



“Turning Possibilities into Realities”

2010 “TOGETHER, READY FOR THE FUTURE”...

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Stephanie Winston's

THE ORGANISED EXECUTIVE

How to accomplish more in less time

Welcome issue, volume 1, Number 1 of 1997



**Spaghetti Junction
The Facilitator**

A Right Delayed is a Right Denied

Martin Luther King, JR

Getting Organised

Stephanie Winston's The Organised Executive

America's foremost authority on organisation and personal productivity, Stephanie Winston teaches overburdened business people how to make their work more productive and lives more rewarding. Her two popular books, **Getting Organised** and **The Organised Executive** have sold more than a million copies combined. She has appeared on *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *CBS This Morning*, *CNN* and *CNNfn* and numerous local radio and TV shows around the country. She's been quoted in such publications as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Fortune* and many others. Equipped with an insider's knowledge of the corporate world, she brings her expertise to you each month in her newsletter.

Taming the Paper Tiger

Don't let yourself get buried in paper's relentless onslaught. Here's my simple system for managing your paperwork.

Many years ago, I had a client who was an Executive Vice President of a major airline. He called me because he was literally losing control of his staff. He didn't know what they were doing, how they were doing it and when deadlines were passed. Projects were always late, tempers were flaring, and he was getting in trouble with his superiors. In short, his life was spinning out of control.

The culprit: Paper.

Paperwork presents a problem for almost everyone because it's ubiquitous, and its onslaught is relentless.

At the same moment that you are working feverishly to rid yourself of a particularly nasty paper pile-up, the mailman is marching up your steps with additional contributions. So is the newspaper delivery person. And throughout the day, the fax machine spits out yet more missives (and now emails).

In addition to its ubiquity and relentlessness, paperwork presents unique challenges. These are the most common:

Challenge #1: Handling paper effectively requires making many micro decisions. Most pieces of paper can fall into multiple categories, thereby prompting any of a number of possible decisions. **Result? An exasperating state of indecision as you ponder, "how shall I categorize this?" or "where should I keep this for easy future retrieval?"**

Then, of course, there is the most exasperating question of all, "should I keep this at all?" For those and other questions, the decision usually ends up being, "I'll leave it here for now." "Here," of course, is a pile that's already too high. "For now" is another way of saying forever.

The Organised Executive TRAFs everything!

There are only four possible choices to be made with any single piece of paper. You either:

Toss it...

Refer it

Act on it, or...

File it!

It really IS that simple.

The challenge is to develop decision-making guidelines that allow you to effectively and immediately direct every piece the moment it comes over your desk.

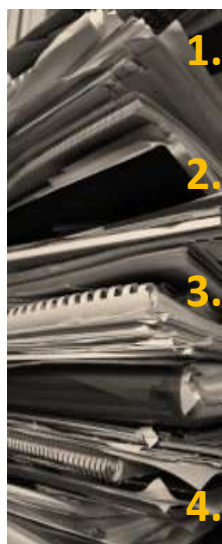
Challenge #2: Paperwork frequently requires future actions; sometimes it requires multiple future actions.

Making an appointment to meet a prospective vendor is an example of a single future action. If approving a contract with the new vendor demands consultation with someone else in the organisation, at least two future actions (and possibly more) will be required.

The challenge is to channel papers requiring future actions out of a general pile toward an appropriate "action" file.

Challenge #3: Some paperwork just leaves us plain undecided about what to do with it. Very irritating!

The good news is that paperwork challenges can be met. I've devised a system for processing the paper flow that works. The system is based on the reality that **there are only four possible choices** to be made with any single piece of paper that comes your way. The choices are:



1. Toss it...

2. Refer it

3. Act on it,

or...

4. File it!

I call this the TRAF (Toss; Refer; Act; File) system. It requires no prior set-up. You can begin TRAFing as soon as you put down this newsletter.

Start with today's mail. **(when I use the word "mail," by the way, I'm including every piece of paper that comes your way: the flow into you inbox, faxes, phone messages, interoffice and regular.)** Only two tools are required: a waste basket and file folders.

Pick up the first piece of incoming mail and make a decision about that piece of paper right now. Let's review the choices:

Choice #1: Toss it? Get into the habit of tossing anything that:

- Can be easily replaced if it's needed again. (it is almost never needed again.)
- Is of marginal interest or value (e.g., notice of meetings you don't plan to attend, advertising flyers from possible new vendors whom you might, but probably won't, call).
- Is just an FYI (e.g., courtesy summary of a department meeting that isn't even your department or a notice of a colleague's promotion).

Work next to a waste basket. Many emails, flyers, faxes, and circulars can be tossed immediately, sometimes unopened.

One client told me that she once measured all the mail that went directly from her mailbox

to the waste basket. Total height: over three inches.

"In the old days. I used to let all that junk stack up on my desk," she said. But not anymore. **I'm a born-again TRAFer, who treats her wastebasket with reverence.**"

If the paper can't be tossed, then consider:

Choice #2: Refer it? If it relates to somebody else's job, interest or responsibility, the paper is referable. Examples: a complaint letter can go to your secretary or the manager of the appropriate department; information on a new office data system goes to your computer consultant; a marketing subscription goes to the marketing manager, etc.

But if a matter is referable to someone else as well as being something requiring attention or follow-up, use referral folders.

You will require one folder per reporting staff member (or freelance contractor if you're self employed) and a folder for your secretary, your boss and colleagues or clients with whom you consult regularly.

For most people, this end up being anywhere from three to seven folders.

When you have something to discuss with one of those individuals, simply drop it into or her folder. Later that day or

week, find your colleague – “Jane, there are a few items I’d like to go over with you” – and voila! Your agenda is at the ready – the items in your referral folder.

If you care to follow up on any materials you hand off to Jane, this is easily done. Keep a little pack of yellow stickies in each referral folder. Then write on a sticky, for example, for example, “inquiry letter to Jane. 9/15 – she said she’d get back to me next week.” Leave that note in the referral folder, then check in with Jane again next week.

The great advantage of this system is that **no remembering** is involved – except remembering to work through your referral folders with the appropriate parties maybe once or twice a week, whether in a scheduled meeting or on the fly.

You should also set up referral folders for any recurring event, such as a weekly staff meeting or conference call, monthly professional association meeting, quarterly board meeting, whatever.

Thereafter, anything coming across your desk relating to that recurring event goes into the appropriate folder. Instead of scurrying to set up an agenda or, worse, omitting an important item for discussion, a **folder review will give you all you need.**

Incidentally, referral folders work at home, too. Use stand-up files with a folder for every member of the family. You might want to have a folder for bills, soccer practice schedules, or birthday reminders. Everybody can drop notes, mail or referable matter in the appropriate files.

Don’t sweat the small stuff – referral folders will keep track of all the details so you can concentrate on bigger issues and make your time more productive.

Choice #3: Action! Anything that requires you TO DO something goes into an action file. Items such as:

- Creating the first draft on the marketing plan for the new software introduction.
- Writing the letter you agreed to write soliciting funds for your favourite animal rescue charity (you know, the one you’ve been putting off for weeks).
- Reviewing the departmental promotion budget.
- Sending thank-you notes to two colleagues who referred new business to you.

If you didn’t toss it, refer it or place it in a file for immediate action, there is only one thing left to do with a particular piece of paper.

If a piece of paper is important, but you don’t know how to categorise it for TRAFing purposes, **drop it into the Action file.** Later on you will take the action of making a decision about.

Choice #4: File it. Many people keep papers on desks, tables chairs, window seats – anywhere there is a surface – because they are afraid that once filed, it won’t be possible to find the item again.

Of course, the steady accumulation of paper will transform a desk office into a paper cage – and the item is rarely traceable again anyway.

If a piece of paper can’t be tossed, referred or acted upon and must be kept, then:

- If you have a workable filing system in place, file it where it belongs.
- If you do not have a workable filing system, drop the item in a “To Be Filed” folder.

In a future issue, I’ll show you how to create a workable filing system for yourself. Meanwhile, follow these fundamental guidelines and TRAF every single piece of paper that comes your way.

You will soon have your paperwork under control. I promise!

General Overview of Services in the Seychelles Islands today...

For the past two years or so i.e. since the introduction of the Economic Reform Programme, which continues to necessitate, downsizing, layoff, resignations, retirements, organisational restructuring and the like, many of us, the Executives, who had the luxury of delegating to a relatively capable workforce are now faced with the dilemma of providing services to the Community, in an orderly and speedy fashion.

And now with limited capacity, knowledge and knowhow, this prevailing “overload” and “the resulting relentless indecision,” on the part of some of us, The Executives, in key sectors is being exacerbated by the bombardment of new information, requests, proposals, projects and activities, all needing our immediate undivided attention for **growth**.

Indeed today no one can disagree that in general, the provision of services in its various shapes or forms is unfortunately on a **continual downward trend**, in causing much frustration, despair, confusion, anger, loss of interest in taking meaningful initiatives and not the least, resulting into a **great lack of trust** in US, The Executives, by the Community at large... our customers, our employers, needing our assistance and our support, in the pursuit of their meaningful endeavours to try and make ends meet, for the betterment of

their livelihood and that of their children – our future.

This prevailing **gridlock** is growing day by day, and minute by minute, whereby the time for us, the Executives, to set the example in reversing this **trend** is imperative and necessary, **for if we do not, no one else in our organisation will, growth will suffer**, while **discontentment** will continue to rise. In so doing let us all remember that we are not merely, the Executives, but the role **models** for our institutions, our people and our children whereby our behaviour, the quality of our work and our attitude towards it, **must always be beyond reproach**.

In good faith, therefore, we do hope that this Newsletter by a highly respected expert of the United States of America (USA) in the field, who collects US\$ 1,500 per day for **her advice**, can be useful in enabling us, the Executives, to accomplish **more in less time**, for the benefit of all, in particular **the less fortunate and the most vulnerable** of our society.

Simply put “**services delayed**” is more often than not perceived as “**services denied**”.

Thus let us all resolve to appropriately **facilitate** this particular **process** for a brighter future for all.

BOTTOM LINE

Stephanie Winston

Organisation – or the lack of it – is not a moral issue. It is not a reflection of your character. You could be Attila the Hun and fabulously organised. You could be Mother Teresa and terribly disorganised. Just because somebody is organised doesn't make him **any more honest, good, right or just anybody else**.

Organisation is not the same as being perfect. We are not striving to have our desks perfectly arranged each morning with sharpened pencils and folders lined up at perpendicular angles. If you have that kind of perfectionist image of “office organisation heaven” in your mind, erase it right now! That's not what organisation is, and I, for one, believe that kind of perfectionist thinking can be paralyzing.

The fact of the matter is anyone – ANYONE – can become better organised. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be neat, you don't have to be Mother Teresa. You just must be willing to adopt some new habits.