

# FAIR DINKUM FEBRUARY

## TAKING CHARGE OF THE PAPER THAT COMES INTO YOUR HOME

- This month we are going to address all that paper that comes into your home on a daily basis, and along with that, organize your home office area as well.
- Remember the organizer's favourite saying that "everything must have a home" — the same goes for your office. This is your office. . .not a multipurpose dumping zone. Nothing should go in to your office that doesn't belong in your office OK??? If you have a bookcase in there, only BOOKS belong on the shelves. If you have a filing cabinet, it should be used ONLY for housing FILES. Keep this space orderly + inviting.

# PAPER

- Remember: Most of our paper files we will NEVER use or look at again. Did you know that the average American receives approximately 50,000 pieces of mail during their lifetime, of which about one third is junk mail?! This is why you need to take control of all paper that enters your home !!
- Most clutter that accumulates in the home office is paper, so try to keep it to a minimum.
- Have only ONE tray to place all incoming mail/paper in. This is a temporary resting place until it can be addressed (which ideally should be immediately). The problem is that once you put mail down, it gets forgotten sometimes for days, even weeks and months! SO sort mail immediately (over the rubbish bin) when you bring it into the house. Do one of the following 3 things with it:
- *Toss it* - Throw out ALL junk mail and shred all those credit card offers and anything with your name + address on it.

## PAPER (CONT'D)

- *Act on it* - If it's a bill, date the envelope with a pay-by date and place it in an upright organizer on your desk. Check this organizer daily to ensure on-time payment. One good way to pay bills is to schedule bill paying days on the first + the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month or on pay day - this way you are more likely to pay bills on time and you will avoid having to pay late fees or interest charges. Pay all bills that you can online to reduce paper accumulation.
- *File it* - Keep a tray basket for paper that needs more time to read such as magazine offers, donation request papers, etc. Try to go through this basket on a daily basis and deal with at least one item. Have a goal to have this basket empty by the end of each week. This will keep paper pileup to a minimum.

## WHAT TO KEEP, WHAT TO TOSS)

For complete guidelines for tax related papers — go to [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) publication # 552 or check with your accountant.

# DESK AREA

- An efficient workspace is one that is uncluttered. Make sure that all desk surfaces are kept clear of paperwork and clutter. Keep desktop items to a minimum — computer, phone, desk pad, bill organizer + your action trays
- Keep all bill-paying materials together — stamps, envelopes, checkbook, etc. Pay as many bills as you can online. Schedule bill paying days on the first + the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month or on pay day — this way you are more likely to pay bills on time + you will avoid having to pay late fees or interest charges.
- Keep a daily or weekly “to do” list handy. This list should include such things as phone calls to make, letters and cards to send or answer, shopping list, gifts to buy, etc.
- Group desk drawer items together and keep confined in separate organizers — paperclips, staples
- Surround yourself with things that bring you a lot of joy — artwork, family photos, etc so you will actually enjoy spending time working in your office (but remember to keep it to a minimum!).
- Make use of a wall calendar or desk calendar if you don't use your computer for this

## DESK AREA (CONT'D)

- Choose desk accessories that are not only functional but also pleasing to the eye, choosing a favourite colour or texture.
- Work efficiently - Have a good desk chair to ensure comfort, have adequate lighting, and keep a notepad and pen near the phone and computer for jotting down notes and information.
- Make sure you have an adequate sized rubbish bin in the office Keep and a shredder close by
- Group desk drawer items together and keep confined in separate organizers — paperclips, staples

# MAGAZINES

- Tend to pile up often unread, so my advice here is easy and very practical. As you are reading a magazine, if you see a recipe that you think you would like to make, tear it out and immediately file it into a clear plastic sleeve in a 3 ring binder that you have designated just for recipes. Do the same with other articles of interest — possible categories for binders could be gardening, travel, house improvements, etc. This is an excellent way to take charge and organize paper that you may or may not ever refer to
- If you are in the car a lot waiting to pick up children, always have a magazine with you, so that you can relax while you are waiting, enjoy reading, and at the same time, pull out those articles of interest to file away as soon as you get home.
- If you find that you rarely read the magazines you subscribe to, then cancel your
- Catalogs — keep these to a minimum and if you are not going to order something soon, toss them, as you know they will be sending you another one soon!!

# FILING SYSTEM

- Most receipts we never refer to or need again, but if you are one of those people who have a hard time getting rid of them, buy yourself a 12 month accordion organizer and file these receipts away by month. When the month comes around the next year and you realize you never needed these, toss them and start over. DO keep receipts for major purchases such as appliances, furniture, etc for as long as you have them for warranty/repair purposes.
- Keep all financial records for the current year in an accordion file sorted by months. At the end of the year, go through and either file or shred documents. This yearly purging is necessary so the paper clutter won't get out of control again
- Clearly label all files for easy reference. Colour code them if that will make it easier for you. However you choose to file, it has to make sense and work for you
- Keep frequently used files handy so you can quickly and easily access important information. The top drawer of your filing cabinet should contain the files you need to access most often such as receipts, bank statements, and other paperwork you'll need for this year's tax return. Store old tax files in a less accessible place (you'll only need them again if you are audited).

# FILING SYSTEM (CONT'D)

- The following is a list of some suggested main file titles that you might want to keep
  - o Automotive — purchase details, warranties, maintenance and repair records
  - o Education — copies of transcripts or degrees, report cards, other miscellaneous school details
  - o Financial — Credit cards, bank statements, investments, tax returns, and retirement funds
  - o Health and Medical — details of health insurance coverage and policies, health records, tests performed, etc.
  - o Home and Real estate — House purchase details, home improvement ideas, copies of receipts for work done on property, investment details
  - o Insurance — Homeowners insurance, car insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, or any other policies you may have. Paperwork related to any claims you may have filed
  - o Legal — important documents such as passports, birth and marriage certificates, resumes, etc.
  - o Taxes — one file for each year's return with supporting paperwork.
  - o You will no doubt think of other files — travel, warranties, appliance manuals, pets, family history. . . The more you can file in its own specific category, the more efficient your filing system will work for you

REMEMBER, IF YOU DON'T NEED IT - TOSS IT !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Go through your files once a year to get rid of outdated and unwanted items. Purge your filing cabinets at least once a year to get rid of old things and also to see what is actually in there!

# COMPUTERS

Not going to say a whole lot about your computer — one could write a book and I'm sure they have one on how to organize your computer.

## **BUT DO:**

- Organize your files
- Delete all old outdated files
- Take advantage of online bill paying
- Back up important files on a regular basis

# THE ORGANIZING AUSSIE'S TOP 10 PAPER/HOME OFFICE TIPS

1. Address mail while it is still in your hand when it enters the house — toss the junk mail straight in to the rubbish bin, the rest goes in to the incoming mail tray on your desk and should be addressed the same day if not right now !!
2. Keep your desk surface clutter free. NO PILES of PAPER, OK ?
3. Organize your desk drawers by grouping like items together — use drawer dividers
4. This is your office — make it a place you want to spend time in by adding personal touches — family photos, etc.
5. If you don't have one already — invest in a good filing cabinet
6. Colour code your files
7. Make filing categories that make sense to you for easy access and use
8. Shred junk mail that has any of your personal information on it
9. Limit the number of magazine subscriptions. If you don't ever have time to read them, then you don't need a subscription
10. Do cut out articles of interest — but file them immediately in to their own 3 ring binder