

Why Organize? Part One of a Two-Part Series!

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We live in a world in which we are incessantly bombarded by a multitude of stressors. This activates our sympathetic nervous system, and effectively turns off our parasympathetic functions. In turn, we become less capable of spontaneous action and instead become exhausted by the continuous stream of outside stimulus.

There are many things that can support us as our energy drains slowly away. We can receive acupuncture treatment; have a massage; take herbal medicine; or practice *t'ai ch'i* or *qigong*, but one free and simple step we can take to mellow the intensity of external pressures is to have our lives well-organized. I recognize that the artist in each of us may be stimulated by chaos and disarray. It's great to have a time and space to allow such expression, but a healing office and clinic need organization and cleanliness to thrive. I have visited many acupuncture offices, but have seen few that are attractive and efficiently managed.

In previous articles, I've discussed what success is; how to prepare for a public speaking venue; and why volunteering is valuable. The foundation of a successful business and an enjoyable practice is organization. Being well organized allows for improved patient care, more efficient use of time, the best possible work environment, and a quality work experience.

When you get better organized, several things will happen:

1. You'll feel good. Feeling good is important. When asked why he looks so positively at life and its challenges, a Buddhist monk replied, "Because it makes me feel good." With the expenditure of just a little effort, you can (and will) feel good every single day - when you're coming to work, while you're there, and when you leave.
2. You'll feel an inner confidence. You will have gained a sense of control where there had previously been confusion and disarray.
3. You'll welcome new experiences and opportunities. An organized clinic invites new clients and communicates to the world. It says "I'm ready."
4. You'll have room to grow and expand. Creating space allows for the unexpected and gives you an opportunity to meet unknown future needs.
5. You'll save on apologies. You won't need to apologize for an untidy environment, or for late responses to calls and letters due to being disorganized.
6. You'll be healthier. "Heart/*xin* is the sovereign ruler who directs with clear insight; lungs/*fei* is the minister in charge of rhythmic order; liver/*gan* is the general who excels through his strategic planning, whilst gall bladder/*dan* is the official who excels through his decisions and judgement; spleen/*pi* is the repository of imagination and ideas; whilst kidneys/*shen* stores the willpower and is associated with technical skills, excelling through his ability and cleverness."

The heart/*xin* stores the shen. When in balance, the mind is calm and peaceful, which allows you to respond appropriately to your environment. What disturbs these feelings more than a sense of overwhelm and loss of control? Precipitating factors of heart/*xin* imbalance may include anxiety and mental irritation. If your workspace is organized, there is much less strain placed upon your *shen*, and thus your heart/*xin*.

The kidneys/*shen* store *jing*. Overwork may contribute to a depletion of *jing*. Being well organized allows for more efficient use of time and less likelihood of overwork. The liver stores *gan*, and when in balance, governs the evenness of *qi* flow and your harmonious interaction with your external environment. Being well organized nourishes your *gan* and thus your liver. The *gan* of the liver is responsible for proper planning, and the *dan* of the gall bladder is responsible for making decisions and judgments. Just as a disharmony of *dan* may lead to indecision, indecisiveness and lack of organization may eventually lead to a disharmony of *dan*. Obsessive thinking, excessive study and worry weaken the *pi* of the spleen. Put less strain on and support your *pi*/spleen by organizing your thoughts and business.

One thing that differentiates us within the health care industry is the healing experience we impart. This includes being listened to, touched, and transformed. It is essential that your clinic allow for this unique experience. Of course you may consider principles of *feng shui* in decorating and arranging your office in order to invite harmony into your work environment. The first impression a new client or potential new client has when entering your clinic for the first time is critical to your success. You want them to feel comfortable enough to want to come back again, and to recommend you to their friends, colleagues and family.

Your office and clinic should be as productive and comfortable as possible. Begin by walking into your healing space or clinic with new eyes, as if you were entering it for the first time. Write down your first impressions. Do some areas need better lighting, a plant, or less clutter? Is the entrance warm and inviting? Does the space look well organized? Is the office orderly and neat? Are there piles of papers or books in the office? Do you feel at home in your office? Is it a comfortable place to work? What about your desk? Which adage do you choose: "A cluttered desk is a sign of artistic genius" or "A messy desk reflects a scattered mind"? How do you organize your desk? Do you get rid of clutter? Keep track of the work you've completed and the work you still have to do? Do you store your reading materials? What about patient files? Controlling clutter will allow for greater productivity and improve your office's appearance as much as how you arrange and decorate it. It will also allow you to enjoy a more relaxed work experience. You will be less likely to feel overwhelmed. Organizing your workspace is as much a part of your job as interviewing patients, proper needle techniques, and lifestyle counseling.

Effectively handling paper is the key to an organized desk. Are you guilty of the paper shuffle, of moving low-priority papers around your desk without acting on them? Instead of tossing it, filing it, copying it, responding to it, or putting it with other related papers, you push paper back and forth, and the piles grow. My rule is that if it's covered up and you can't see it, it's not critical to your daily activity - which means you have not dealt with it in the most efficient way. What is the etiology of this condition? Indecisiveness, procrastination, and the fear that "maybe someday I'll need it." Once the pile grows, it takes longer to sort through than if appropriate action had been taken initially. You should avoid keeping anything on your desk other than what you are currently working on.

Ideally, set aside at least one hour for your first session of organizing. Start with the top layer first. Process everything that you can. When you have only 15 minutes left during this session, try to bring order to the papers remaining. Clean off your desk at the end of each day. Select your most important project for the next day, and put it on the front of your desk before leaving. Don't think that any magic tool or person is going to straighten out your mess. A good time to tackle your desk is the first 15 minutes of each day. Sort through the papers on your desk and either trash it; refer or delegate it; act on it personally; read it; or file it. Always keep an area of your desk bare. Try to deal with each piece of paper right away, right when you first look at it. Clutter-free environments can be created and maintained, but you must be committed to it.

In Part II of this series, we will examine a variety of organization tools, including keeping track of projects; handling reading materials; managing down time; and dealing with interruptions. Good luck!

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