



Purge Your Overloaded System

By Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC

Clearing out what you don't need to retain is an emerging discipline among winners in society today. Merging and purging is essential because even with all the new technological tools, paper will continue to mushroom for the foreseeable future. When I speak to groups, I tell them that once they let go of all the unnecessary papers and clutter they're keeping, they will experience great rewards.

Merge And Purge Or Be Doomed

Consider all you encounter in the course of a day, week, month and year: faxes, memos, reports, newspapers, newsletters, bulletins, magazines, bills, calendars, promotional items, and all manners of sundries. How would your life be if you merged and purged on a regular basis, as these items came into your life? You would have far more time. Why? Because accumulations,

by their nature, rob you of your time. First you receive them, then put them somewhere, look at them, move them, attempt to arrange them, perhaps file some items and discard others, and then move things yet again.

You know you're hanging on to too much stuff, and that it's slowing you down. When are the best times to merge and purge what you've retained? Try these guidelines:

- Anytime you approach a birthday is a good time, particularly a zero year birthday. If you're about to hit 40, this is one of the great times in life to get rid of the stuff you no longer need. Age 30, age 50, and age 60 also work well.
- As you're approaching New Years is a good time, especially if it's the change of a decade—a zero year such as the year 2000. When the end of the year approaches, I find it easy to rip into files and get rid of

half the stuff I know I'm never going to use again. I clear more room in my files, enabling me to be more organized and ready to face other things that compete for my attention.

- Merge and purge right after you've filed your taxes. If you procrastinate, and a growing number of people do when it comes to taxes, don't worry. After you've finished filing, there are all kinds of benefits. For one, you can get rid of most receipts and documents from the tax year, three years prior to the one you completed. The law says you have to keep the forms filed, but not the nitty-gritty details (If you've been audited, or you anticipate a problem, that's a different story).
- Spring-cleaning has traditionally been a time to clear out the old and make room for the new. The arrival of fall works as



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well. Having the crisp, cool air return is a stimulant to get your desk, office, home, and car back into top condition.

- Whenever you move is a good time. There's no sense in paying the movers to haul stuff that you're never going to use to your new location. Have a yard sale or give the stuff away, but never bring junk to a new location.
- When you change jobs or careers, you have to clean out your old desk at work. Don't make the mistake of hauling stuff with you to the next office or the next organization when it would be best to get it out of your life.
- Passing one of life's milestones—the birth of a child, the death of a parent, graduation, retirement, getting a major raise, and anything like that—is a reminder to reexamine what you're retaining. Think of the rearranging as a way to accommodate the new you.
- Anytime the spirit moves you, must be a good time to merge and purge. You don't need to wait for any of the above. As you begin to sense the power inherent in regaining control of your files, your possessions, and your life, you may not need the milestone, the change of year or birthday to take action. When is a good time to get back in control? The answer is almost anytime.
- As you finish reading this particular paragraph, go merge and purge some area of your life. Pick a file drawer or a closet. Make it something you can tackle and master within 10 to 15 minutes. You'll feel good about what you have accomplished! ❖

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