

Cut paper clutter by applying 4 Ds

By TRENTON HIGHTOWER

"It shouldn't take you more than five seconds to find a piece of paper. If it does, your file organization system needs an overhaul," says professional organizer and author of "Finally Organized" Marcia Gracia.

Mishandling paper drains energy and money from your business every day. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that the average executive loses six weeks per year retrieving information from messy desks and files.

Enter a billion-dollar business in time management tools and personal organization systems.

We make complicated lists, and rank our tasks A, B, or C by urgency. We use handheld and desktop software to organize in our time. In our computers, we cut, paste, click, drag and highlight.

We purchase bigger, better filing cabinets for the office. We color code folders, always on the look-out for the next new approach to managing paper.

But are we any more organized or efficient?

Could it be that the answer to finding our way through the sea of paperwork is not so much about how to prioritize it or where to store it as following through on a daily plan of action?

One of the simplest, yet most effective, ways to get through your paperwork clutter is to use a system identified by renowned workplace innovator, Zig Ziglar called the 4 D's:

Do it

Perform the task now. Make the call. Send the e-mail.

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TRENTON HIGHTOWER

Curriculum vitae

Trenton Hightower is the associate vice president of FCC/JTA customized training at Frederick Community College. In addition, he has completed "Train the Trainer" courses in the following areas: Using the Malcolm Baldrige by Kodak, Dale Carnegie sales course, Xerox strategic planning process, systems curriculum and instructional development by OSU (certified), Ziglar Education Systems, and DDI certification. Mr. Hightower has a Bachelor's in communication/public relations and Master's in administration of higher education.

Hightower: The four Ds

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Follow through on the task.

Don't spend time moving the paper, or adding the job to your ever-growing list. Get it done.

Doing it may be difficult when the task at hand involves confrontation or conflict. Yet, dispatching it promptly will free your mind from concern about it, and allow you to be more productive throughout the day.

One of the most effective salespeople in the country attributed his success to arriving first, and making 10 contact calls immediately. He got it done.

Delay it

There are times when setting something aside momentarily makes sense. Are there other people involved? Schedule a date and time to meet.

Need more information? Put it in a tickler file, and note on your calendar when you'll be retrieving it for action.

Delegate it

Is there someone else in your company who can perform this

task? Pass it on immediately.

Does it make sense to outsource it? Find a partner who can do this job for you quickly and efficiently. You'll save time and money in the long run.

Dump it

This can be the most difficult "D" of all. Most of us have a pile of magazines, articles and miscellaneous paper we have every intention of "getting to."

We let it build up for months before we finally throw it away anyhow. Why not just throw it away at the beginning?

Professional organizer and author Marcia Gracia says that paperwork has been voted the biggest burden for businesses.

Time spent hunting for lost papers is always better spent taking care of customers, increasing sales or improving your company's bottom line.

So why not try managing your portion of your company's paperwork in 2004 by practicing the four Ds?

Who knows?

It just might catch on.

THE NEWS-POST, MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2004