



HOW TO AVOID BEING AN OFFICE PACKRAT

Checking priorities and mastering the art of creative trashing will help keep critical information accessible

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In a society such as ours, which speeds off in all directions, it's understandable that people like to hang on to pieces of the past. We all tend to overcollect. A desk, office, car or pocketbook could be overloaded with now useless items saved from months and even years past. This tendency, called packratism, is a problem that afflicts many office workers.

Although much of the material scattered around in odd places may be useless, quite a bit of it may include valuable records and information that's critical to a business. In order to access that information quickly, it's important to eliminate the clutter surrounding it.

To combat packratism, first recognize that you remain the primary force in preventing these piles from engulfing you. To take control, eliminate whatever clogs your system and interferes with your effectiveness.

The three principals of combating packratism are:

1. Break down horizontal piles.
2. Reread your priority list and ask key questions.
3. Master the art of creative trashing.

Horizontal piles

You can't *manage* a horizontal pile (a stack of files placed one on top of another). No one can efficiently negotiate this arrangement. Information can always be found more quickly if it's filed systematically.

Horizontal piles can't be a final resting place for the items in them because you always have to do something else with them. To know in *seconds* whether or not someone is efficient, visit his or her office or home and observe whether or not he or she maintains horizontal piles.

Human beings most effectively organize printed information vertically, either in a filing cabinet with all labeled tabs facing upward or in a vertical divider with tabs facing outward. Color coding the files also helps considerably.

