How to Organize All the Paper in Your Personal Life

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Last week I had two clients who told me that they have been feeling overwhelmed with all the things that they need to do. They explained that they know there are specific deadlines on certain paperwork projects that they have to do but just can't get started because they have things scattered all over the house!

Here are some of the tips that I gave these individuals:

1. Find a rather large container that you will use to hold all the paperwork

2. Walk into every room of the house and put all the paperwork you find into the container

3. Go to a clean table or countertop where you will have room to do your sorting

4. Begin labelling half a dozen file folders with specific terms for grouping the items (Bills to Pay, Forms to Complete, Documents to File, Items to Read, First Priority Tasks, etc.)

5. Move a garbage can and shredder (if you have one) near your work area

6. Start at the top of the pile in the container and begin by putting each paper into the garbage, shredder or the appropriate file folder

7. Label an additional folder, if necessary, with an appropriate name but make sure that you are only use broad categories at this stage

8. Only touch a paper once. That means that you will put it in a place and leave it there

9. Continue working through the pile until you have reached the bottom of the container

10. Put the folder that is labelled "Items to Read" in the bathroom and commit to reading and destroying at least one item from this folder on every trip you make to the bathroom in the day. (You will be surprised at how easy and quickly this folder is emptied).

11. Put the folder that is labelled "Documents to File" in a safe place so you can deal with it as a last priority.

12, Now you can begin working on items in the folder labelled "First Priority Tasks" and continue until this folder is empty.

13. Your next folder is the one labelled "Bills to Pay". Write the cheques or enter them in your online banking so that they will be paid no later than the due date required.

14. The folder "Forms to Complete" might be ones that you need to do, and this would be your next task. If you need to have someone else be involved, put them by your coat or in a place where you will remember to take them to that person the following day,

15. The only folder you will likely have left at this point is the one labelled "Documents to File". There isn't really any urgency for this compared with the other paperwork, but you can break the file down using the same method as above. If there isn't too much filing to do, you

might want to purchase a small portable filing box and folders that you can label with sub-categories.

The final step in your organization is to make a commitment to maintain order in the future. This is done fairly easily by opening your mail beside the garbage can so that you can get rid of envelopes and unnecessary paper as you go. Each day take the items that are left, deal with the "First Priority" ones and put the others into the appropriate folders.

The only things that you will need to schedule will be for the one marked "Bills to Pay".

It sounds like a lot of work to get started but you are really just setting up the system once and the relief you will feel will be well worth the effort!