

real solutions

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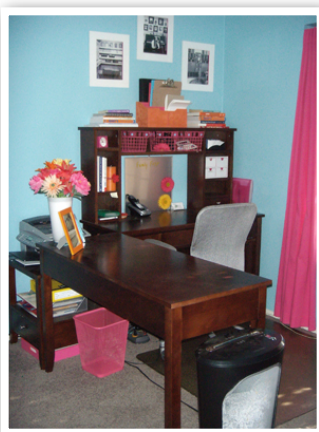
Real Solutions is a periodic newsletter produced by Susan Stewart designed to provide practical organization tips to simplify your life.

Office Sweet Office

Cindy hangs up the phone and immediately begins massaging her temples. She just booked another appointment, Nicole and Megan are fighting and Zachary is pulling on her leg asking for a drink. How in the world did she get to this place? When she started her home-based business a year ago, she thought it would be nice to have something to work on a couple of hours a week and bring in some extra cash. Little did she know, it would turn her house upside down! Between that, the kids, running the house and volunteering at school, Cindy is about to have a nervous breakdown. She has so many things on her plate, she can't even get dinner on the table half the time.

Keeping her office organized is definitely a problem. When they moved into the house, the room began as the kids playroom. As clutter threatened to overtake the rest of the house, it turned into the dump room as well- you know, the place you throw everything when company is coming? Then she started her home business and now it is.... well, it is what it is- a disaster! The desk is covered, the floor is covered. Let's face it- everything is covered! Once something goes into that room, it doesn't usually resurface again for quite some time. Come to think of it, Cindy has found sippy cups with sour milk in them numerous times, but that's another story.

Cindy has attempted to clear the space several times with little success. For one thing, she can't cram another paper into that file cabinet of hers. Plus, she can never seem to remember which file to put things in which makes it difficult to locate things when she needs them. Amidst the desk are overdue bills, kids artwork, junk mail, half finished projects and the like. A larger desk would likely solve the problem she thinks to herself. Then there is the calendar issue. How many times has she set up an appointment only to find out later that her husband will be out of town that night and she doesn't have childcare? And of course, getting ready to leave for an appointment can be the most stressful of all. Locating contact information, sample products and a bag to carry it all is no small chore when it is spread all over her 2 story house.



Tracy opens her computer and pulls up her calendar to look at tomorrow's schedule. This is a ritual she began when she started her home-based business last year. What was once a play room, has now become a business office for Tracy. Having a dedicated space to store inventory, make appointments, and pay bills has played a significant part in the success of her business. The desk she chose isn't huge but there is enough room to work. And, a smaller desk gives her less space for things to pile up. Tracy loves having a space of her own where she can shut the door and concentrate. With everything organized, she feels motivated and confident to accomplish the

tasks at hand.

Tomorrow's schedule holds a dentist appointment for Nicole and volunteering at Brandon's school in the afternoon. She also has a business appointment that evening so she had better pack her bag now while the kids are asleep. After packing her bag and visually processing the next day's events, she heads to bed.

The next morning while she is preparing breakfast for two year old Alex, she remembers that she needs to call the pest control place. She heads to her laptop and puts it on her "To Do" list so she won't forget. Right now she needs to stay focused on getting the kids out the door and to the dentist on time.

Just before she leaves, Tracy looks over her "To Do" list. She sees that she needs to pick up her prescription and realizes she will be driving right by on the way home from the dentist. She can pick it up on her way home.

Later in the day while dinner is in the oven, Tracy runs upstairs to change clothes for her business appointment. After getting dressed, she heads to her file cabinet where she has a folder for each client with MapQuest directions to their homes. She grabs her bag from the hook, her client folder and laptop. She will need to be heading out the door just as soon as Kevin gets home.

That night when she returns home, Tracy is tired and relieved that she has limited herself to 2 business appointments a week. Having a margin is what keeps her sanity intact these days. She heads up to her office to quickly unpack her bag and glance over her calendar for tomorrow. With that behind her, she can plop down in front of the TV with Kevin for a few moments before heading to bed.

real solutions for real life

Add color to create the a desired mood. For example, a brightly colored room may inspire creativity.

If you like the colors and containers you are using, you will be more inclined to keep your space neat.

Everything must have a home or it will find itself in a pile on the desk.

Use "To Do" lists. Place it on the computer so you don't have to look around the house for it. Also, keep a separate list for work and personal.

Keep a calendar and be relentless about writing down appointments. Whether you use a day-timer, a wall calendar or a computer calendar, consider color coding by person or topic. For example, all of my business appointments are in one color and all of my home/family things are in another color on the same calendar.

Schedule transition time in your day. What if you trained yourself to take 15 min. when you first walked in the door to unpack the car, your purse or briefcase? Often we keep our schedules so busy that we don't allow ourselves or our kids to transition from one event to the next.

Determine what functions you want the office to provide and keep those functions to a minimum. For example, it may not be realistic to expect an office to act as a business office, home office, kids craft room, weight room and storage area.

Get a file system that appeals to you. People typically don't like to file. Having a system that is simple, close to the desk and not crammed full, will make this dull task more bearable. My personal favorite file system is www.smead.com/Director.asp?NodeID=529

Live lighter. The amount of papers that come through your door on any given day is astronomical. Before keeping something, ask yourself, "what would I need to keep this for?" For example, if you don't report utilities on your taxes for a write off, is there a reason to keep the stub once you've paid the bill? Save yourself the headache of filing and shred instead.

Separate business from personal. If you are using the same office for business and personal use, keep things separate by using different sides of the room, separate colors in a file cabinet or separate storage boxes. It is hard enough trying to tackle business without coming across a bill or permission slip that needs signing in the middle of the pile.

Designate a home for the bag you use for work or other activity. The middle of the floor in any room does not count! Consider getting an attractive bag, hanging it on a hook and making it part of the design of your room.

Are you forever arriving at a business appointment only to find that you forgot a thing or two? Consider making a checklist on your computer for all of the things you need to remember to take. Keep it on your computer desktop or print it out and laminate it. You could even attach it to your bag with a hole punch and ring clasp.

Offices in open rooms are a nice idea if you are short on space but are difficult to pull off. Having a room with a door assures your disarray during an overwhelming week is not on display to everyone coming or going in the house.

If your home business requires keeping an inventory, designate ONE place to store it. Mixing inventory with personal products being used by the family makes things more complicated. Sort like with like, use labels and don't store more than you have to at any given time. Open shelving can help you to see what you are running low on at a glance.

Set up a database on your computer to keep track of contacts, phone numbers and email addresses. Not only will you know where to go to find the phone number, but it won't take up any valuable desk or drawer space.

Around 23 percent of people pay late fees on bills they cannot find. Designate a place where unpaid bills go when they come in the mail. Set a schedule of when you will pay the bills. Paying bills online is incredibly easy- even for the technically challenged.

Ask yourself what is driving you to continue at the pace you are going. It may be time to cut back a little and enjoy the moment.

For more organizing tips go to www.perfectlyplaced.org

