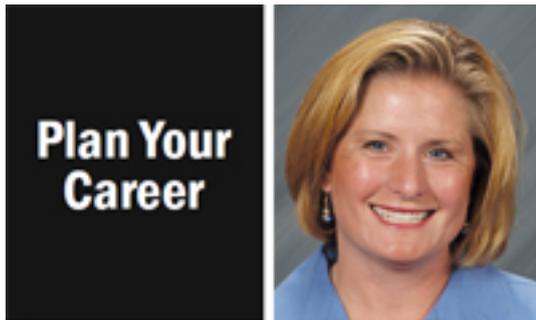


Co-worker clutter? It's time to come clean

Written by Julie Desmond
Friday, 13 May 2011 14:25



By Julie Desmond
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Working alongside other people is still a way of life for most people. During those forty hours they are together each week, co-workers stand in for roommates, existing in close proximity, dining at adjacent desks and sometimes sharing a stapler. If a workspace is a reflection of what's inside a brain, what does that say about the guy in the cube next door?

If his space is a mess, he might be disorganized... or highly creative. Can he easily find what he needs, even if nobody else can? Some people are visually oriented, but that need to keep everything in plain sight can translate into fire hazard: piles of paper, folders, books and office supplies scattered across the desk and spilling onto the nearby chairs, onto the floor and into the hallway.

Challenging your neighbor's organizational strategy is not advised. Instead, take a walk over to your own desk and take a long look. What does your space say about you? Are you visually ordered, too? Or a confused and disorganized scatterbrain? Try this simple party game to find out.

Next time you are away from the office, call in and ask someone to help you locate something you need, a phone number or a file. Can you direct your friend to the needed information fairly quickly? Then your desk, and probably your brain, are in fine shape.

If you can't lead someone through your own maze, if you frequently lose or misplace information, if you re-do work because things tend to disappear, then it's time to clean up your processes.

This will be painless and does not involve a half-day field trip to Office Max. Just use your eyes. What's in your space? And why? Remove those items you no longer need. Reading material can be donated or stored on a shelf. Paper can be recycled. Last year's reports? If they're on a computer somewhere, you do not need to keep the paper copies. It should feel like playing pick-up-sticks; you are not rearranging anything. You are just removing the noise.

Next, note where everything that's left is located. Do you often lose your phone? Where is it now? Put a phone charger in that place on your desk. Now your phone is where it belongs; no more calling yourself before you can leave for lunch.

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If your stapler is on the right side of the desk because that's where you left it, then putting it in a drawer only forces you to take the extra step of tracking it down when you need it. Decide that the stapler belongs where it is, and look for it in that spot tomorrow. Trust me, it will be there.

The key is to intentionally leave things where you want them. Your desk might not be a reflection of your brain's ability to function, but a sense of control over your space will certainly free your brain up for more interesting tasks... like taking this party game to that guy in the next cube.