

Getting it together

It pays to keep routine tasks from taking more time than is necessary, personal organizers say

BY ROBIN WOOD
THE BUSINESS REVIEW

Is getting organized perennially on your list of New Year's resolutions? Should it be?

Managing time, paper, projects and stress are critical skills for running a business, but businesspeople often overlook basic organization until there's a crisis—unpaid bills, lost files, and piles of paper on the desk, the floor and the conference table.

"There are entrepreneurs who fail because they fail at time management," said Jeff Corcoran, executive director of the Schenectady County Community Business Center. The incubator provides start-up space, training and small business support.

Organization skills have become an important part of entrepreneur training, but many companies can benefit from the one-on-one advice of a personal organizer, Corcoran said.

There are three kinds of work that need to be done in any business: routine tasks, the core work of the company and business development, said Diane Campion, owner of Albany-based Organize This! The goal of a well organized workplace is to prevent routine tasks from taking more time than necessary.

Organize This! works with businesses and families to develop systems to manage tasks efficiently. "Basically, it comes down to helping people who are overwhelmed," Campion said.

She said being organized requires dealing with paper and projects upfront by creating timelines, schedules and systems that put things where they need to go in the first place. "I'm a big believer in planning, and many small business owners are

not," Campion said.

Campion honed her organizational skills during a 20-year career in labor relations. Being well organized includes managing paper, but it is primarily about managing priorities and dealing with change. Creating workable systems often requires understanding how a company's mission, workflow or operations have changed, and then changing processes that no longer work.

Organize This! offers help writing or revising business plans, doing strategic planning, hiring and training employees, developing filing, mailing, invoicing and other systems, coaching and presentations on workplace organization, and project management. Campion also teaches personal and business organization classes for Knowledge Network, a community continuing education organization.

Penny Perkins, owner of AlphaOmega Media Services in Albany, a communications, Web-site developer and production company, said Campion's advice has helped her better juggle the requirements of working on several long-term projects concurrently. Along with developing a new filing system, Perkins and Campion set up a six-month flow chart with key dates for various projects.

Working with an organizer paid off immediately for AlphaOmega, Perkins said, because a better invoicing system means better cash flow.

Campion said her fees range from a couple of hundred dollars to a couple thousand dollars, depending on the scope of work. "I tell small business owners that they can afford to pay me in what they will save in late fees [for unpaid bills]," Campion said.

ON THE WEB

For more information:

Organize This!: www.Org-This.com

The field of professional organizers is growing locally and nationally, said Helen Volk, who operates Beyond Clutter, a personal organizing firm in Albany. "People are handling and juggling more paper and more activities," she said.

And in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, people are looking for ways to be in control of their lives and surroundings. People want to simplify their lives at home and at work so they can concentrate on what really matters, Volk said.

Personal organizers tend to do well during boom times when people have more money than time, but businesses also need them in a shrinking economy, said Karen McCorry, president of Boulder, Colo.-based Officiency Inc. and spokeswoman for the National Association of Professional Organizers. The Austin, Texas-based trade association has 1,400 members.

In a recession, businesses often hire personal organizers to deal with the results of layoffs. Businesses have fewer people doing more work and that makes organization even more critical, McCorry said.

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Diane Campion, left, owner of Organize This!, developed a new filing system and six-month flow-chart for client Penny Perkins, owner of AlphaOmega Media Services. Perkins said Campion's advice helped her get a handle on the requirements of concurrently working on several long-term projects.