

Why Organize? Part Two of a Two-Part Series

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Working Effectively

Working effectively means keeping track of projects you are currently working on. A visual reminder can aid you in keeping track of the work you are doing and the work that you have to do. Whether it is a bulletin board, a calendar, a ready-made-system, or one that you create, a tracking system can be a great help, especially if you remember things visually. Beside my desk is a large calendar encompassing the next 12 months, which I can use to chart upcoming vacation times, seminars and other events. I've also come to enjoy having a large calendar on my desk where I can quickly jot down notes, schedule appointments, write down names and phone numbers. At the end of each month, I commit the important names and phone numbers to my Rolodex and laptop computer.

All papers related to projects on your master list belong in files, not stacked on your desk. Once you create a system, it will be much easier to find things. I often file copies of materials both by subject and chronologically. A good rule of thumb is to keep inactive and active items separated, so that you can find priority materials quickly. Computer files are out of sight, but they shouldn't be out of mind. Like any file system, they've got to be kept up to date and well maintained. Be consistent in your file and folder names. When a directory or folder contains more than a screen's worth of files, it's time to create a new directory or folder. Clean out your files regularly. Delete duplicate and un-needed files. Transfer to disk inactive files that are not presently needed. I've learned the hard way: back up your data!

Books, magazines, newspapers, journals, pamphlets and other reading materials pile up quickly and can become an obstacle to an organized office. Have a clear plan for handling each item and whether you will sort or discard on a daily, weekly, monthly or yearly basis. Donate reading materials that you might otherwise throw out to acupuncture colleges, local libraries, prisons, shelters or schools. Of course, you can tear out and save articles you intend to read or reference, then throw away the rest of the magazine.

In any endeavor, it helps to have a clear picture of where you want to go and what you want to accomplish. First, write out a list of realistic goals you want to attain in the next year. Then outline the steps you need to take in order to reach them. A running master list is the most effective method for keeping track of what needs to be done. It keeps all your "to do" tasks in one place and eliminates all the notes and lists you started, never finished or can't find. Use a notebook or laptop computer. Write down everything that needs to be done, including tasks related to both long and short-term goals, and ranging from the simplest phone call to the first step for a major project. You might include clinic improvements; self-improvement, which can include CEU and other developmental activities; or marketing, which can include advertising lectures and other promotional activities. Prioritize the list. On the left side, note the date of entry; on the right side, note the task's deadline. At the end of the year, see how well you met your goals.

You should also organize how you spend your time each day. How you manage your down time is critical to the balance you achieve and is invaluable to organizing your thoughts. You can choose to

take a few moments every hour to relax and recharge. What do you do during lunchtime (exercise, socialize, business, phone calls)? Do you have adequate time each morning to stretch and sit quietly before beginning a busy day? Do you have enough time to assess each patient's needs adequately? Do you have enough time in the middle of the day to break from treating patients, eat a nutritious meal, and rejuvenate and revitalize your *qi*? Are you organized well enough to not have to bring work home from the office? If you have staff, meet first thing every week to refocus on shared goals, clear any misunderstandings, and exchange constructive feedback, in order to facilitate a harmonious work environment.

Interruptions are a normal part of business, but how you manage them may be critical to the quality of care you provide. I find it disrupting and unprofessional if the session I'm receiving is interrupted by a phone call. I do my best to not take calls, unless urgent, while I am with clients. Instead, I set aside a time during each day to return phone calls. If people walk into your office wanting information while you are busy, it is best to take down their name and number quickly and phone them back later the same day at a more convenient time. Absolutely do not accept telephone calls during your "quiet" time. Turn on your voice mail or answering machine, or ask your secretary to screen your calls.

Have you noticed that the busiest people are often more successful in creating more time to play, relax and be with their families? They have learned how to organize themselves and their time. Being well-organized is one of the keys to a successful practice, whether you are a solo practitioner with no staff, or are running a large multi-practice clinic with many staff. The more organized you are, the easier it will be for you to focus your energies on healing, education, and providing superior medical care. The better organized my time is, the more time I find to play. I've calculated that my work week averages 45-50 hours. Even so, I take a half-day each week to spend alone with my son, and one full day each week to be with family. I have one day each week to relax and be alone. It gives me time to practice *t'ai ch'i*, surf, and hike in Haleakala Crater. Recently, I have been taking a half-day to spend alone with my wife. So although you might grumble now about investing the time and energy it takes to be better organized, the rewards are great. I recommend you give it a try at least for a few months and see what happens.

If your environment is harmonious, it will take you less effort to perform your daily routine. When you are organized, the *qi* will circulate more freely. You won't feel stuck. Your creativity will blossom. When you possess a calm and meditative spirit, not distracted by a myriad of undefined and unfinished tasks, you will function at optimum performance.

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