



## An Organizational Diet for the New Year!

Welcome to a New Year, with new beginnings and fresh insights into organization.

Think of it like this: Your “Organizational Mindset and Subsequent Behaviour” or “Maintenance”. You know the maintenance challenge when it comes to dieting.

You finally lose those five, ten or fifteen pounds. You feel wonderful. However, it is all too easy to revert to the old, comfortable behaviour that got you into this problem in the first place. So your new challenge becomes, how do you keep those unwanted pounds from creeping back? What behaviours do you have to change?

A similar principal applies to organization, whether it is home, office, business or personal. You have edited, cleaned, filed, set up new systems electronically and in closets, offices, rooms, garages, basements, even the linen closet. It is done. It looks fabulous. It works efficiently. You are relieved and delighted.

Like your weight loss, however, this new organizational state is based on your behavioural patterns. Unless you are conscious of this, and make deliberate efforts to change the behaviours’ that got you into this in the first place, you may well find yourself slipping back into comfortable old patterns. Just like the weight creeps up, so does your familiar “mess”. Stuff, left out and around, unedited and ignored, tends to grow into those ugly piles, destined to hide forever that precious piece of information, letter or bill, gradually overtaking your wonderful new organized “space”.

You begin to lose focus and start growing very messy around the edges. Why? Because the majority of us continue to do what we have always done. Like every other human endeavour that undergoes change, it takes time, effort and awareness to allow our new organizational systems to function effectively.

Or perhaps you or your client is floundering and back to square one because the systems put in place just don’t work for your learning and organizational style.

One strategy to consider is what we’ll call “thinking both outside and inside” the organizational box. There are the “filers and the pilers”; there are the “left brainers and the right brainers; there are the “logical, analytical, Type A’s” and the “creative, compulsive Type A’s’, never mind all the multitaskers, the Type B’s, the lazy and the just plain genetically programmed confused.

How do we meet this complexity of organizational needs in a world that now defines a personal assistant as “blackberry”?

How does an individual, professional organizer, or client, recognize their style and organize and maintain around it?

Here is an example of two people, intelligent, hard working, and seemingly organized.

**Elaine is in her mid-thirties, married with two children under the age of 9. A former systems analyst, she is logical, quick, goal oriented, un-emotional and very much in control of her personal world. She edits constantly, does not have a mismatched plate or mug in her cupboards, and**

**brings new definition to the old adage, “a place for everything”. Her special gift is that the “place” is usually decorative as well as highly functional.**

**Marietta on the other hand is in her 60’s, transitioning from a senior administrative position where she leaned on a personal assistant, to semi retirement where she is totally on her own. Although she has some systems, and she does not feel physically or emotionally ‘comfortable” in a mess, she is more of a creative sort who piles rather than files, who puts things away in random places to get rid of them.**

*A recent conversation between Elaine and Marietta went like this:*

***“I have to stay home this weekend and clean out all my drawers”, Marietta moans to Elaine. Elaine, in all sincerity, asks, “How did they get messy in the first place?” This brief conversation illustrates how deep a schism can exist in organizational life styles.***

There are many levels in these scenarios – your role as the individual or the organizer, if you choose to accept it – is to recognize the piler or filer; the logical analytical thinker or the creative visionary; the person who is happiest with everything in sight or the individual who can’t produce a thought unless the desk is clear and everything spotless.

It needs to be a customized system, fitting the personality and style of the individual it is designed for. If we just take a simple drawer that has just evolved with use, it may mean several things. There was no system for that drawer to begin with, or, that system may have been designed inappropriately for the user’s style and habits. Before designing any system, whether for a drawer, a closet, a filing cabinet or a room, you must recognize people’s first natural thought processes when looking for an item.

Just because “tradition” or the media determine some of the norms where things should be, is not necessarily where you – or a client- might think they should be. The coats are not in the front hall closet. They hang on pegs at the back door. The books are not neatly stacked on shelves. They live comfortably in baskets or in stacks. Sometimes, it is psychologically easier for adults, as well as children, to use baskets or clear containers to stay neat rather than traditional furniture and chests of drawers.

As an organizer knows, for the piler type of system, the containers need to be clear. The wall storage is an open bookcase rather than a closet with a door.

As far as paper goes, the traditional storage systems look like filing cabinets with hanging folders. This rarely if ever works for the piler. We will start with the premise – nobody likes filing. It is like an empty calorie. Yes, you have put stuff away. But is it really a natural behaviour for many of us to go find it again in those cold hard cabinets, rifling thru all those folders with faded labels, looking for things we can’t remember how we classified or filed in the first place? How many miscellaneous or personal labels do you have? Honestly.....

So first, understand the type of organizing behaviour you or your client displays and think both “outside and inside” the organizational box when considering systems.

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To stay on top of your game requires focus and dedication to constant upgrading of your skills. We believe everything works better ....when it works together. Organization is liberation!

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