Constructing Efficient Systems - Having a System to Manage Information Overload

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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My adult children are disgusted when they noticed that I have several hundred emails in my Inbox or can't find a computer report with ease. They are even more annoyed, however, when I print documents that they think could have been better left as digital records.

These children have grown up with computers and therefore have learned how to deal with things in a different way than I have. They also are used to protecting the environment and trusting electronic files whereas I tend to feel more comfortable with physical files and printed documents.

Because we live in a world in which we receive an overwhelming amount of information, it is important to learn how to manage it in an effective manner. Following are some tips for handling both electronic and printed data:

1. Set up folders in your email software to hold information that needs to be kept. I tend to use the name of the person who sent it to me and the folder name, but you can use any method that will help you to file and then find it again.

2. Deal with things as they arrive. Organizational specialists often recommend that you only touch a piece of paper once. It's act on it, file it, or destroy it. The same applies to emails.

3. Develop a system for storing reports or documents that you need to keep. It only takes a couple of minutes to properly label a file folder.

4. Ensure that all of your photos are downloaded from your camera and labelled properly.

5. Learn about specific techniques that you can use to search for information stored on your hard drive.

6. Get rid of everything you don't need. If you can't name the items in a box before opening it, you likely don't need the contents!

7. Keep your voice mailbox cleared. Writing a list of caller names and numbers will allow you to delete the messages as you listen to them.

Managing information involves having a plan that includes responding to it, filing it or destroying it. Responding means you will deal with it right away. Filing it means that you will have a system which will allow you to quickly find it again when it is needed. Destroying it means that you will have a shredder, garbage can or trash folder available for immediate use.