

HINTS FOR THE ORGANISATIONALLY CHALLENGED

After four years of teaching and coaching in personal effectiveness & time management and feeling guilty when my home office got into a mess, the penny suddenly dropped. All the personal effectiveness and time management courses, including the one I ran, assumed that I wanted to be organised, control my time, plan out my day or week ahead of time and stick to lists and schedules.

One day I admitted to myself that I was more interested in “looking organised” than being organised, because of the nature of what I taught. The courses were teaching “how to” presuming that I “wanted to”. I didn’t – it was a real insight.

What I realised was that the “how to” would fall on deaf ears unless I could motivate myself and others to “want to” be organised and that “want to” is very personal. So for all the “organisationally challenged” out there who don’t “want” to be organised but “need” to be organised to get results that you want, here are my top five tips:

Know why you are working. I work because I love helping people to achieve what’s important in their lives. So if I’m grumbling about why I have to do something (that seemed like a good idea until the deadline loomed close) I check in to see if it is related to this purpose. Somehow, reminding myself of my purpose helps puts the tasks into perspective. The things that don’t fit with my purpose, I either don’t do, or if they are necessities, e.g. reports, I do them as quickly as possible and encourage myself with a reward – after I’ve done the task.

Some people don’t work at what they love. They are working because they want to earn money to do the things they love, e.g. to look after their family, to travel, to pay off the house. Even so, when you know why you are working, you can make better decisions about how many hours you want to put in at work and what you are required to achieve in that time period.

Know why you need to be organised: I need to be organised to meet appointments, keep my promises to clients, remember what to take to appointments and trainings and find relevant research information when I need to quote it. My basic system is designed to satisfy these outcomes. Being organised is the means to the end, not the goal itself.

Decide the balance between Quality and Quantity of work. Organised people fit a lot into a day and I believe they get their satisfaction from working through a list and finishing tasks – a high quantity day. In comparison, I want enjoyable, interesting tasks to do and this is what I call quality. So I try to get as much quality as possible in my day and I either negotiate or swap tasks, because I learned long ago that others may like the tasks I dislike. Where I cannot pass on the task, I do it first up in the day and get it out of the way. I have also learned to accept that in a competitive work environment where those who work the hardest get promoted quickest, I may not be as outwardly successful – i.e. I won’t get promoted as quickly, but I’ll enjoy more of the work I do.

Write down your To Dos and Choose your “Must Do’s”: Find a place to write down everything you want to do, need to do, like to do and have promised others you’ll do, preferably as soon as the thought occurs. I’ve found an A5 spiral bound notebook is best and if I slip up and write things on sticky notes or scraps of paper, I just stick them in the notebook as soon as I realise. Also, if I think of something to do when I’m at home, I write the task on sticky note so I take it to work the next morning.

Then in the morning, I choose the “must do” tasks for the day, things I promise myself I’ll do. I highlight write them and stick them somewhere noticeable. When I’ve done those things on the list – I give myself a reward, which might be 10 minutes reading, a call to a colleague for a chat, a walk down the street, a chocolate or coffee. In order to meet my quality objectives I now make sure the list is only 3 – 5 items long. Except when I get really busy, then

When the workload gets overwhelming, be Efficient. Make a list of everything that you Must Do today, number them in order that you want to do them, stick the list up somewhere very noticeable, start with number 1 and keep working through the list until you’re done. Anything new for the day goes on the bottom of the list. This has gotten me an amazing amount of work done, especially the day before I head off on holidays, or when I have back to back training. I acknowledge that well organised types do this as a matter of course, but they probably aren’t reading this article.

Bonus hint: Think outcomes not work. When I sit down to work on a longer-term project, I start by trying to define what chunk of work I want to finish, rather than just “work on the project”. E.g. this morning I decided that I wanted to finish at least three hints for my article, but I was writing so well I got to 6.

My ultimate outcome is to only do the work I enjoy so that I can truly “live a life I love”. To do this I’ll need a really diverse team around me – who like the work I dislike. Time management will become a thing of the past because I will always want to work.

I dream on.