

Getting Things Done: Personal Productivity Strategies

By: Kim Cooley

Jocelyn Coverdale was a very effective speaker – straight and to the point, easy to understand and follow. She opened the segment by asking each attendee to complete a self-assessment test designed to help us determine “where we are” as far as our organizational skills go. For those who scored low on the organizational skills chart, Coverdale offered encouragement and stated that becoming organized is a process – it’s never a “once and for all” thing.

Coverdale said there are six reasons why people are disorganized – and any one by itself will cause chaos! The six reasons are: time management, project management, personality factors, psychological obstacles, skill at handling incoming items and prioritization.

She also said that disorganization is not a disease – it is a conscious decision that forms habits in a person. To become organized, one must identify the habits and work on changing them.

According to Coverdale, effective workflow has five steps: collect, process, organize, prioritize and do!

1. **Collect** everything in *buckets* – *buckets* should include 1) a notebook, notepad, notecard or Palm Pilot that you carry with you at all times to jot down ideas or thoughts (remember, if you THINK it, you should INK it); 2) the indispensable IN basket, and 3) a good filing system.
2. **Process** what you collect in your buckets using the FAT system meaning you take each bit of information you capture and ask yourself File it? Act on it? Toss it?
3. Once you FAT your information, **organize** it. Find a home for everything including a filing system you trust and are comfortable with.
4. **Prioritize** or take the “act on it” items and place them on a timeline – what needs to be done first? Once you’ve done that, use a chart and divide each action items into columns of things you can do on the phone, on the computer, at your desk or when you’re running errands.
5. Once everything is prioritized – **just do it!**

Always remember that lots of things impact how we work and how well we complete assignments including: the environment in which we work, interruptions from family and friends, our energy levels, the time of day, etc. The items you decide to tackle should be taken on keeping your energy level and personal capabilities in mind, for instance, if you work best in the morning, tackle the large tasks then.

Coverdale also suggested a few steps that can help improve overall time management skills:

1. Organize your office or workspace – now.
2. Try the 96 minutes technique – take 96 minutes each day to concentrate on what’s most important to you.
3. Get clear about your goals.
4. Cut from your life unimportant tasks that eat up time.
5. Learn speed reading.
6. Improve your keyboarding skills.

To manage a project, try these three steps:

1. Prioritize and move projects along
2. Define projects
3. Effectively manage the projects by being clear on the outcomes, assigning ownership and organizing the tasks. (Bake the cake before you put on the frosting!)

Coverdale said the average American spends 1 year of his or her lifetime looking for misplaced items. That's one reason making the decision to become organized is so important.

She introduced the 80/20 Rule (also called the Pareto Principle): 20% of your efforts produce 80% of your results. Imagine what you could accomplish if you could change those numbers!

Coverdale also suggested reading "Outsmart Your Brain" by Marcia Reynolds.

This article is a summary of material presented by Jocelyn Coverdal during her "Getting Things Done: Personal Productivity Strategies" presentation at the 2006 AAM Summit: Mile High Marketing.

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