

Workable Work Spaces

By Ramona Creel

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You don't have to be Fortune 500 CEO to need a functional office. Any kind of work -- including the running of a household -- involves a great deal of paperwork. Paying bills, filing paper, staying on top of phone calls, and tracking expenses -- these activities all require an orderly workspace. And don't forget your personal papers -- investments, insurance, school records, birth certificates. Do you clip articles out of magazines? Collect travel brochures? No matter what kind of paper you accumulate, you need a dedicated space for storing and managing it.

CHOOSING A HOME OFFICE SPACE

Where is your "home office?" A corner of the kitchen? The spare bedroom? Perhaps you work out of a cubbyhole -- or you might be fortunate enough to have an entire room set aside for paperwork. In choosing your home office space, first ask how you plan to use it -- for managing personal paperwork, occasionally bringing business home with you, or working full-time out of the house. Will you need a separate phone line, connection for your modem, or room for other equipment? Do you plan to bring clients or other colleagues to your home office? Whatever space you adopt, make sure to avoid any TERRITORIAL DISPUTES with other household activities. Your kids don't need to play monopoly on your desk -- and you shouldn't have to move your work off the kitchen table to serve dinner.

YOUR WORKSTATION

A workstation doesn't have to be an elaborate affair -- many people get by with no more than a desk and a telephone. How you design your office depends on what you plan to do there. What keeps you busy -- writing letters? Balancing your books? Phone calls? Computer work? Keep these activities in mind as you plan your space. If you need room to spread out while you work, make sure to include a large flat surface. Do you have a lot of machinery -- scanner, fax, postage meter? You might want to bring in a printer stand or a bookshelf for your equipment. But don't think that you have to spend a lot of money on expensive office furniture. You may have some discards that would do the job just fine. I have seen everything -- from card tables to steamer trunks to old doors -- used as office furniture. Be creative!

STORING SUPPLIES

Now I must ask you a personal question -- do you hoard supplies? Is there really any logical reason for keeping 65 pads of post-it notes in your desk drawer? I know, I know -- you say you don't have anyplace else to put them! Well, let's see what we can do about that. Take a good look around your

office. Where can we create some storage? Could we put in some bracket shelves above your desk or credenza? How about using drawer dividers to organize paper clips, thumb tacks, extra staples, and tape? And any letter or legal size items -- letterhead, sheet protectors, index dividers, manila folders -- can always be stored more efficiently in stacking trays. Remember, your storage center does not have to be conventional -- it simply has to be functional.

ERGONOMICS IN ACTION

Does your office give you a pain in the neck -- literally? It has been proven time and time again that you work more efficiently -- that productivity increases when your office space is designed to be ergonomically correct. The first step is to make sure that all of your vital equipment and supplies -- the ones that you use daily -- are within arm's reach. You should be able to get at everything you need without bending, squatting, or stretching. Now take a look at your computer -- the monitor should be at eye level and your wrists should be flat when you are typing or using the mouse. If not, you can raise up your monitor or attach a keyboard tray to your desk. Finally, have a seat. Are your thighs parallel to the floor, your calves perpendicular, and your feet planted flat on the ground? If not, you might want to consider adjusting your chair or bringing in a raised footrest. As you sit at your desk, pay attention to what your body is telling you. If it causes you discomfort, fix it!

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