The Very Real Struggle Of Paper Management

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Do paper piles line your countertops? Does the need to find a form send you into a panic? Are you constantly losing papers that you put in a 'safe place' where you are sure to find them, only to lose them?

If so, you're not alone.

Papers are the bane of my existence.

Nothing screams to me, "I may need this one day", more than paper. And, because of that, I accumulate piles for that elusive day.

I know I'm not alone. Papers are a problem for a lot of people, professional organizers included. At least this one.

Yes, I have a strategy for my incoming papers, and a place to file them, but I am still inclined to hold onto too many. I know it, acknowledge it, and claim it. I also know better. But letting them go can be difficult.

I've gotten much better. It's easier for me to get rid of papers now, but it has taken me a while to get to this point. If I'm not diligent, I can amass a stack of "I might need that" papers in no time.

So when I say, I understand the struggle, trust me, I really do.

Dealing with paper is stressful. Each piece of paper requires a decision, and considering how much paper comes into our lives on a daily basis, well, that's a lot of decision making.

There is a very real sense of, "I may need that information one day". This is how filing cabinets become overstuffed with documents that will likely never see the light of day again.

So how do you deal with the daily onslaught?

Like everything in organizing, keeping your paper management system simple is key. Here are some tips, whether you are a filer or a piler:

If you are a filer:

Give your folders names that are easy to remember. Avoid creating a 'miscellaneous' folder as it will become a catch-all for anything and everything.

Handwrite your labels. It's quick and easy and avoids letting things pile up until you buy labels, get out the label maker, etc.

Be ruthless. Resist the urge to keep everything. Remember, the majority of what we file we never touch again.

If you are a piler:

Keep your piles together as much as possible rather than scattered throughout your home. Having one centralized location for your papers can make it easier to find what you need.

Stay up-to-date with action papers using a bulletin board or magnetic dry erase board. Devote 15 to 30 minutes each week to sort through your pile and purge what is no longer needed. Attach this task to something you already do, like watching a particular show.

Whether you are a filer or a piler, before you save a paper, ask yourself these questions:

Can I find this information elsewhere?
What's the worst that could happen if I get rid of this paper?
Does this paper represent something that requires action?

Here are a few more tips for managing papers in general:

Establish a dedicated space for sorting papers. This space should include a bin for papers to recycle, as well as a shredder for documents containing personal information.

Be consistent with where you keep your papers. It's easier to find what you need when you know where to look.

Keep action papers separate from reference papers.

Be realistic about those things you are saving to read later. There will always be more to read than we have time for. If you find yourself putting the same newsletters, magazines, and periodicals in a pile to read someday, but you haven't done it yet, realistically you're not likely to start. Make peace with it and toss them.

More than anything, ask yourself if you really need that piece of paper, bearing in mind that most of the papers we keep we never refer to again. Ever.

Ready to set up a paper management system that works, even if you are an out of sight, out of mind type? Join me (via Zoom) Thursday, February 17th at 7 pm for a FREE class on how. Advance registration is required. Register at https://www.savvyspacesorganizing.com/