

## ACTION PLAN

ADVICE FROM JEFF DAVIDSON, AT YOUR BEST ADVISOR AND AUTHOR OF BREATHING SPACE

### Getting Organized: FIRST STEPS FOR THE FEARFUL

When it comes to organizing, some people are like primitives who fear that a photograph of them captures and imprisons their soul. They think organizing will somehow strip them of their inner essence, their humanity—that they'll become unfeeling robots dedicated only to efficiency. But that's far from the truth. Organization gives you more time to be human.

So relax. Don't fear organization, or despair that you'll ever be able to achieve it. As organization Barbara Hemphill says, "Organization is not a moral issue." Being "neat" is not the same as being organized. Being organized is just a tool to help you get more done and feel better about your life. Each person has to arrive at their own comfortable level of organization. You don't have to be an efficiency whiz or neatness nut to be organized—all you have to do is know where things are and be able to access them freely. And here's some advice on getting started:

1. **Collect everything on your desk and elsewhere that is competing for your attention.** Stack it in front of you in a big pile. The higher the better. You'll have a much clearer idea of what you've allowed to accumulate and what you're up against.

2. **Separate every item into one of four piles:** an important pile, an urgent pile, an interesting pile, or the recycling bin (trash can). Do it when you're fully rested, or the process will seem overwhelming.

3. **Next, rank the items in each of the three remaining piles.** On this second pass, you may want to downgrade an item, or toss it altogether.

4. **Now, use those files.** Prioritize each new incoming task or piece of information, and file it in the appropriate file. And act: "Important" tasks take priority. But when you need a change of pace during the day, flip to the Urgent file. And every week or so you might want to dip into the interesting file. It's O.K. if it grows very thick. Eventually, you'll reclassify or check its contents.

5. **Stay mean and lean.** Always think, "What else can I check? What can be combined/ignored/delayed/delegated/done in multiples/farmed out/automated/systemized? Downgrade as many items as possible to interesting, and keep them, and their distractions, away from your desk.

6. **Repeat as often as necessary.** Whenever anxiety over all the tasks you have to perform starts overwhelming you again, it's time to repeat the process.

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**PURPOSE:** To provide authoritative, useful, easy-to-understand information that will help our readers reduce stress, be more energetic and balance the demands of home and work.

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