

# Help...I'm Drowning In Paper!

By Ramona Creel

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Nearly all of my clients, whether I work with them in their homes or offices, cite paper management as their biggest organizational challenge. We are overwhelmed with paper in our society -- junk mail, faxes, bills, correspondence, periodicals...talk about information overload! But what to do with all of that new paper as it enters our lives?

Most people have at least some sort of filing system. But very few of them also have a "paper management system." What do you do with the new paper you receive each day? Does it get thrown in a pile on your desk or dining room table? Does it go into one of those bottomless "in-boxes," never to be seen again? Or do you actually take the time to deal with your paper when it comes in?

If you want to stay on top of your paper, consider implementing the following suggestions:

## DEAL WITH IT NOW

Take time each day to go through your paper AS SOON AS YOU GET IT. The longer you wait to sort through mail, memos, etc., the more daunting the task will seem. Take just 5 minutes each day to look at each piece of paper and MAKE A DECISION about what you need to DO to it, right then and there.

## THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Sort incoming paperwork according to the type of action you need to take. For each item, ask yourself, "What is the next thing I need to do with this paper to resolve the issue?" Have a file for each "action item" -- TO PAY, TO READ, URGENT, CALLS TO MAKE, TO FILE, etc. -- and put each piece of paper in the appropriate file.

## GET PRESSING ISSUES OFF OF YOUR PLATE

Empty your URGENT file everyday. The URGENT file is for items that must be resolved in the next 24 to 48 hours. If you receive an item that is time-sensitive or a volatile issue (registration forms, customer complaints, today's "to-do's"), put them in the URGENT file. Then, fit in time each day to empty it out (maybe you set aside the first hour of your day for URGENT items). You won't ever find that important issues have slipped through the cracks again.

## SET UP A CONSISTENT ROUTINE

Make time each week to resolve each action item. A "paper management center" like this serves no purpose if all you do is add more to it. You actually have to take time to empty the thing out each week! Schedule a morning on your calendar as "administrative time." During this time, you take no calls, see no clients, and attend no meetings. All you do is paperwork. But you must respect this appointment as if it were sacred -- don't let other people take this time away from you. Once you begin to respect your time a little more, you will see that others follow suit.

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Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of [OnlineOrganizing.com](http://www.onlineorganizing.com) -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At [OnlineOrganizing.com](http://www.onlineorganizing.com), you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest organizing products, get tons of free tips, and even learn how to become a professional organizer or build your existing organizing business. And if you would like to read more articles about organizing your life or building your business, get a free subscription to the "Get Organized" and "Organized For A Living" newsletters. Please visit <http://www.onlineorganizing.com> or contact Ramona directly at <mailto:ramona@onlineorganizing.com> for more information.

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