

# Help! I'm disorganized!

By Cathy Goodwin

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"My boss says I'm the most disorganized person he ever saw. It took me three weeks to recover."

"My chaotic style is great when I'm cooking or painting, but disastrous to a smooth-running office."

"I keep forgetting appointments and losing memos. If this keeps up, I'll be history."

Sound familiar? Here are three steps to respond with confidence.

1. Challenge the "disorganized" diagnosis.

Labeling yourself? What bothers you? Do you have piles of paper all over your desk? In a recent New Yorker article, Malcolm Gladwell writes that stacks and scrawls may serve as useful memory cues. Paperless offices, he says, can actually be dysfunctional.

If others label you "disorganized," demand specifics. Do you forget appointments? Consistently miss deadlines? Have trouble finding what you need?

2. Get information.

In very rare cases, you may have ADD or a neurological disorder. Do your research and, if appropriate, get tested by a specialist.

More likely, you need information. Set up a session or two with an "organization coach" (see <http://www.movinglady.com/careerlinks.html#organize> or browse through a few books in your local library. I've seen people revolutionize their lives with simple ideas like, "Put the stuff you use often on the bottom shelf, where it's easy to reach." A bulletin board or a few hooks can transform your environment.

You may need time management or assertiveness skills. Suzanne had trouble with deadlines until she realized she was trying to meet the demands of two bosses, each of whom wanted to be "first."

Working with a coach, she decided to say, "John, Mary has asked me to finish this project by Tuesday. If you'd like me to stop and work on yours, please talk to Mary first." Her job, she realized, did not include "referee between John and Mary."

Other skills include breaking down tasks into fifteen-minute chunks, rewarding yourself for doing

what you dread, and setting priorities by day, week and month.

### 3. Review your motivation.

When emotion clouds your motivation, begin by working with a qualified therapist. If a close relative just died, you have griefwork to do, and many losses will be less obvious but equally painful.

More likely, if you forget appointments or lose documents, you're probably ready for a job change. Begin your transition work in the early stages, while you still have control of the situation.

A professor found himself losing student homework papers. Soon entire term papers disappeared. When he caught himself absent-mindedly tossing his gradebook into the trash, he realized his students would be thrilled but he was headed for a new life -- whether he was ready or not.

In summary: Being called "disorganized," by yourself or anyone else, is a signal that you need to change your environment, your skills and/or your career. Work from your strengths, values and goals and your "organization" concerns will disappear.

Want to learn to compensate for weak organizational skills? Prioritize and gain time for your life? See <http://www.movinglady.com/coaching.html> . Set up an appointment to learn how you can find success within your own organizational comfort zone: <http://www.movinglady.com/begin.html> .

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