

Where is your left shoe?

Does this sound familiar to you: “Where did I put it?” “I know I put it somewhere!” “Where is my left shoe?” Are those sentences a continuous part of your vocabulary when you need to put your hands on an item? Usually you find yourself in this situation when you don’t have time to spend looking for something.

I remember when my son would spend 10 minutes or more every morning looking for the match to his school shoes, that is approximately 50 minutes to an hour weekly looking for a misplaced shoe (10 x 5 days a week). That shoe scenario robbed us of one hour from our weekly schedule until I taught him the art of “***everything has a home***” (even shoes) and to put the item in the same place every day. For us it was the missing shoe, for you it maybe your keys, cell phone, wallet, eyeglasses, etc. Why allow searching for items rob you of your time and cause unnecessary stress?

I decided to create a personal filing system at home similar to my filing system at work. So one beautiful Saturday morning (when I could have been shopping, going to the French Quarter Festival in New Orleans – sorry I had to vent) I organized all my important papers into categories and filed them into manila folders and labeled the folders according: Income Taxes, Home Insurance, Life Insurance, Autos, etc. Each family member had their own manila folder with all the important papers that were important to that person. For example, each of my kids’ folders contained their birth certificates, immunization records, social security cards, school records, rewards, etc. Once every paper had a home, I put it all in a file cabinet and housed it in my closet.

It was so great to put my hand on any document I needed at a moment’s notice and I returned the document to its home upon completion.

When we were packing to evacuate the city of New Orleans due to the forecasting of Hurricane Katrina’s direct hit to our city, I did not have time to look for items, it was wonderful to look in my file cabinet and retrieve all the important papers that I needed: home & flood insurance, children’s school & immunization records, birth certificates, all the most important documents we needed. Can you do that?

Do you realize the amount of stress I eliminated in such a stressful situation? I was able to spend time on other important tasks instead of trying to replace documents.

Filing is important and it is a *major* time saver.

3 Simple Ways to Find Everything You Need

1. Categorize Information and Create a Master Outline

Look at your business and decide how you want to categorize your information. For example I have: Administration, Marketing, Finances, etc. as my Master Outline and than under those larger categories, I create subcategories: My sample

Administration

- Policies & Procedures
- Forms / Templates
- Business Structure
- Clients

Marketing

- Brochures
- Business Cards
- E-zine Content
- Networking Groups

Create tabs for the Master Outline and use on hanging folders, use manila folders with labels for your subcategories. Make sure that you give all files a name, do not use Miscellaneous as a file name, because the file will began to accumulate papers and you will not be able to find items easily and quickly. You can use this same format to keep electronic files as well.

2. Create a Tickler File System

Get twelve manila folders and label them January – December, then you will need 31 more vanilla folders labeled 1 – 31 for the days in the month and two additional folders labeled for the upcoming years. As I am writing this it is 2006, so you would create a 2007 folder and a 2008 folder.

Which ever month that you are currently in, include the days of the month folders (1-31). Whenever you have a planned task, appointment, project deadline just put the information in the folder that you need to get it done. For example, If I need to complete and submit an article to a publication that my target audience reads on December 15, 2006, than I would put the contact information and due date and a checklist in the folder for December 15, 2006. On Dec. 15, everything that needs to be done is in my tickler file. Review you tickler file daily.

What if I am planning to attend a conference in May 17, 2008, than I would put all the necessary information in the 2008 file and file those items according once I get to that month and year. Tickler files should also be in sync to your daily planner.

3. Purge Your Filing System

Do not let files contain more 25 – 30 pieces of paper. It is best to block time on your schedule once every three months to go through your files to see if there is any information that can be discarded or scanned and saved electronically. Check with your accountant and banker to see how long documentation should be retained. Also check out www.bankrate.com/brm/news/mtg/20000518h.asp it contains a checklist of how long you should keep financial documents. You must keep your filing system neat and easy to obtain the information you want when you want it. It is best to keep the most used files near you in your desk drawer.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Business Coach, Bridgette Boudreaux, teaches small business owners to get it all done in 6 hours or less daily!

If you'd like to accelerate your business productivity and increase revenue while finding time for family & fun stuff with Bridgette's simple but powerful *5 Step System*, call today to schedule a FREE half-hour phone consultation at 512-351-4842.

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