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Business Section

Her next task is tackling her time

Trina Lewis has made progress on eliminating clutter. Now she must build on those lessons.

By Jane M. Von Bergen
Inquirer Staff Writer

Machine operator Tony Butler poked his head into Trina Lewis' office at Union Packaging in Yeadon. "Who cleaned your office?" he asked, impressed. "I did," she said with a laugh. "Well, good," he said, "'cause I was going to call the fire marshal."

Butler's reaction echoed that of office organizer Barbara Bergeron only two hours earlier. "I'm stunned," she told Lewis when they met again last week.

Lewis, the company's human resources manager, has already accomplished a lot since winning The Inquirer's Confess Your Mess contest last month. Lewis wasn't the messiest applicant, but her situation was typical of many in the corporate world. When her responsibilities increased, her help did not, and she was overwhelmed.

Her prize was time with Bergeron of SOS Organizing Services, of Chester Springs. They had their first session last month.

First, Bergeron congratulated Lewis on her progress. Lewis had followed Bergeron's advice to declutter 20 minutes a day, so her desk was noticeably neater. Personal items, like aspirin, no longer took up prime work space.

Lewis also adopted Bergeron's organizational strategy of dividing her job into main categories, such as benefits and recruiting, for both computer and paper files.

Now, said Bergeron, Lewis has to learn to manage her time as effectively as she manages her clutter. How? By better utilizing both her assistant and her boss.

Lewis can rely on her highly qualified assistant for backup. But Lewis needs more of her help for mundane tasks, such as the data entry that Lewis does now. End that, Bergeron said. Lewis said she would have her assistant help set up the new color-coded filing system. Bergeron agreed. "She's going to have some ownership of the system if she's participating in creating it."

Managing up is more tricky. On the one hand, Lewis has tremendous respect and warm regard for her boss, company president Michael K. Pearson. They operate on the same wavelength and talk often about company issues.

But, Lewis said, Pearson is sometimes not entirely clear about his expectations. For example, he'll call her unexpectedly into a meeting that will have nothing to do with the priorities she thinks he has set earlier. "It's real easy to have a disconnect between your boss' priorities and yours," Bergeron said. Mostly, she said, a lack of communication is the problem.

"Neither one of you are being proactive about establishing priorities," Bergeron said. "That leaves a lot of room for ambiguity." Lewis nodded. Point taken. "But it works because you get along," Bergeron continued. Lewis nodded again.

Bergeron recommended that Lewis use Microsoft Outlook's calendar. Then she will have a clearer idea of her "must dos, should dos and could dos."

Bergeron also advised Lewis to tap into Pearson's respect for technology by suggesting to him that top managers be allowed to see each other's Outlook calendars. That way, Lewis can get a warning of a meeting she might be asked to attend and plan accordingly.

Bergeron also told Lewis to send her boss weekly e-mails updating him on her activities, and asking him to clarify his priorities in the reply.

Bergeron stood up to go, but Lewis had a last comment. "At first I thought, 'Let me just get cleaned up and organized,' but now I see that time management is even more important."

Bergeron nodded. "You just needed to organize how you get the work done."
