

Ever been on a diet? Most people have. Too often, dieters go back to their old eating habits, regardless of whether they lost weight. If you're familiar with the cycle, you know that "going on a diet" is very different from "eating right for life."

DITCH THE DIET

HOW TRUE PRODUCTIVITY IS LIKE EATING RIGHT FOR LIFE
By Leslie Shreve

Here, Business Owners Get Relief From The 2 a.m. Jitters



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Many people start a diet after Jan. 1, but it can fade away by February or March. Conversely, eating right for life is a long-term commitment. If you decide to make changes, you choose to commit and you choose to succeed. Then you're on the road to a healthier lifestyle for the long term. It takes planning and decision making and action to succeed. Your habits and routines must change along with what's available in your house to eat.

Many CEOs take the time to clean up their office periodically, maybe on a Saturday here and there. Some say that they've gotten organized in the past, but it didn't stay that way. Well, they may have tried to put their office on a "diet" – and unfortunately it doesn't stick because the basic foundation of their office and their workday has not changed. There are bigger issues here to recognize and address, and no amount of "cleaning up" will solve it permanently.

FEEDING THE FRENZY

Interestingly enough, many "dieting" CEOs report that their clients and colleagues consider them very organized. Take Sally, for example. Sally owns a bookkeeping business. She works out

of her home in a nice office that's set up very well. It's not crowded or dark or forced into a room in the home that really isn't right for an office. It looks great. The problem is that Sally's productivity is not as good as it could be. It's not as good as she wants it to be. It could be great, but there are several things missing.

First, there's a lot of stuff on her desk. Things, both business and personal, plus papers, files and office supplies outline her desk. She has clear workspace, but what is around her is closing her in.

Second, there is a considerable number of files, both hanging and manila, but there is no regular, categorical system in place, so it's not incredibly easy to find and file things readily. Plus there are piles of paper, catalogs and files with no rhyme or reason in a credenza behind her.

Third, she has over 700 e-mails in her inbox (which is by far not the most I've seen in an inbox), over 5,000 in her sent mail folder and over 650 in her deleted items folder. She needed to reorganize her system of e-folders in her computer so she could find and file documents in three seconds or less electronically.

Fourth, Sally did not have a solid task management system working for her. She reported that she was consistently overwhelmed with things to do and had difficulty prioritizing tasks. In addition, Sally said she had trouble managing time and interruptions.

HUNGRY FOR ORGANIZATION

Does any of this sound familiar?

All the things that Sally is unhappy about lead her to say that she's tired of putting out fires, experiencing lost opportunities, not feeling productive after working 15 hours a day, having great ideas and not being able to implement them and not being able to take her business to the next level.

She also stated that disorganization and her arrested levels of productivity made her feel stressed, scattered, unmotivated and angry.

Any office "diets" that Sally may have tried before lacked an overhaul of her systems, lacked major changes in her routines and left her with negative, unproductive feelings. The diet only dealt with what the office may have looked like, but not how it operated. There's a big difference.

Sally worked to put together a new file system that encompassed everything that she needed to reference in the future that was useful to her. This included client files, plus all other file categories like administration, HR, advertising and marketing and so on. Then having addressed all the files and the paper around her office that go in these folders, she finally made it to her desk surface. Most of what she had on the desk didn't need to be there and she took the initiative to clear it off.

Once the physical space was clear and ready for more focus, she focused on her task management. This led to her Outlook where she set up a brand new list that encompassed everything she was responsible for and more. She drew from her pads of paper, paper lists, post-it notes, voice mail, snail mail, her memory, and papers and files that represented things to do.

After the system was built and she had practiced using it a little, she incorporated tasks derived from e-mail. There are so many places from which to gather tasks, it's essential to look everywhere, touch everything and find them all: all you need to do, have to do, want to do and dream of doing. It all needs to be captured in one trusted system if you are going to be driving

your own success. Leave no stone unturned.

She also addressed her computer file system. This needed categories too, just like her paper file system. She took the time necessary to organize all of her computer documents and folders so that she could quickly find and file anything. When she went to the inbox afterward, she was able to save things like e-mail and attachments to the computer, knowing where everything belonged and knowing that nothing would be lost.

If you talked to Sally today, you'd say she was a different person. Today, she does not take client appointments on Mondays and Fridays, and in the summer, she takes Mondays off. She uses Fridays as an office day so that she no longer has to work on weekends. She gets about 75 to 80 e-mails a day, but she empties her inbox twice a day and processes the information that not only comes from the inbox, but other sources as well.

Keep in mind, this does not mean that she does every task derived from all these sources every day. What this means is that she's reviewed it and has decided where it will go next. She accomplishes certain tasks on her list and plans the rest. Nothing slips through the cracks and she is well aware of everything she needs to do. The bonus for her is that she not only gets to decide what she wants to do, but she can also choose what not to do. Sally is better able to prioritize because it's all right in front of her on a list. She doesn't have to scan her desk every morning to remember what she was doing yesterday or try to rethink what she had planned to do today.

I had lunch with Sally recently and she reported feeling relaxed, more in control and much more productive. Plus, her family is happier too, now that she can spend more time with them and can enjoy some down time for herself. She enjoys new hobbies, travels more and she has even lost weight because exercise is now part of her week. On the work front, Sally has decreased her staff and cut back overhead. Her client billing is up 40 percent over last year and she is working half the hours that she used to. The diet is over. Sally is eating right for life, and her productivity and peace of mind have soared.

Leslie Shreve is productivity consultant and CEO of Focus Consulting, LLC. www.productiveday.com.

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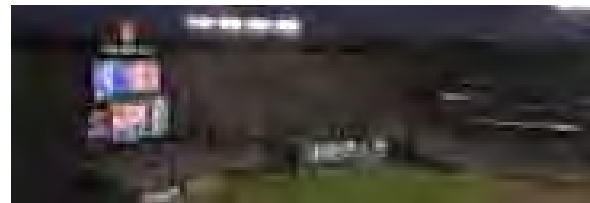
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