

Book Review: Taming The Paper Tiger

By Ramona Creel

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It doesn't matter who you are or what you do -- you could be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company or a stay-at-home mom -- you are deluged with PAPER! The pile of mail on the counter, the stack of letters to write on the desk, the pile of magazines to read by the chair -- junk mail, bills, correspondence, reports, memos, catalogs, kids' schoolwork -- make it all stop! As a professional organizer, I end up working with nearly 99% of my clients on paper issues, even if they originally hired me to tackle a closet or set up business procedures. And this is because paper is such a PERVASIVE part of our lives. Our finances, health care, housing, jobs, and even basic living necessities are dependent on paper. But what can we do to keep it from controlling our lives?

Barbara Hemphill has been the recognized "queen of PAPER MANAGEMENT" for decades -- and her classic book "Taming The Paper Tiger" has become the standard "how-to" manual for regaining control over your piles and stacks. Her methods are proven-effective, her writing style is clear and concise, and her SYSTEMATIC approach to dealing with paper is just what today's overwhelmed individual needs to get on top of everything. So let's find out exactly how Barbara does it -- and how you can do the same thing in your home or office.

ANSWERING THE TIGER'S ROAR

Before you can tackle the paper in your life, you must understand a little bit about its purpose and origin. Barbara starts out by suggesting that you ask FOUR QUESTIONS about each piece of paper that enters your life:

- Do I really NEED to keep this?
- WHERE should I keep it?
- HOW LONG should I keep it?
- How can I FIND it?

Of course, these questions may not be easy to answer at first. Paper management is a skill to be learned, just like any other. But keeping these four issues in mind as you implement Barbara's systems will help you understand the big picture. She also offers a paper management skills SURVEY to help you assess your current strengths and identify those areas which need a little work. If you find that you are great at managing your calendar, but need some help with filing, Barbara points you toward the exact chapter which addresses your concerns. It's well worth a few

minutes time to get oriented with the layout of the book.

SETTING UP YOUR PAPER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

An effective paper management system should accomplish four basic GOALS:

- ELIMINATE unnecessary paper
- Avoid generating unnecessary paper
- Establish a LOCATION for essential paper
- Create a method for easy RETRIEVAL of paper

So get out your hard hat and shovel -- Barbara will lead you through the entire process of sorting through your stacks, learning the "art of WASTEBASKETRY," and creating meaningful categories for your paper. She also guides you through the development of your ACTION files -- for items that require your immediate attention -- and REFERENCE files -- for paper that requires no immediate action but you might need in the future. And remember that paper includes much more than your incoming mail. A comprehensive paper management system will tie in your CALENDAR or planner, your TO-DO LISTS, and the method by which you keep track of people's CONTACT INFORMATION (addresses and phone numbers). For you to really be in control of your paper, each of these elements must be in good working order.

STRATEGIES FOR PAPER MANAGEMENT

Unfortunately, you can't just set up a stellar paper management system and expect it to maintain itself! You have to exercise constant vigilance to keep those stacks and piles from creeping back up on you. No matter what you do with your paper, Barbara has a solution for making it easier and more efficient. Check out her systems for paying BILLS, tackling those piles of READING, and taming your MESSAGE center. She even offers suggestions for dealing with FAMILY PAPERS (medical records, insurance, home repairs, employment records, kids' schoolwork) and MEMORABILIA -- as well as what to do with TAX receipts and other financial paperwork. Staying on top of paper is all about what you do on a daily basis -- and Barbara will not only help you design effective systems, but also build good habits. And if you are a bona fide PAPERHOLIC, read the last two chapters for some special resources that might help you tame your own paper tiger!

You must include the following resource box when publishing this article:

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