that you keep this appointment under all circumstances and never reschedule it for something with a "higher priority". And use this hour for the organization of your work and start with cleaning your desk.

### **2. No interruptions!**

Switch off your telephone, close the door and hang out a sign that says : No interruptions! In other words, take care that you are not disturbed during this hour. Consider this hour as if it would be an appointment with your best customer.

### **3. Put a paper bin next to your desk**

Sixty percent of the stuff that is on your desk can usually be removed anyway. So keep those papers you need and throw the rest in the paper bin. However, don't go back as many people do to the paper bin and get all the stuff out of it in order to have another look at the document as these might be useful after all. What is in the paper bin should be considered as "removed".

### **4. Read each document carefully**

Now that the door is closed and your telephone is off, you start to read all those documents you left after step 3 carefully piece by piece and put yourself with every document the following 3 questions: What is this? Why do I have it? What should I do with it.

If you cannot think of a proper answer, just throw the document away.

### **5. File the documents**

If you need to file the documents you just read, put these in a properly labeled binder and if you don't have such a binder, make one. Please note that the labels can be read easily and don't save money by re using old binders but buy new ones!

### **6. Make an action list**

If after reading the documents, you need to take an action, write this on a to do list (or define this in your outlook or pda or mda) and start, after having read all the documents to work on your action list.

You will see what a goof feeling you will get after having cleaned up your desk in this way and when you have already a number of crosses behind some of your action items!

You will see in no time that your desk is clean and what a great feeling it is to start a telephone call and be focused and productive rather than to have frustration about the mess in front of you.

### **'Paperless Office'**

The 'paperless office' as it ever was predicted appeared to be an utopia. There will always be forms and documents that has to be kept available as hard copy and an office without any paper does not exist.

So we will have to accept that but if you treat the piles of paper as described above, it is after all very easy to manage.

Starting with the 6 basis rules you can further integrate this methodology with your pc. Try to file your documents in your computer as much as possible and introduce your filing system then also on your computer.

In such way, you can force yourself to use the capacity of the hard disk in your pc or laptop rather than to print and file all of this as hard copy in your closet. (By the way, when your desk is clean, I would recommend you to use your fixed scheduled hour for cleaning up your closet! Usually 80% of the content of closets can be thrown away so that would be a 2nd mega cleaning action!). But be careful, if you do not regularly clean up your hard disk, your computer will crash! But with the current prices of external hard disks of 300-500 gigabyte it is very easy to make a total dump of all your documents on your pc. You could do this once a month so that you can subsequently free up the space of your computer and put your documents on your external disk. Or you could use a DVD that has a capacity of 7 gigabyte to store your data. What you can put on such a simple DVD, really cannot be stored in an office closet!

Most ultimate thing would be if you organize your work and filing system in such way that it seamlessly interlocks with your enterprise. You could start with your master plan of your company, the mission statement as beginning, till the objectives and tasks on department level and work from "wide till narrow" on such a logical system. In such way, you hardly have to think about where what is filed. Such a "construction" Works as a foundation in your thinking and handling and what saves you an enormous amount of time.

Time, that you can spend to your customer your staff and .....to your dear ones at home!