

Taking Control of Your Day

[Productivity](#) - [Time management](#)

Written by Jeff Davidson

If you're like most working adults today, chances are you feel time-pressed right now. If so, you might be comforted in knowing that you're not alone -- nearly everyone in our society is experiencing time-pressure. The pace of change in society and the levels of information and communication have increased, and human response to change hasn't caught up -- yet.

A crucial step in controlling your time is to condition your environments -- your office, home, car and other physical spaces of your life -- to enhance your use of time. To condition *your environment* in accordance with what you face today is to accommodate inefficiency; you are merely managing the aftermath of intake overglut. To manage your time effectively now and in the future, Professor Stanley M. Davis suggests, "Learn to *manage the beforehand*" (as opposed to the aftermath).



What is Managing the Beforehand?

Managing the beforehand involves creating space -- mentally or physically -- in advance of what comes next. It is clearing out the old and unsupportive, and making room for where you are heading. It requires anticipation, forethought, and vision. It is an approach for integrating your priorities and goals with your personal "systems," including how you keep your desk, office, closets, car and other spaces.

Each time you have attempted to get organized, did you quit after a couple of hours, believing it was hopeless? To manage the beforehand requires getting organized. For many, it is a welcome relief to learn how much time it will take -- only one full weekend and several week nights.

Why do some people seem to stay in control and on top of things almost effortlessly? The answer lies in their *ability to organize*. Some people approach personal organization with fear and trepidation. They become anxious about doing nothing but getting organized. Yet, getting organized is an essential element to more time in your life. You are probably retaining too much; you have saved too many things and over-filed. Much of what you have collected does not serve you or support your priorities and goals.

Sue, a legal secretary for a downtown firm, was tired of living in clutter and reorganized her apartment. She created a 20 percent clearing of items in her drawers, closets and files, tossing the old and making space for the new. And she felt great about it.

Why do we over-collect? For security, as a hedge against an uncertain future, or in procrastination ("instead of taking action, I'll simply save it"). Often, because we don't have priorities, or we don't have an approach for handling new information and new items in our life.

Traps in Attempting to Get Organized

Even when you know that it is time to "clean house," many traps to getting started may await. Here are the seven major excuses for failing to get started in your organization efforts.

1. "I have been meaning to." If this is a familiar self-lament, then make getting personally and completely organized a high-ranking item in your life.
2. "I have never been good at organizing." The difference between people "who are good at organizing" and "not good" is that people who are organized recognize that it takes some effort to maintain the organization. Those "not good" at organizing believe that somehow things "just get out of order" or "get lost." Some think that there are forces operating in opposition to them.
3. "I don't know how to get started." Keep reading.

4. "I have so many other things to do." Of course you do -- you will for the rest of your life. After getting organized, however, the other things "you have to do" will more directly support your priorities and goals, and you will have a clearer mental connection that they do.
5. "Organizing will take too much time." Initially, it takes one weekend and several weeknights. If you think organizing takes too much time, consider how much disorganization costs you.
6. "I don't see any value in organizing." Many aspects of your life *already are* organized. You're about to extend the procedures to enhance control of your time.
7. "It makes me anxious; I don't feel that I am accomplishing that much." Even if you only toss unnecessary files and papers, creating more space, you would be accomplishing a great deal.

Max, an employee at a local insurance company, knew that he needed to get organized, but he let years pass without getting started. He would do anything but straighten his files. Yet he spent untold hours looking for items, and was never in control, which carried over into other aspects of his life. His nickname became "Lose It Max" because he could not be trusted to return items in a timely manner. This reputation hampered his career and working relationships.

The Road to High Pay-off Personal Organization

Organizational consultant Barbara Hemphill offers four basic organizing principles:

1. If you don't know what you have and you can't find it, it is of no use to you.
2. Just because it is interesting or expensive doesn't mean you have to keep it.
3. Clutter is postponed decision-making.
4. Being neat and being organized are not the same thing. Hemphill says, "organizing is not a moral issue.

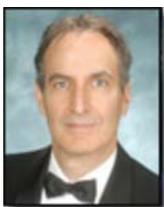
It is not neatness, it is effectiveness. It is not efficiency, it is a tool. Organization exists in many forms. Today it is an essential life skill." To be organized is an individually experienced state of being. "A desk or office that would drive you crazy may be well organized for a co-worker," she adds.

Knowing where things are -- papers you need, back up supplies and important phone numbers and addresses -- provides freedom to concentrate on creative, fulfilling work and puts *you* in charge of your time, not the clutter that surrounds you.

The High Art of Filing

Managing the beforehand requires filing -- a tool for getting organized. Being organized enables you to approach life efficiently. Filing involves allocating printed information and materials to their best home for now.

What do you need to have in order to be a good filer? It requires some clear priorities and goals, and the space to put a chair in front of the filing cabinet. Do you feel you're being a caretaker, however, when filing? If so, ask yourself what are you becoming a caretaker of -- is it that which you deem important? If it is not important, do not save it. If it is important, why are you moaning about filing it?



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Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, helps organizations and individuals overcome the relentless burden of information and communication overload. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800-735-1994 for more on Jeff's keynote speeches and seminars including "Managing Information and Communication Overload" and "Prospering in a World of Rapid Change," and his books *Breathing Space: Living & Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society* and *The Sixty Second Organi*