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Simple steps can organize home office



By Sarah Bradshaw
Poughkeepsie Journal

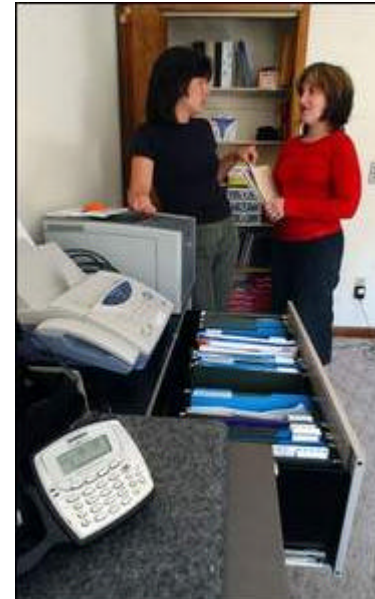
Improving your home office could be as simple a task as replacing that old, uncomfortable chair or it could be as complex as thumbing through shoe box after shoe box of old receipts.

However simple or complex, this is the week to tackle those home office projects, in celebration of "Improve Your Home Office Week." Lisa Kanarek, founder of HomeOfficeLife.com, created and registered the Oct. 9-13 observance with Chase's Calendar of Events.

Ellen Kutner, owner of Simply Organized and member of the National Association of Professional Organizers, said improvements can be done in five steps.

- First, weed out things that don't pertain to office work. Kutner suggested limiting unwanted junk mail by contacting the Direct Marketing Association and opting out of unsolicited credit card offers. She said to dispose of old electronics properly, by contacting the Dutchess County Resource Recovery Agency.
- Second, categorize office items into groups such as supplies, computer software, reference section, etc.
- Third, define how the office space will be arranged, and remember the layout needs to be functional and comfortable.
- Fourth, organize. Label folders so papers can easily be retrieved, organize reference books on shelves, label office supply closet, etc.

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Kathy McLaughlin/Poughkeepsie Journal

Ellen Kutner, left, talks with Robin Farley about organizing the home office Robin shares with her husband in their home in Fishkill Plains on Monday.

Steps to declutter

- Use a planner to manage your time better, including to schedule time to get organized.

- Fifth, maintain organization by dealing with mail daily, organizing bills chronologically and keeping daily to-do lists.

Kutner has been working with Robin Farley, a physical therapist at Saint Francis Hospital, who shares her home office with her husband, Tim.

Before hiring Kutner, Robin said she'd have to plow through piles of paperwork, books, greeting cards, letters, etc., in order to reach her desk. She'd get frustrated when she'd go looking for items that were related to her work, but were scattered in rooms around her Fishkill Plains home. She also had a problem parting with things.

After working with Kutner, Robin said there is not one paper on the floor, she feels more productive and that can help her achieve her main goal — starting a home care practice.

"I felt stuck before but now I can move on to the next goal," she said.

According to the National Association of Professional Organizers' Web site, benefits of organization include increased productivity and energy, meeting important deadlines, finding things faster, reducing clutter and stress, saving time and money, increased pride and discovery of peaceful environments.

Stephanie Padovani, of Poughkeepsie's The DJ Solution, said she works better in neat environments.

"It creates a cluttered thought process when you have lots of stuff around," she said.

Barry Izsak, president of the organizers' association, said the latest work-from-home trend is people have to do more with less time. As a result, they need to be more organized.

He suggested a few tips to improve your home office.

Keep your desk clear. Make sure you have space for your computer and a space to do written work.

Store things you use most frequently closer to you.

Create a system for action files — people you have to call, appointments you have to make, etc. These are the "ABC projects" that you will finish first, Izsak said.

Aesthetics are important

Shannon Leddy, a Hopewell Junction interior designer, said home office organization and design go hand and hand.

She suggested keeping the office comfortable with warm lighting and soothing, light earthy colors.

- Tame your desk by keeping only essential supplies out.

- Remove any items in your home office that don't belong there.

- Eliminate junk and unsolicited mail.

- Categorize items by similarities.

- Create office zones (e.g., a place for supplies, for reference books, etc.)

- Define how a space will be arranged. The layout should be comfortable and functional.

- Label files logically, so they are easily read.

- Paint your office walls light, earthy tones.

- Buy an office chair that is comfortable and adjustable.

- Choose a desk with adequate work space.

Sources: www.napo.net, www.simplyorg.com and Shannon Leddy.

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"A home office is an opportunity to have control over these things," she said.

Farley's office walls are white and bare. That's because she wants to figure out what shelves she needs to hang. Then she will worry about decoration.

"Functionality first," said Kutner, who celebrates her third year in business this month.

And Farley added:

"I'm very into how things look. But I know if they aren't functional, I don't put things back, and the look doesn't stay."

Sarah Bradshaw can be reached at sbradshaw@poughkeepsiejournal.com

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