

# NEW CASTLE COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Your Bridge to Business Success in New Castle County, Delaware



HOME SEARCH

About the Chamber

Business Programs

Join Us!

Upcoming Events

Government Relations

Economic Development

Membership Directory

E-Newsletter

## New Organizing For The New Year by Jocelyn Coverdale, Ballantrae Organizing Solutions

[TheOrganizer@BallantraeSolutions.com](mailto:TheOrganizer@BallantraeSolutions.com)

It's back! The ring-a-linging in of the New Year, and our perennial love affair with the 'fresh start' part of the tradition. It's exciting to set new goals and objectives and renew our visions. And -- oh yes -- to give those old New Year's Resolutions another try.

If you are like most Americans, *losing weight* tops your list of New Year's resolutions, again, with *getting organized* a close second, again. Somewhere embedded in the second one, or perhaps plugged in further down the list, is the hope of being more productive in 2005. But where did these same resolutions rank on last year's list? It's not a big "aha" moment to recognize the recycling!

Why keep starting over? Not feeling organized *again* is particularly baffling. After all, you did buy a new PDA last year, didn't you? Or perhaps new, stacking in-baskets? And a calendar-planner system with motivational quotes and inspirational images to reinforce your goals? How do things get so out of control when you make so many ToDo lists every day?

An important success factor in sticking to this year's resolution is recognizing that organizing does not come in a box. Tools like Palm Pilots and leather-bound day planners will no more organize you than buying a piano will get you to Carnegie Hall. The fact is that the mental side of getting organized is significantly more important than anything else you do or buy. Organizing is more about skills and habits than about gadgets and containers.

Within the organizing industry postponed decisions are seen as a big contributor to both physical and mental clutter. Making a mental choice implies control -- deciding (or not) what we do and do not want to do with our time, what we do and do not want to let into our space, and what we do and do not want to let into our lives. This year, new decision-making habits may go far in helping you get and *stay* organized through the next round of resolutions.

Start with a "Not ToDo" list. By this I mean get out of the habit of doing what's unproductive. At the top of the list write "multitasking". *The Wall Street Journal* ("Multitasking Makes You Stupid" by Sue Shellenbarger, March 2003) summarized a growing body of neurological research showing that it takes at least four times as long to complete work while switching between tasks rather than focusing on them one at a time. As a regular habit, multitasking uses the brain less efficiently and is linked to earlier short-term memory loss -- i.e. more senior moments at an earlier age. Just think honestly about how poorly you focus while driving, eating fast food, and talking on your cell phone at the same time. It's the same at your desk -- a disaster waiting to happen.

Also add to your "Not ToDo" list whatever is not a good investment of your time. Apply the 80/20 principle here -- 80% of what we work on is probably insignificant in achieving our goals. Which of your habits or attitudes create busywork, procrastination or distraction from your key purpose? How often do you allow the demands of others to eat away your time?

Think, too, about the massive amount of "stuff" coming into your life with no effort on your part -- catalogs, junk mail, spam, advertising -- and compare it to how much effort it takes to move it out. Find ways to keep such "stuff" at bay. A critical look at your own 80/20 habits early on in the new year will do more than just save time --it will help you create boundaries for yourself which you will not allow clutter to cross.

Another "Not ToDo" is anything you're not good at doing. This is different from things you don't want to do -- the unpleasant tasks to tackle first so that you don't postpone them indefinitely (read *procrastinate* ). But do look at those things you don't do particularly well. How important are they to you? If they're not important, stop doing them. If they are important, delegate or outsource them. Free up your personal resources to apply what you do well to what matters most.

After completing a "Not ToDo" list, implement conscious habits to address other organizing challenges you face. To begin, stop beating yourself up for handling papers more than once. This old adage is an oversimplification from an earlier era, when executives had plenty of staff to delegate the work and to route paper. Today, that rule only applies to Kleenex during flu season. Let go of the myth " *handle* a piece of paper only once" and replace it with " *make a decision about* a piece of paper only once" -- again, no postponed decisions. Only one of three decisions is needed for paper, easily remembered as the **FAT** system: choose to **file** , **act** or **toss** .

Let's start with toss. We all know what the word means, so why is it so difficult to do? Start 2005 with a serious throwaway session. In larger offices, schedule a throwaway day and involve everyone. Evaluate why you're keeping paper items. Have a clear reason and purpose for them -- and "just in case" is not a good reason!

The "act" decision is a simple habit. Ask "who?" needs to act on the item. If not you delegate it. If you, ask "when?" If you can complete the action in 2 minutes or less, the answer is "now" -- it takes longer to put it into a follow-up system. If not now, form a habit to schedule time to take the action. Write it on your calendar and put the item in a dated follow-up, or tickler, system.

The "file" decision in FAT will only become a habit if you have a filing system you trust and find easy to use. If it's not working for you, start over. You must trust that you will be able to find what you need when you need it, and that means an index or cross-reference for all but the simplest filing needs. Ease of use has as much to do with the proximity of your files, adequate supplies, clearly typed labels, and free-moving folders in unstuffed file drawers (less than 3/4 full) as it does with color-coding or fancy tabs. If you struggle with designing a filing system, plenty of help is available. Stop trying to do what you don't do well.

Solving your filing dilemmas will go a long way toward organizing your workspace. But again, tap into your mental side when tackling your desk. For example, if you are a piler or stacker, identify why. Is it because a) you don't trust

your filing system, b) you rely on visual reminders of priorities instead of a written plan, or c) your stacks have piled up for so long that you are psychologically numb to them. If thinking about the stacks overwhelms you, put them in a box and move them away from your workspace. (While you're at it, move off everything you don't use daily, or that doesn't support your goals.) First, put a system in place to handle anything new coming in. Then schedule small blocks of time over several days or weeks to handle the backlog, one small chunk at a time.

Organizing is all about stress reduction and making better use of your time. Setting goals is the first step. Organizing time and space in ways that support your goals should follow. Invest the time to plan and to set priorities, and remember, if you have no goals, everything becomes a priority, resulting in chaos.

Again, the 80/20 rule can support your plan and help you adjust your habits accordingly. Try this technique: for the next 3 weeks, during your peak energy time, spend 20% of your typical workday focused, without interruptions, on your top priority. If your typical workday is 8 hours, that's 96 minutes. Set a timer, lock the door, do **not** look at email, and let voice mail pick up your calls. Your productivity will soar. You will amaze yourself!

Changing your organizing habits via a mental approach is a great New Year's resolution to take on for 2005. I'd love to know how the tips shared here work for you. Let me know not later than January 2006! Have a healthy and productive year.



P.O. Box 11247 Wilmington, DE 19850-1247  
Phone: (302) 737-4345 Fax: (302) 737-8450  
Email: [info@ncccc.com](mailto:info@ncccc.com) Web: [www.ncccc.com](http://www.ncccc.com)

Providing Business Solutions to the Chamber and its Members:



© 1995-2003 New Castle County Chamber of Commerce. All rights reserved.