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## MOLEHILLS OF PAPERWORK?

Are you feeling overwhelmed by your mountain of paperwork? Does looking at your *To Do* list fill you with dread? Today's Tip has some ideas on how to reduce your mountain into a molehill together with ideas for dealing with your *To Do* list.

The idea of a paperless society may have been predicted in George Orwell's 1984 – but we are still a long way off achieving it. This morning's post brought me forms to complete for my Tax Return, 10 sheets of paper with a return envelope and a leaflet from my bank (despite banking online, my bank tells me as a business they have to send me paper statements!), 2 leaflets advertising stuff, several completed forms back from my clients, and a reminder for my car's service. Apart from the leaflets, which are headed for the recycling bin, all of this stuff needs processing. Tomorrow's post will bring more. And of course I add to my pile of paper by printing out interesting stuff from the web and the odd email I think I need in a more permanent form, client notes that need my attention, and so on. If these things aren't managed properly, it doesn't take long for these papers to grow into a mountainous pile.

I have a good system to manage my paperwork – but I'm not infallible. Over the last few weeks I have been busier than usual and so last week I had the experience of going through my mountain of 'unprocessed' papers many times. Each time I thumbed through it, I was aware of my frustration and the waste of my time. It also left me feeling slightly out of control. Yesterday after finally catching-up, I vowed (again!) to keep on top of it.

In an ideal world we would deal with all of our paperwork on a daily basis. In the real world it's often not possible. No-one has ever said to me: "Jennie, I love sorting my paperwork out!" For almost everybody, it feels like a chore. But not doing it costs time, energy and sometimes money if unpaid bills hidden in the pile start to incur additional costs.

If you are married or living with a partner, are you clear on who deals with what? If you are the one dealing with all of the paperwork, is that OK with you? Or would you like your spouse/partner to take over some of it for you? I know it isn't the sexiest of

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subjects, but talk about it. Decide who does what and when.

If you are self-employed is there someone else who would make a better job of looking after the paperwork than you? Consider what it's costing you to be tied up in admin vs. not doing your 'real' work. If you are a one-man-band, know these days there are virtual assistants and agencies that offer this type of help: you don't need to employ someone to get help with your paperwork and admin.

Sometimes having an interim filing system helps rather than just letting one pile grow. I do this. I have several coloured 'clear' plastic slip files – each one for different things. My blue one for example is for money stuff – any invoices in the post go straight into this file. This process means there are less unsorted papers to go through at any one time. If I am looking for an invoice – I know to go straight to the blue file. When I'm ready to deal with my invoices, bills and bank statements they are already in one place.

Allocate a time and/or a day for sorting paperwork. As I said most people don't enjoy doing this, but leaving it until it reaches crisis point makes the chore seem even bigger than it is. By allocating a time on a regular basis means you stay on top of the paperwork, and it stays as a well-managed mole-hill and not a mountain on the verge of an avalanche!

### To Do vs. To Be

Most of us have a *To Do* list – some are scribbled notes, some are post-it notes gaily festooned around a computer screen. Others are highly organised lists stored electronically with times, deadlines and 'whistles-and-bells' as the computer 'tells' of impending events. A few people manage just to carry a list in their heads. Do these lists work? Does your list really help you?

Last year I worked with a client, who had over a 100 things on her *To Do* list. Everything was listed in Outlook's Calendar. Everything was scheduled. Everything then was rescheduled when she didn't get it done. It felt like she had so much on her plate, and never enough time to do all of the things she wanted to do. This approach definitely wasn't working for her. My belief is that long lists are counter-productive. Let me explain.

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If you begin your day looking at a long list of things to do, the mind and body will inwardly sigh. On reading such a list, you know there are far more things on it than can be completed in a short space of time. By the end of the day, there will still be many things to be done and so the sense of achievement (in relation to all the things not yet done) feels insignificant. Starting your day with this list also impacts on your energy levels on the things you are going to tackle during the day. How can you get around this? By giving yourself a realistic list of things that you can do today – not in the weeks ahead.

If you have a very long *To Do* list, try this approach to see if it helps you. Create a new list or rename your current one – and call it anything apart from a *To Do* list. Call it a Master List, an Aide Mémoire or anything that doesn't imply immediate action. Now it's no longer a *To Do* list, you can add to it ideas, dreams and snippets of useful information. The role of this list is to free your mind. With this list you don't have to try and remember everything – nor worry that you might forget something, because it's all in one place.

Now for your *To Do* list. Write it only for that day. If you only have a couple of things on it – that's totally OK. Why, because at the end of each day you will get a sense of achievement as everything will be ticked or crossed off. The satisfaction you get lifts your energy and allows you to do more.

Some of you may remember the Tip on creating a *To Be* list instead of a *To Do* list. Now you have a new list that is just a memory tool, creating a *To Be* list is even easier because you are just focusing on today. If you would like to read the *To Be* Tip again, please see [www.reddandelion.co.uk/tips.html](http://www.reddandelion.co.uk/tips.html) to download it as a pdf file. In a nutshell, the concept behind the *To Be* list is simply deciding what you want *To Be* first instead of last. The old way we were taught is that first you have to do, then you will have (something) and then you will be (something) – usually the 'being' is a state of happiness. The new way is to start by deciding what you want to be, then what you can do to support that 'being state' and then finally choosing what you wish to have. Using the idea of *To Be* elevates you to a much higher level than working from to just your *To Do* – give it a try – you have nothing to lose!

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