Data Dump – An Organizational Skill

We can realistically accomplish only so many things in a given amount of time. When we attempt to do everything at once, we feel overloaded. Sometimes we feel so overwhelmed that we do the easy things just to get something done, and we never quite accomplish the most important things. Or we never even get started. We end up putting out fires and feel like we are living in crises, racing to keep up. We need to change how we work. We need to work smarter instead of harder. We need to be proactive, choosing and doing right now what we know is the most important task for us to tackle and complete.

Success is the result of consistently taking action. We make progress by taking baby steps, by completing a few tasks every day. At the end of the week, we will have accomplished far more than if we expect ourselves to do so much at one time that we get paralyzed.

Purpose

- ► To get the thoughts, ideas, tasks, appointments, assignments, etc. out of your head and organized on paper and/or computer
- ► To break bigger tasks and projects into smaller pieces; ones you can complete in one "sitting"

Reason

- ► To increase productivity
- ► To decrease wasted time, missed, or forgotten tasks and missed appointments
- ► To leave your mind free to be creative, to work on as well as in your business, to do critical thinking, to reflect, to hang out to do whatever you want

Instructions For the Data Dump

- ► Sticky Notes—lots of them in the smallest size you feel comfortable using (you can even cut the smallest ones in half)
- ► Several sheets of blank paper that fit in your organizer
- ► Time and Space—plan to spend at least 30 minutes doing this, even if you take several sessions to accomplish the task
- ► Willingness to invest the time and trust in the process

Step 2: Data Dump

- ► Write down, as quickly as you can, every task that has run across your mind lately; a "task" can mean a thought, idea, phone call, errand, assignment, meeting, etc.
- ► Write one task per sticky note; you will get maximum results if you break bigger, more complicated tasks into the smallest tasks, ones you can complete in one work session
- ► This is a brainstorming session, so write down every task you can think of; write down everything, every little detail
- ► Write down tasks related to short-term and long-term goals; include tasks from your personal and professional lives
- ► In the future, create new sticky notes for any task that comes to mind; then either immediately place them on the "To Do" list for a specific day or put them on the master page for the appropriate Goal, Objective, or Project (GOP)

Step 3: Sort by Goal, Objective, or Project (GOP)

► Using the pages that fit in your organizer, write the name of one goal, objective, or project that your tasks relate to on the top of each page

► Move each task to its appropriate page

Step 4: Create a Timeline

► For each GOP, create a timeline of tasks by putting them in order based on how soon you need to do them; prioritize based on urgency and importance

► Start in the upper left hand corner of the page, and arrange the sequence of tasks; you may choose to arrange the tasks vertically or horizontally

► If you are not sure of the exact sequence for a particular task, just guess or place the sticky note to the side of the page. Trust that if you know something has to be done, you will eventually know when it needs to be done, even if you don't know when at this time. As you work through the list, today, and in the future, you will be adding tasks to the list and you will be changing the order in which the items need to be done (that's why you are working with sticky notes; you won't have to rewrite the list each time you make changes)

Step 5: Choosing Priority Tasks

► Go through each GOP and choose the tasks you will be doing in the next 7-14 days; this may include only the top 1-3 items from a GOP list or none at all; choose only the tasks you are confident you must and will do within two weeks.

► Move those tasks to a temporary location—a tabletop, desk, wall or whiteboard—anywhere you can place many of the stick notes and rearrange them without running out of room

► Leave all other tasks on their GOP pages and put those pages in your organizer (the Projects section is a good place)

Step 6: Creating An Immediate Timeline

► One the temporary work surface, create a timeline for these priority items; start with the tasks you will do first

► Start in the upper left hand corner and work in rows or columns; move the tasks around until they make sense to you

Step 7: Scheduling Tasks

► Take the tasks you are going to complete in the next two weeks and place them on specific days in your organizer

► If you run out of time before you place all the priority tasks, either create a Pending Priority Page to put at the front of your Projects section, or put them back onto their GOP pages for safe storage and future use

Step 8: Review and Evaluation

► Whenever you think of a new task, make a new sticky note and place it on the appropriate page

► On a regular basis, review your progress; do this each week, either on a Friday or Sunday afternoon, or whenever you plan your upcoming week

► Whenever you review your progress, you will actually be going through this entire process again — the good news is you will probably only have a few items to add to your lists; you will find you become more realistic about what you can accomplish each day, and therefore get more done with less effort and greater ease and satisfaction