

Executive Challenge #6:

“I Really Need to Get More Organized.”

What are the biggest challenges facing successful business people today? In my work as a certified executive coach for C-Suite Executives, Directors, Managers, and Entrepreneurs, there are many recurring themes that seem to surface. One at a time, I'll be sharing with you 12 of those top challenges along with hints, tips, and steps you can take to avoid or eliminate altogether these key issues that might be holding you back from achieving the kind of success you are aiming for.

Challenge #6: “I really need to get more organized.”

Imagine a life without clutter: No mail piled up in your “in” tray, you easily stay caught up on your e-mails. Your productivity is up, but your schedule isn't packed. You avoid interruptions, arrive on time to appointments, and leave the office early enough to enjoy quality time with your family at the end of the day. Is this an accurate picture of your life? If not, you may need to beef up your organizational skills.

Lots of clients feel getting organized takes too much time and effort. But remember: The time and energy you take now will save you even more time and energy in the long run. So, how do you do it?

Set organizational goals. Focus your thoughts first. What's most important for you from an organizational standpoint? Do you want to be able to retrieve any document quickly? Do you want another hour with your family in the evenings? Do you want to get to your top three priorities done every day without having to stay late? Be clear on what you want to achieve.

If you're not sure *how* to get organized, ask for help. Ask your assistant to work with you on organizing your office, or hire a professional organizer. The important thing is to set up a system that works for *you*. If you do it yourself, start small. Allot a certain amount of time each week for organization until you have a good system in place. And remember: Being “neat” and being “organized” aren't the same thing. You may have only one pile of papers on your desk but no idea what's in it or how to find what you need. Only keep the items on your desk that are top priorities and that must be completed within the next week.

Create a “suspense” file for items that must be completed by a later date. Mark each “suspense” item with an “S” and the date it must be handled. Give these documents to your assistant to keep in a file, by date. Each morning, your assistant can check the file and give you back the items that are marked for completion that day.

Unsubscribe to non-value-added newsletters. If you can't actually use the information, get it out of your inbox.

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Set up e-mail etiquette rules, and make sure everyone sticks to them. Tell your staff not to send you a copy of an e-mail unless you *must* read it. Set up a code to be placed in the subject line that indicates to you if action is required or if you simply need to make note of the information. This will help you to prioritize your e-mail reading.

Keep track of new contacts by setting up a system to manage business cards. When you attend a networking event, keep your own business cards in your left suit pocket and the business cards you receive from others in your right suit pocket. When you get back to the office, remove the cards and write notes to help you remember the person, including the date and name of the event. Then, give your assistant the stack of cards so she can scan them into your Outlook contacts.

Organize your travels.

- Make a master list of “to take” items for trips, which includes *everything* that you could possibly need. Then, before each trip, print out the list, highlight only those items you want to take this time, and give it to your assistant to gather for you.
- Never lose travel expense receipts again! Have your assistant write the name of each trip on the outside of a larger-sized envelope, then automatically store all receipts you get for that trip inside that envelope. At the end of each day, pull out all receipts, write what the expenses were for on each receipt, and place them back in the envelope. When the trip is finished, your assistant can create an expense report immediately – and you can get reimbursed faster.
- At the end of each travel day, go through all papers you’ve collected that day and throw out the unnecessary ones. Lighten your load each evening, and you will have less to weed through when you get back home.

Good time management and organizational skills really can save you time and money. In fact, being more organized has been proven to free up as much as one hour a day. That means, over the course of a year, you would have freed up enough time to take a much-deserved two-week vacation. Enjoy!

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In one of her recently released books, *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™? How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.



After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in Fortune 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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