

“Spring Clean Your Professional Life”

Everyone has them...those issues that you don't want to deal with, those actions that you dread taking, those phone calls that you don't look forward to returning. People have a natural tendency to procrastinate—especially regarding the things that are unpleasant. Laura Huffling, a manager in our office, constantly reminds us of the “kitty litter theory”. You may ask, “What in the world is that?” Take a bucket, fill it about four-fifths with kitty litter, then add 5 tennis balls. The tennis balls are the priorities of the day, the issues, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are ones that must be handled. The pieces of kitty litter are those necessary things that keep you busy, but cause you not to be able to focus on your true priorities or time wasted with coworkers or personal issues while at work. If you put the kitty litter in the bucket first, the tennis balls will not fit without overflowing the bucket (ever had that feeling?). If, however, you put the tennis balls (priorities) in first, you will be able to fit the kitty litter around it. My cheerleading manager, Laura, said that the actual demonstration would be done with rocks and sand, but I think that kitty litter has a certain symbolism to it.

Have you ever noticed that once you make that dreaded phone call, no matter how unpleasant the conversation, it feels so much better once it's done. A few hints for keeping the clutter out of your professional life:

1. Handle the unpleasant tasks first.
2. Prioritize, and constantly reprioritize.
3. Take time for professional development including training, involvement in professional associations, seminars, etc.
4. Block out time periods in your schedule each day to organize your work.
5. Use the last fifteen to twenty minutes of each day to plan for the next day (before the morning rush hits).
6. Keep a detailed record of your activities for one week. You will find areas where your time management skills could be improved.
7. Learn the proper balance between your professional and personal life (this need varies from person to person but we all need balance to be successful in all aspects of our lives).
8. Take a “real” vacation. People who take a week rather than a long weekend come back to work revitalized and motivated.
9. Remember: “no one ever lies on their death bed wishing that they had worked more or spent less time with their family.”

Each week as you become overwhelmed with everyone else's priorities and general busy work, remember Laura's kitty litter theory.

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