

struggling to find customers' orders, let alone the papers you need to file last year's (or the last five years) tax return. "It takes a load off people's shoulders when they have everything organised and they don't have to waste time thinking. 'Where is this?' 'Where is that?'," says professional organiser Carol Posener of Sydney firm Get Organised!. Fellow organiser Loani Prior agrees. Organisation gives you "peace of mind," she says. "People 'busy along' every day, saying they don't have time to fit

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everything in – they certainly don't have time to take stock, spring clean and set up systems that might help them. Then there's a gearshift. Something clicks into place and they realise their disorganisation is hindering them, losing them money, upsetting their work mates, giving them stomach ulcers."

If you've let things slide, getting back on track can seem like an insurmountable task. It's somehow easier to continue muddling along than admit you've got a very messy issue on your hands. No matter what the size of your problem, whether it's a chaotic spare room or the inability to find files, it's important to make a start.

Tackling disorganisation can be facilitated by calling in professionals such as Carol or Loani. Carol began her business after working as a temp for a number of years. "I was walking into a lot of offices and seeing disorganisation. I didn't know what to do when I got into an office because there wasn't the staff to show me what to do, so I'd be thrown in at the deep end and end up writing procedures and leaving it for the next temp."

As a temp, Carol would also organise work spaces and set up office systems before she could start doing what she was there for – and figured there had to be a market to do this sort of thing full time.

Once you've made the decision to get organised and turn chaos into calm, it's important to set both short- and long-term goals. A short-term goal may be to clean out your desk. A long-term goal may be to wrestle the office filing system into efficient shape – and keep it that way.

Workable storage space is crucial to any organisation plan, and professional organisers may have ideas (and the resources) to come up with storage plans you haven't considered. Remember, you'll need space for items that are accessed daily, for filing systems and possibly off-site storage for archived documents.

When the initial work has been done and the office environment is at "ground zero" and ready to run smoothly, Carol then focuses on getting people into a new form of routine.

"When we were kids, most parents tried to keep us to a routine," she says. "When we become adults we decide whether we want to continue that or not – and most of us give it up"; which leads to a life without structure, an element vital to remaining organised, according to Carol. Not surprisingly, both Loani and Carol are huge fans of diaries, list-making and prioritising. "My diary is my bible," says Loani. "I don't go anywhere without it. I make an appointment, it goes in the diary. I have a deadline, it goes in the diary. A bill is due, it goes in the diary. I don't write on bits of paper, I don't rely on memory. Every evening when I finish my day's work, I check the diary for tomorrow's work. Every morning I double-check the diary for today's work. That is a habit and it works because I make it work."

As with everything that's worth doing, practice makes perfect. Organisation "becomes a habit," says Carol. "Once [a client] has had a session with Get Organised! then everything is in order and it's back to square one again." Your work space and methods will become much more efficient, says Carol, if you "pare down, get rid of all the things you don't need and start afresh".

TAKE FIVE PRIOR ENGAGEMENTS' GUIDE TO GETTING ORGANISED.

- 1 Visualise the end result. If you don't know what your goal is, you'll have a hard time achieving it.
- 2 Make time to do the job, and be realistic about it. Three years' worth of office mess is not going to be organised in a single day.
- 3 Break big jobs into smaller jobs. Tackle one thing at a time. Clear your desktop first, then start on the desk drawers, then the department's filing system.
- 4 Constantly assess what you're dealing with. Does action need to be taken now, can it go into the filing system or can it be archived? Maybe it can be thrown away.
- 5 File for retrieval. Store for retrieval. Sort out what you need to access daily and what you need to keep but don't need to have immediate access to.