Getting organized is habit-forming

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Cluttered desk
photo by VHancock

From the time you get up each morning, you use many habits. Some habits are productive and helpful. Others are counter-productive and cause stress. Listening to the traffic report before driving to work is a productive habit. Tossing the mail onto a growing pile on your desk is a counter-productive habit. It takes time to form habits, whether they are productive or not. Just like quitting smoking, changing your diet, or starting an exercise program, changing the habits that cause clutter in your life requires a conscious effort over time.

Got some habits you'd like to change? It may be easier than you think! Follow these steps to get started:

1. Name a habit that bothers you. Example: Letting mail pile up on your desk.

2. Think about the routine that has caused the clutter. Example: When you get home from work, you bring the mail inside, throw it on the desk, and start dinner. You usually don't have time to get back to the mail, or you just forget about it.

3. List the steps in a new routine - the new habit - that will stop the clutter. Example: Put out two baskets or boxes, and have the trash can handy. When you bring the mail into the office, sort the junk mail directly into the trash, the bills and other items requiring additional steps into the "action" basket, and the items that you should keep but that require no action into the "file" basket. Make an appointment with yourself to clear out the action and file baskets at least once each week.

4. Follow your new routine self-consciously for two weeks to assure that it becomes a habit, replacing the old routine and eliminating that pile of clutter. This step may take some reminders, so enlist a family member or friend to help you.

By following these four basic steps, you'll find that forming new, productive habits stops your clutter from piling up and reduces your stress.

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