

BusinessWeek

SmallBiz

Boost Your Business Profits by Getting Organized

Disorganization is both time-consuming and costly, ultimately damaging a small business's bottom line. Wasted time, higher expenses, reduced efficiency and effectiveness limit new business opportunities and damage customer relationships within a small business, not to mention the potential liability associated with lost critical documents.

According to Barry Izsak, president of the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO) and owner of Austin-based Arranging It All, many studies have shown that workers lose an hour a day looking for lost or misplaced information. In an organization with several employees, the cost of that disorganization quickly adds up to thousands of dollars annually.

In fact, the smaller the company, the greater the impact disorganization can have on profitability. Fortunately, even the smallest changes can yield big improvements, points out Barbara Bergeron, owner of SOS Organizational Services in Chester Springs, PA.

TO IMPROVE YOUR OPERATIONS AND INCREASE YOUR PROFITS,
THE EXPERTS AT NAPO RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING

Set some goals. What do you want your business to accomplish this year? These goal-setting questions help clarify which organizing activities are more important. Then break those goals down into more manageable monthly activities, says Cynthia Kyriazis of Organize It, in Kansas City, MO.

Follow the 80/20 rule. Begin by organizing what gives you the biggest bang for your buck," recommends Bergeron. Since 20 percent of your efforts yield 80 percent of your results, tackle disorganization in the most important 20 percent of your business.

Start Small. Overcoming piles of paperwork and office clutter can be daunting. Don't get discouraged by attempting too much at once. Instead, work in batches or chunks.

Purge your files. "The start of the year is a perfect time to weed out old files," says Bergeron. And since research has shown that 80 percent of what we file never gets looked at again, you'll save time and storage costs. "Once you get your physical space in order, it does more than clear

your desk, it clears your mind and bolsters your bank account," says Kyriazis.

Next, evaluate how you're spending your time. Reprioritizing your activities can help you recapture valuable work time.

Bunch your emails. Instead of reading emails as they come in, look at them at set times during the day. You'll end up spending less than the typical two to five hours daily that workers now devote to email.

Use a planning system. Schedule appointments and note action items in an electronic or paper-based system you can easily access. Limit meetings. Some meetings are important, but be selective about which you attend. The average executive spends nearly eight hours a week in meetings; every one you skip will significantly boost your productivity.

Don't get distracted. "We get caught up in the quick and easy tasks, rather than tackling the big project that could impact the bottom line," says Izsak. Make time for high impact activities by setting aside or delegating lower value tasks.