

Paper, paper, and more paper! It seems endless. That's because the volume of office paper has tripled since the birth of the computer. So much for the paperless office! But don't despair; you can create new habits and systems to conquer that seemingly endless invasion of paper.

On average, a piece of paper is moved eight times before it is recycled or filed. Now, I'm not a proponent of the "touch it once" school of thought because to me it's completely unrealistic in most instances. However, touching the same piece of paper eight times is a bit excessive and a sign of indecision.

As you look at the paper strewn around your office, ask yourself, "Why is it there?" Chances are your response will be "*I just don't know what to do with it.*" The result of **in**decision is paper clutter. Keeping paper under control is about making decisions. Because many people struggle with decision making, we'll share some steps to streamline the process.

Look at a document and ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I discard (recycle) it?
- Can I delegate it?
- Do I need to act on it?

- Do I need to save it for future reference?

The first line of defense is always to eliminate it (recycle or delegate). If that isn't an option, you have only two choices: take action or file for reference.

There are two types of action you can take: immediate or scheduled. If you can complete the task in two minutes or less, do it immediately. If it'll take longer, either schedule the activity on your calendar or file it in a daily action file such as a 1-31 tickler filing system.

Items that don't require action, but you want or need to keep (an article you've read or a legal document), should be filed in a reference filing system.

Here are a couple things to note:

- If you're still struggling to decide, ask yourself:

-Do I really need it? (i.e., for legal purposes)

-Can I get it somewhere else? (Internet, another department)

-What's the worst thing that could happen if I get rid of it?

- 80 percent of what you file for reference will never be looked at again, so be selective in what you decide to keep.
- Having a user-friendly file cabinet is important (i.e., easy to open/close, files clearly labeled, and convenient to access). If your file cabinet and filing systems are easy to use, you'll be more likely to actually use them!

If you're overwhelmed with office clutter, give us a call. We'll help you create systems that work for you.