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HOTLINE

Letting Go of Excess

by Jeff Davidson, of www.BreathingSpace.com

Despite e-mail, IM, and text messages, are you surrounded by more paper and clutter than ever before? If so, you're not alone. To coax the piles back down to manageable levels, examine how items first come your way and then determine how you can pare down. I suggest, for example, opening your mail over the waste basket; it's much easier to throw things out with the waste basket below you. If you get a magazine, go through it rapidly and take out the articles or items that look like they'll be of interest. Recycle the rest of the publication.

Often, there's no need to hang on to the back issues of a publication. These days, much of the information is also on-line. Pare down what you get to only what you need—get the volume of it down as quickly and easily as possible. See if you can use the copier to create a single sheet.

The same applies to books. I receive books from people all the time. I quickly scan the entire book. I'll read the table of contents and index, and find the pages in that book that contain information that's of value to me. Then, I'll make a photocopy of those pages, along with the cover

and publishing information, and create a dossier of the key information from that book that's important to me. I then give away that book to an associate, a friend, a library—wherever.

I don't need to keep the physical hard copy. Thirty or forty books take up an entire shelf; a dossier of these books is, at most, two inches thick. Often, I don't even keep the dossier; I'll dictate the key points and have the tape transcribed. I have hundreds of books reviewed on my hard disk and can find them easily. There's no accumulation, no pile. With the word search ability of word processing software, I can find the information I need immediately.

Hereafter, whenever information crosses your desk, there are some key questions you can ask yourself:

- Should I have received this at all?
- What is the issue behind this document?
- Is the information of marginal value that I could easily skip and, in retrospect, will there be no dent in your career for not retaining it? If so, then let it go!
- Will it matter if I don't handle it at all?
- What am I saving it for?

- Do I need it, or do I fear that if I don't have it, I'll somehow be deficient?
- Does it support what I already know or believe?
- Is it an information crutch I want to walk around on?
- Can I delegate the information in the document?

When you're in control of your information, you can better retrieve and more easily use it. Information is power, but if you can't find what you've retained, it's of no value. It's only of value when you can find it and combine it with other things.

A Lifetime Guarantee

You are part of the pioneer generation in the information age, moving into an ultra-rapidly changing future, and you can handle it. You have the intelligence and the capability. Every day, for the rest of your life, you are likely to be besieged by more information, not less. When you understand what you're up against, you're in a far better position to take control.

Jeff Davidson is the work-life balance expert for our time-pressed generation. He wrote "Breathing Space" and the "60 Second Procrastinator."

Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800-735-1994 for more information on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars, including "No Time, No Clarity? No Problem!"™, "Managing the Pace with Grace®," "Choosing When it's Confusing®," and "Managing Information and Communication Overload®."

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