

October, 2009 Organize for Business and Life Copyright © 2009 M. Colleen Klimczak

We can all learn something from these Business-related Strategies:

Manage your Email:

I have been out of town tending to family business in another state for 3 days. I had over 100 emails waiting for me, just the business related ones. If you work in an actual office, that number could be far larger.

I took a tele-seminar over the summer on Managing Your Email. The class was intended for Professional Organizers, to offer suggestions that we could then pass on to our clients, but I learned a lot that could be applied to my own email practices, too.

I have un-subscribed from all newsletters that just don't work for me. I used to leave these e-newsletters in my in-box until I found time to read them, but they were never compelling enough for me to choose to read instead of doing something else. So they're gone.

I turn off my email when I don't want to be interrupted. They can wait, really, at least a few hours. And I don't check my emails first thing in the morning, either. I wait until I'm ready to answer them before opening up. That leads me to....

Use Boundaries in your Correspondence:

I talk about boundaries all the time, because they are essential to organizing. Here is a new spin, though: Set and respect your own boundaries, then set the tone for your correspondence.

For example, Perhaps you don't want to take work related calls on the weekends.

If you don't want people to bother you with business issues on the weekend, don't answer their calls or emails on the weekend (unless it is a company policy). I found myself answering emails one Saturday morning at 7 am, and someone called me at 7 am because they saw I was up, and therefore available.

If I don't receive business related calls between 8 pm and 8 am, I don't make calls between those hours, either. Voice Mails are great, and I will answer what is urgent, but that time is personal time.

I now save my business related emails to send on Monday morning, during normal business hours.

Nurturing Relationships is critical to success, in business and in life.

Recently, I studied my advertising practices and results, of how clients have found me over my six years in business. I have paid for advertising, but truly, word of mouth, repeat business and networking are the three best ways people have found me. I know some really great people, and you are probably one of them.

I also find that when my own thoughts are in a whirl, if I focus outwardly, on the needs of my clients or friends or family, my own needs don't seem so huge. The more I consider the needs of others, the better things go.

I never know where the connections made today, or a kindness done today, will take me tomorrow, so we need to be kind and nurture our interpersonal relationships at all times.

This idea inspired the new [Business Directory Page](#) on my website, to help spread the word about excellent professional relationships I have encountered.

In my business relationships, I am the more organized one (this may be specific to Professional Organizers, but other professionals can learn from this, too). I need to be the one to follow up, to guide the process. And when I start thinking about how to consistently treat people with the highest regard, that leads me to

Standard Operating Procedures: Providing a consistently excellent experience.

Most large corporations and organizations have Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

- SOPs are step-by-step descriptions of regular responsibilities. They are not the list of responsibilities, they are specific steps of a task.
- SOPs are created through repetition, consideration and study, defining the one best way to do a task for the best (either most efficient or most effective) results, and doing that task only that best way.
- Remember the scene in Forest Gump when he assembles and disassembles his firearm with great speed? In the army, there is one and only one best way to do it, and Forest learned that process well.
- For a more professional application of the idea, read the E-Myth Revisited by Michael E. Gerber. This gives excellent examples of SOPs in companies we all recognize, and how to set up your own. The example used that comes to mind is McDonalds. You can order a Big Mac anywhere in the US, and it will taste the same as every other Big Mac. McDonald's recognizes and embraces the idea of using the one best way to do something, over and over.

There are many benefits to establishing SOPs at work and in life.

- SOPs help us focus on the task at hand. Think about how much time would be wasted if you had to figure out new every day how to complete a regular task. I back up my computer every month (I should do it every week), and until I wrote down the specific steps, the task seemed so overwhelming. Write it down, mystery solved!
- SOPs give us a chance to look at how and why we do things, and discover how to do them better. SOPs can change, too, as we and our lives evolve, but they are an excellent reference to how we should do things.
- SOPs offer flexibility, expendability and enable others to work for me. One of the challenges of being an independent entrepreneur is that if I am not working for my business, no one is working for my business. The days of paid vacation leave are behind me now. So, SOPs make it possible for someone else to do my work for me. If I ever needed someone to step in and take over my client calls and billing, set up my appointments, take care of my office tasks, etc, I could.
- SOPs for business are an excellent idea, but we can also create SOPs for our personal life, too.
 - I needed to go out of town to take care of some family business, and I thoroughly documented the necessary steps to get the kids out the door in a timely manner, pick up everyone in the carpool and get them where they needed to go, after-school activities, etc.. Any other day, these are solely my responsibilities, so I had to share the process.
 - In different areas around the house, I have preprinted grocery lists, daily menus and packing lists, all which can be considered SOPs. My sons and I sit down every August and create our Daily Routine, our list of what tasks need done every day and when we plan to do those tasks.

I hope you can learn something new from this, and apply it to your professional and personal life!
Have a great month!

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