Tips to fight information overload

By Jeff Davidson

Every working man and woman in society today, from Chatham County MA, to Chatham County NC, to Chatham County GA, and all points to the west, whether self-employed or employed by others, faces the specter of too much information competing for his or her attention.

When you're besieged by information on a continual basis, you begin to feel overwhelmed, which leads to the feeling of over-work and stress. If you're able to eliminate a lot of the extraneous information that makes itsway to you, you will actually experience being overwhelmed less frequently, and you will not feel as over-worked.

It's important to understand that you control the spaces in your life, because information is stored in spaces — tables, shelves, desks, disks, web sites, etc. If your desk is a mess right now, strewn high with piles that are growing higher, remember you're the one that controls that space.

The same principle applies to your filing cabinet, your shelves, the top of your dining room table, your kitchen counter, your glove compartment, or your back seat. You are the one controlling your space, and this acknowledgment will allow you to stay in control of your information.

Not Too Much at Once

If you're facing volumes of information, divide and conquer. You may be facing a 10 inch pile of information. Put it into file folders, and group like items together. Eliminate duplicates and prioritize the important items in a given file. It's harmful to ingest too much information at once. At least half the job of dealing with most information is simply dividing it into piles, categorizing, or putting it into various directories on your hard drive.

A key question when evaluating any item to be filed is, "Where does this go?" The answer is finding an appropriate file where you can find the material easily. You may find that you need to re-label files, but that's OK. This is your system, designed for you — never mind what it looks like to others. Re-labeling files is an indication that you're getting good at filing.

Even students or a spouse at home could benefit from more effective filing and being better organized. Oh, you don't think you have time to get organized? The ever-present reality is that you're already taking time from other things if you're not organized. At the least, it takes you longer to find things.

Tickler Files

It's worth considering the benefits of having a file folder for each month of the year and a file folder for each day of the month. This idea, the "tickler file," has been in practice for years. Create a file for days 1-31 of the month, and place it at the front of one of your file drawers. Behind that, have a file for each month of the year.

As the days and months go by, you continually take files that were in front and put them in the back. Once you get this system in place, you'll find that many of the things you file may not need to be acted on later. The benefits of this system are immediate.

Jeff Davidson is the work-life balance expert for our time-pressed generations. He wrote "Breathing Space" and the "60 Second Procrastinator." Visit www.BreathingSpace.com or call 800.735.1994 for more information.