

# Getting Organized

By Dave Ashman

There are many activities that fill up our days. Most actions are predetermined by individual responsibilities, the balance by the organization's needs and our opportunities to make the most of short periods of time. Management experts tell us the secret to staying on top of all the details is in our ability to make simple decisions. It doesn't matter if you ride the mower or run the entire program, you have to get the paper work done.

### Make a Decision!

There are many individuals who tour the country and share their

back at you and ask you the same question over and over, "What do I do with this?"

Keep it simple is the best advice time-management experts will tell you. Most of the systems they advocate are based on making a decision once and moving on to the next issue. I was recently given an article outlining the best and simplest four-step process I have encountered to date. An organization expert developed the system over many years. The way the system works is each time you pull any item from your in-box, ask yourself four questions:

1. Do I throw it away?
2. Do I give it to the right person?
3. Do I act on this myself?
4. Do I file it away?

This is probably the most direct method for managing the flow of paper work through our hands. Just put a trash can close to where you work, and you are ready to start this system.

The first question

forces you to consider if the item is important to what you do and if you can find the same information through another source. If you don't want it or if you can find it somewhere else, get rid of it. An example would be courtesy notices about events or meetings you would not or cannot attend.

The second question asks you if someone else should be handling the item. If it requires the attention of another person or another office, pass

it along. You could make separate folders for the different areas to which you refer items and keep them organized until you can deliver them. An example would be invoices that are processed in another area or memos that require action from another person or department.

The third question asks you if you need to deal with this issue directly. If you must take some action on an issue, it is better to just do it right then and there. Do not put it off, even if you do not have the time to finish the process, at least start it and see what happens. You will be amazed at how fast the tasks fall off your "to do list" if you follow the simple rule: *Do it now!* An example of this is sending a thank-you note or returning a phone call. You may not be able to deal with each item completely in one shot. You must have a plan to follow up on items without going back to ground zero each time. Keep an action file or "hot tray" on the desk and keep items you must act on in this system. Be sensitive to deadlines and keep plugging away.

The fourth question asks if you should keep the information and where you should keep it. This is where most operations people get into trouble. Get it off the desk and put it away is the best solution. Don't create piles all over your office. Get rid of it. Create a library for catalogs and cut sheets. Create a file system where you can find what you want when you want it. It doesn't have to be a complex, multi-structured matrix of sites and projects files. Keep it simple and make a decision. □

If you have a story or anecdote you would like to share, call (562) 425-2449 or write it down (include your name and phone number) and mail it to Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Road, Long Beach, CA 90808.



secrets about how to get control of your time and improve your productivity. Each of these individuals will tell you that you must be able to make decisions for their system to work. Most of us do not have trouble making the big decisions. It is decision making on the smaller issues that will rob you of valuable time and bury you in a sea of paper work. By not making a decision, those little things keep coming