

LESSON 2

Organizing Your Time and Workspace

Becoming organized takes time and effort, but the productivity payoff in the end makes it worthwhile. Being organized not only improves job performance, but it can enhance your overall well-being. It has been shown to decrease stress levels, elevate mood, and enhance personal efficiency.

ORGANIZING YOUR SPACE

Before thinking about how to structure your time, first consider how you structure your workspace. How you manage your workspace will depend on your personal preferences and your company's policies. For example, some employers do not allow items to be hung on walls or left in shared areas. Before redecorating your assigned space, check organizational guidelines. To start making your workstation or home office more organized and comfortable, focus on removing clutter, engaging your senses, and developing a system that organizes physical work items like paperwork, as well as digital files and technology.



Cluttered or clean?

Our physical space can reflect our state of mind. If we feel overwhelmed or stressed, it will likely be reflected in messy or cluttered workspaces or homes. **Clutter can be anything that disrupts your ability to concentrate, work efficiently, complete tasks, or even relax.** This might include personal objects such as decorations, job-related items such as files and office supplies, or unneeded things such as trash or recyclables. Clutter can be a result of stress, such as feeling too busy to tidy up. It also can cause stress as it minimizes the amount of available space you have for work. Clutter also makes it difficult to find what you need when you need it. Taking steps to keep your workspace organized can improve your work performance and productivity.

Soothe your senses

Think about the **five senses** when you create your workspace. Engage your senses in ways that help you focus, promote relaxation, and/or boost energy. Again, it is important to be mindful of company policies and shared workspaces as you brainstorm options that are best for you yet respectful of others.

- **Sight.** Adjust your computer angle and brightness so it is easy to see without straining your neck or eyes. Make sure your workspace is well-lit, using natural light whenever possible. Face windows while you work, or decorate with things that bring you joy. Personalizing your workspace is one way to make it more comfortable; however, too much personalization can quickly lead to clutter. Remove any personal items that are a distraction, take up valuable space, or get in your way while working.
- **Sound.** Listen to energizing or relaxing music, and/or wear a pair of noise-canceling earphones to help you minimize distracting sounds.

- **Smell.** Consider types of air fresheners that appeal to your olfactory system — the part of the brain that allows us to interpret smells. Research suggests that our olfactory system is involved with our emotional responses and behaviors. Scents have the power to relax, energize, and evoke positive emotions. Look for clean, natural scents that will not aggravate sensitive noses or trigger headaches. For example, citrus, lavender, and peppermint have been shown to increase productivity and focus. Plants are natural air purifiers and can be nice to look at too.
- **Taste.** Grab a coffee, fill up your water bottle, or add a dish of hard candies to your workspace. Eating a healthy lunch or a snack when you are hungry and staying hydrated can minimize the distractions of hunger and thirst that can halt our productivity. This also can help ward off headaches and give you energy to fuel your brain and body while working.
- **Touch.** Find a supportive chair if you sit most of the day or wear comfortable shoes if you are on your feet or walk a lot. If you work at a desk, use arm or wrist rests for hands that are constantly typing. Adjust the room temperature if possible, or dress in layers to keep your body comfortable if you work in a shared space or outdoors.

Files and paperwork

Being able to find information (or a resource, tool, phone number, etc.) when you need it is essential to being productive. Research estimates that people spend up to an hour and a half each day looking for lost items. To retrieve materials quickly on the job, you need an organizational system that works for you and your daily tasks.

Whether using physical or electronic filing systems, sort files and papers by content, project, or date. For physical files, divide



Customize computers, smart phones, and tablets to quickly find frequently used items.

them into clearly labeled folders and organize them in a filing cabinet or portfolio. For electronic files, save them into clearly labeled folders on a computer, external hard drive, or portable storage device. One helpful method is to have three main kinds of files: working, reference, and archival.

- **Working files** contain materials used most often that you need nearby, such as files you are currently working on or open customer orders.
- **Reference files** contain information needed occasionally, such as notes on how to complete a task not done regularly.
- **Archival files** contain materials seldom retrieved but that must be kept, such as financial statements or daily reports.

If you do not work in an office environment, you still can apply similar practices. For example, keep supplies or information you need frequently in an easily accessible place, while materials used less often could be stored on a higher shelf. Ask a colleague or supervisor before tossing paperwork or supplies that may be important, or ask if there is somewhere else you could store them that would be out of your way.

Tidy up technology

Customize computers, smart phones, and tablets to quickly find frequently used items. If you need assistance, ask your technology department or a computer-savvy colleague to help. Organize the start menu, home screen, or desktop so that you can easily find the applications and

files you need most often. Add shortcut icons to applications you use daily — like your email — so they immediately launch when your computer turns on or are easy to access. Like your physical space, keeping your virtual space categorized and clean can increase your efficiency.

ORGANIZING YOUR TIME

In addition to organizing our workspaces, it is important to structure our time both personally and professionally. This allows us to focus less on our personal tasks while on the clock, putting more energy toward our work, and vice versa. We have a limited number of hours per day, making each one valuable to our overall productivity.

Time is a commodity that can be easily wasted if we are not intentional, especially when we are procrastinating or feeling overwhelmed by our personal or professional to-do lists. To avoid wasting valuable time at home and work, look for ways to simplify life and maximize your time.

Four Action Steps to Simplify Your Life

- **Outsource** tasks by paying a neighborhood teen to mow your lawn, assigning chores to other members of your household, or using services like grocery pickup or delivery. You can delegate tasks as appropriate to capable co-workers or send the work to a different department, such as asking the marketing team to create a flier rather than making it yourself.
- **Automate** things like bill pay, calendar reminders, medicine refills, or weekly supply orders and deliveries. Slow cookers can be programmed ahead of time to have dinner ready for you after work, and dishwashers can be programmed to turn on at night, so your dishes are clean the next day.
- **Communicate** with your household or team to ensure everyone is on the same page with needs and timelines. Regularly schedule staff



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends going to bed and waking up around the same time each day to keep our bodies on a consistent routine.

or family meetings, maintain a visible command center in a central location in your home or workspace, and/or use shared calendars.

- **Consolidate** and simplify where you can, such as purchasing meal kits or prechopped fruits and vegetables to save you time when cooking. You can plan what to wear for upcoming events when you do laundry. As you iron and put clothes away, fold or hang your planned outfits in the order that you will wear them, making what you will wear first the most accessible.

Establish routines

Establishing consistent routines is helpful when learning to be more intentional with our time. Routines help us structure each hour and can be used to increase personal and professional productivity.

Personal routines are separate from our work and are essential building blocks for our general health and well-being. Three common personal routines are sleep, meal, and exercise routines.

- **Sleep.** Establish a bedtime routine for the half hour before you intend to fall asleep. This might include creating a to-do list for the next day, enjoying a cup of tea, taking a warm bath or shower, stretching, journaling, or reading. Technology can interfere with sleep, so avoid it before bed. Electronic devices emit blue light that cues our bodies to stay awake. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends going to bed and waking up around the same time each day to keep our bodies on a consistent routine.
- **Meal.** Take time each weekend to plan meals for the week ahead. Then make a grocery list of everything you need. Set aside a regular time to either place a grocery order online or to go shopping in the store. Appliances like slow cookers can help make sure

dinner is ready after your workday. Pack lunches the night before, or meal prep at the start of the week so you can quickly grab your lunch each day. You also can prepare meals ahead of time and keep them in the refrigerator or freezer. This not only saves you time on hectic days, it can save you money compared to eating out (and you can choose healthier ingredients too).

- **Exercise.** Look for ways to sneak activity into each day. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults get 150 to 300 minutes of moderate exercise each week. This breaks down to roughly 20 to 45 minutes per day, perfect for a brisk walk on your lunch break or an evening stroll around your neighborhood.

Professional routines are focused on what we can do to be more productive on the job. One way to implement professional routines is to remember the 4 P's: Prep, Production, Pause, and Play.

- **Prep routines** help prepare us for the next day. They set us up for success and help us hit the ground running. For example, before leaving work, you can tidy up your workstation, check tomorrow's schedule, or set out materials you will need for the first task you want to accomplish when you return to the office. Similarly, before you go to bed at night, lay out your clothes for the morning, pack your lunch, and prepare your work bag.
- **Production routines** include things you can do throughout the day to increase your production or output. This could include stacking meetings, gathering all your supplies before starting a project, or completing like-tasks together. If two tasks are similar in nature, such as counting cash drawers and verifying bank deposits, do them at the same time. You also can do this with tasks that are geographically

close. For example, fill up your water bottle on your way to meet with your supervisor, or drop off paperwork on the way to your next job site.

- **Pause routines** allow us to build little breaks into our day to decompress, recharge, and return to our work more creative and focused. This could be getting coffee, stretching, going for a quick walk, getting fresh air, taking a lunch break, or briefly chatting with colleagues.
- **Play routines** give us time to unwind from work. Separate from our workday, these focus on intentional self-care and spending time with family, friends, and co-workers in relaxed settings. Play routines help promote a healthy work-life balance.

Productivity journaling

To track your productivity and how well your routines are working, keep a running list of things you need to do, as well as how much time it takes you to do each one. Productivity journaling allows you to see how much time you typically spend

on a task and which items may need a better-established routine. A productivity journal can be as simple as a labeled spiral notebook or a purchased planner. To continue promoting a healthy work-life balance, keep separate personal and professional productivity lists.

Here's what you should do once you have your journal:

1. Label each page with the day and date, and then list the tasks that need to be done that day.
2. Prioritize each task in order of importance by assigning every item a number.
3. Use a highlighter to mark the top three items and focus on those first.
4. Cross off items as you complete them.
5. Items not completed should be carried over to the next page/day.

To be as productive as possible, remember there is no secret or one-size-fits-all solution. There is no magic button to organizing your time and workspace. You must explore different methods, and through trial and error, find the solutions or combinations that work for you. Periodically you also may need to revise your management systems as obligations and preferences change.

REFERENCES

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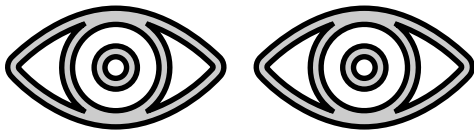
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LESSON 2: ACTIVITY 1

Soothe Your Senses

Brainstorm ways to engage each of the 5 senses in your workspace.

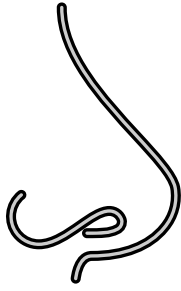


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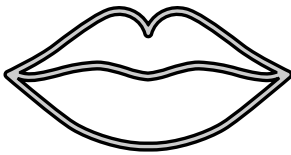


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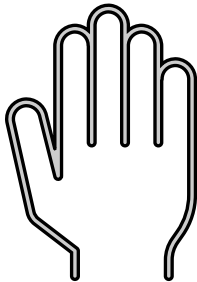




Smell:



Taste:



Touch:

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LESSON 2: ACTIVITY 2

Reflecting on Your Routines

Whether or not they were created intentionally, you may already have some personal and professional routines in place. As you consider these routines, reflect on what is working well and what needs to be implemented.

Personal Routines

What personal routines do you already have in place in each of the categories below?

Type of Routine	Routines I currently have in place
Sleep	
Meal	
Exercise	
Other	



Personal Routines (continued)

Now consider the routines you listed above. Are there any that are not working well? If so, cross them out. Then brainstorm personal routines that you could create.

Type of Routine	Routines to create
Sleep	
Meal	
Exercise	
Other	

Professional Routines

What professional routines do you already have in place in each of the categories below?

Type of Routine	Routines I currently have in place
Prep	
Production	
Pause	
Play	
Other	



Professional Routines (continued)

Now consider the routines you listed above. Are there any that are not working well? If so, cross them out. Then brainstorm professional routines that you could create.

Type of Routine	Routines to create
Prep	
Production	
Pause	
Play	
Other	

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