

Is Your Office An **INFORMATION Toxic Dump?**

Effective Information Management is the Key

BY BARBARA HEMPHILL

Kathy is the office manager for a large corporation. The great news is that the company is growing and Kathy is looking for employees to handle all the new clients. The bad news is that she has no office space for these new employees to work in. The truth is, the office and storage areas are full of filing cabinets and the desks are covered in stacks of paper. The worst part is, Kathy and her staff don't even know what all that information is. It's no surprise that Kathy can't find space for new employees as she is wasting it with massive amounts of files and paperwork.



help

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Does your organization have offices, file cabinets, storage rooms, and offsite facilities full of unidentified paper files and electronic documents? Are there files in your office that you've never opened and probably can't identify the contents? Have you ever come across a piece of information you didn't know whether to save or throw away, so you saved it, just in case? If so, you are working in an "Information Toxic Dump!"

Research shows that 80 percent of the information kept in most offices is never used. Ironically, the more information that is kept, the less it is used, simply because it's too difficult for employees to find. Often employees can't even find the documents they themselves created — let alone any information created by another employee — especially someone who is no longer with the organization.

Why Information Management Really Matters

Your ability to accomplish any task or goal is directly related to

your ability to find the information you need when you need it. Finding information in every organization — regardless of whether it is in paper or electronic format — is becoming an ever-increasing challenge. This inability to find information causes all sorts of problems for the organization and for the individual; wasted time looking for information or recreating already existing information, missed opportunities, and increased stress, which results in increased healthcare costs.

Who Is Responsible for the Problem and What Can Be Done About It?

Blame for the information management debacle falls in several courts:

- Management blames employees for the problem.
- Employees blame management for the problem.
- Organizations don't have a user-friendly system.
- Employees aren't trained on the filing systems.
- Management fails to look at

records management as an ongoing activity.

To create and maintain an effective information management program, you must answer the following six questions:

1. What information should we keep?
2. In what form?
3. For how long?
4. Who is responsible for maintaining the information?
5. Who needs access to the information?
6. How can everyone who needs the information find it?

Answering those six questions requires the cooperation of everyone in the organization. It can easily take up to one year, or even longer, to answer them, since accuracy requires addressing the questions over a one-year business cycle at a minimum.

Creating and Maintaining an Effective Information Management System

Use The Productive Environment Process to implement a new system. This can be applied to organize information in any organization.

- **State your vision.** If your information management program is successful, what will you be able to do that you can't do now? What positive effect will an effective information management program have on the organization and your customers?
- **Eliminate your obstacles.** What currently prevents you from having a successful system?
- **Commit your resources.** How much time, money, and human re-

The Art of Wastebasketry

When faced with too much paper, ask yourself these questions:

- Does this require action?
- Can I identify a specific use?
- Is it difficult to obtain again?
- Is it recent enough to be useful?
- Are there tax or legal implications?

If the answer is "No," ask:

- What is the worst possible thing that will happen if I toss this?
- If you can live with your answer, toss or recycle it — and work happily every after!

(Note: These tips apply to paper *and* electronic files!)

source power are you willing to put into the project?


- **Create your system.** What tools (software, existing filing systems that work well, etc.) do you currently have that will be helpful in the process? What other tools are available? What processes do you need to apply? A crucial component is applying *The Art of Wastebasketry* (see sidebar) to eliminate unnecessary records.

- **Maintain your success.** What procedures do you need to develop and implement so the system you create will continue to work long after the creators of the system are gone?

It would be wonderful if creating an information management system was simply a matter of buying a book or hiring an expert who told you exactly what to do.

A successful program, however, requires people, processes and technology. It must be supported by management, customized for the organization, and executed by everyone in the organization to succeed on an ongoing basis.

Designing, implementing and maintaining an effective information management program is the

best place to start on the road to a “productive environment” — an organized office in which everyone can find what they need when they need it so they can accomplish their work and enjoy their lives. Your employees will have more space to work, stop wasting time and energy searching for paperwork and get more accomplished. 

Barbara Hemphill is one of the country’s leading productivity experts. As a speaker and consultant on organizing, she helps individuals and organizations create and sustain a productive environment. She is author of the best-selling *Taming the Paper Tiger* book series. In the forthcoming book, *Bushido Business*, she joins Tom Hopkins, Brian Tracy & Stephen M. R. Covey, sharing how they learned how to be successful. For more information visit: www.barbarahemphill.com.

