

DEALING WITH PAPER

More than almost anything else today, paper is a principal source of clutter in our lives. Here are some hints for dealing with the flow of paper in your life to help make sure that you can find and use the essential and unburden yourself from the rest.

What Should I Keep?

- **Some papers you must keep for legal reasons.** Place these in safe storage. Consult your accountant, lawyer, or office manager for guidance on what you absolutely must keep.
- **Record the information, toss the paper.** Once you have recorded the date of a concert or a customer's contact information, there is little reason to keep the flyer or business card.
- **Keep "core information."** These are the materials that you actually use on a daily or weekly basis—phone lists, directories, or handbooks. These are not clutter: these are your tools.

Ask yourself these questions to decide what paperwork to keep:

- Would my life/work change if I didn't have this piece of paper?
- Will this help me complete a project I am working on right now?
- Do I refer to this paper on a regular basis?
- Do I have time to do anything with this paper?
- Are there tax or legal reasons to save this?
- Does this paper tie in with the core activities of my business?
- Does this paper represent a viable business opportunity?

What Should I Purge?

Abide by the old adage, "Out with the old, in with the new." Purging these old items will allow you more time to deal with the present:

- Product solicitations for things you aren't ready to buy
- Old magazines, books, and articles you haven't referred to in the last twelve months
- Outdated research materials, literature or schedules
- Duplicates of documents, previous drafts of letters and proposals
- Old receipts, bank statements, auto records (unless needed for tax purposes, or less than seven years old)
- Junk mail and old newspapers
- Old greeting cards (unless they contain a very special message)
- Old receipts; expired insurance policies
- Invitations to past events
- Expired warranties and service contracts; instructions for items no longer owned
- Investment and banking brochures you've never read
- Business cards from people whose names you don't recognize
- Road maps you haven't referred to in ten years
- Solicitations from charities you don't intend to give to