

Efficiency = simplicity

Professional organizers help businesses improve their skills at wastebasketry

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As an image consultant, JoJami Tyler makes a living helping people straighten out facets of their lives -- their closets, image and clothing.

Despite her expertise, Tyler was having difficulty keeping things in her own life in order -- namely her home office.

The Hockessin office's design caused poor posture and shoulder pain. Her file system began to overflow and her propensity to multitask left her to-do list in a similar unruly state.



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JoJami Tyler's home office in Hockessin has been organized to maximize its -- and Tyler's -- work efficiency.

"Running a business is totally different than organizing a closet," said Tyler, who launched Mode Image three years ago and has 15 years of experience in the fashion industry.

About a year ago, Tyler hired a professional organizer. Jocelyn Coverdale, president of Newark-based Ballantrae Solutions, came in, picked out trouble spots and found ways to make Tyler's business more efficient.

Faced with slim profit margins, tight budgets and strict time constraints, small business owners increasingly are seeking out consultants like Coverdale to help get better organized.

About 48 percent of executives admit to having messy desks but claim to know where everything is, according to the Glenview, Ill.-based National Association of Professional Organizers. Roughly 12 percent say their desk appears organized, but that they have no idea where anything is.

This lack of organization leads to lost time, said Coverdale, the association's chairwoman of course development. Of the total eight hours per week spent on document management, executives and employees spend one hour finding documents, one hour sharing documents and about 30 minutes on document retrieval.



JoJami Tyler finds working in her Hockessin home office more efficient after professional organizer Jocelyn Coverdale gave the space a makeover.

JoJami Tyler's home office in Hockessin has been organized to maximize its -- and Tyler's -- work efficiency. The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG Jocelyn Coverdale of Ballantrae Organizing Solutions in Newark talks to New Castle County Chamber of Commerce members about organizing for greater productivity.

Coverdale pointed out simple

but effective solutions to help Tyler make her business more efficient.

To cure the shoulder pains, Tyler replaced her traditional computer monitor with a flat-screen, and moved it from the right side of the desk to the center.

To untangle Tyler's file system, Coverdale suggested a tickler file -- which organizes items by date -- to separate documents that pertained to upcoming events.

Tyler put into practice Coverdale's Power Hour -- a 60-minute chunk of the day without e-mail, phone calls or interruptions. During that time, Tyler focuses on one current project and nothing else.

"It was just life-changing to me," Tyler said. "It's always ongoing. I think you always have to continue and keep getting refreshed and stick with it."

Firms like Coverdale's are drawing more attention these days because of the proliferation of television shows dedicated to organization. One such show, "Mission: Organization," on HGTV, focuses on homes but offers tips that might be useful for businesses.

Atlanta-based organizing and productivity specialist Monica Ricci of Catalyst Organizing has appeared on "Mission: Organization" four times but she's not sure the spotlight has been good for firms such as hers.

"We love the exposure, we love the public awareness," Ricci said. "But at the same time it becomes our responsibility to manage our clients' expectations."

In other words, Ricci and Coverdale are not miracle workers. Ricci said the projects shown on 30-minute shows actually take about 80 hours of work.

Corporate jobs take just as long, if not longer. The most common problems Ricci sees are redundancies where two people are doing the same thing and poor business flow caused by excessive e-mail.

"I have a lot of clients who get e-mails -- they're cc'd on everything," Ricci said. "They're like, 'Why am I getting this? I'm not even involved.' "

Technology like BlackBerry devices and cell phones, which are supposed to increase efficiency, are sometimes causing more entanglements. Those who can't resist technology feel as if more is better, Ricci said.

"In reality, what you want to strive for is as simple a situation as you can generate, with as few pieces of



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SHOULD THEY STAY OR SHOULD THEY GO?

For deciding the fate of documents, professional organizer Jocelyn Coverdale has developed a system of questions, which she calls "The Art of Wastebasketry":

- Did I ask for this information?
- Does the document require immediate action?
- Is this the only place the information is available?
- Is this information recent enough to be useful?
- Can I identify the specific circumstances when I would use this?
- Are there legal or tax implications for why I have it?
- Does anyone else need it?

Coverdale's no-nos include superfluous or redundant messages or e-mails, multitasking and workaholics.

- Worker productivity decreases 20 to 40 percent every time the worker multitasks or "task switches."
- About 28 percent of all workers say they feel more pressure to respond to messages today than they did five years ago.
- American workers receive 68 e-mails on an average day. The average worker sends or receives 190 messages daily.
- About 47 percent of U.S. executives say they take their laptops on vacation. Roughly 27 percent say they check their e-mail while they're away.
- In 2001, 69 percent of U.S. executives from 1,000 of the country's largest companies said they work more hours now than they did five years ago.

technology as possible," Ricci said.

Coverdale offers a seminar for business executives yearning to be more organized called "The GO System." The three-hour class covers discarding documents, filing efficiently and maximizing time in the office.

Executives and small business owners who attended a recent seminar each had a different disorganization dilemma on their hands. Former DuPont executive Norm Henry couldn't figure out how to properly run the office for his home-based consulting business.

For 30-plus years, Henry had all the luxuries of a high-ranking executive, including administrative support staff who kept files tidy and phone calls answered.

"Now I don't have it," Henry said.

Coverdale has self-motivating tactics for people such as Henry and Tyler, who are on their own after years in the corporate environment. One is to not look at e-mail first thing in the morning. Tyler said that, early in her day, she used to blow from a half-hour to two hours responding to messages from family and friends. Now, she leaves e-mail unopened and focuses on work early on.

Bobbie Yarrusso has no problem staying organized when she puts together social gatherings and other functions for businesses through her business, Creative Event Designs by Bobbie.

Back at her office, it's a different story.

"My office is an absolute mess," Yarrusso said. "I just sit there and look at the piles."

Coverdale instructs her clients to jump right in using the "FAT" system -- "file," "act" or "toss." If a document seems relevant, file it. If it requires immediate action, do so and discard it. If the document is deemed outdated or irrelevant, toss it immediately.

Without a system to file and trash incoming documents, papers pile up and people become overwhelmed.

"It doesn't file by itself," Coverdale said. "And it doesn't purge by itself."

A fail-proof filing system that's comfortable to employees also is essential. Coverdale suggests taking the pile in the "in" box and flipping over items that need immediate action. Everything else goes back in the "in" box.

Another method involves drawing dots on documents each time they are encountered in the in box. Once three dots appear, the document goes in the trash because it

can't possibly be useful. The key is to focus on one problem at a time. Otherwise, getting organized can cause even more disorder, she said.

"You start working on something. Then you say, 'This needs to be fixed,' " Coverdale said. "You really need to find a way to put borders around your work time."

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