Conquering the Information Deluge -- Handling Faxes and Snail Mail

By Joy-Ellen Lipsky, **Success with Joy!**

In this article we'll take a look at some time saving ideas for handling fax messages and your regular mail. Fax usage can take two forms: the old fashioned "feed the paper through the fax machine," or sent via fax software on a PC. In either case there are some simple rules to follow to get the best results.

Handling Faxes

If you are sending confidential information, call the recipient prior to sending so they can pick up the fax immediately.

Always double check your fax has actually been received by the other party. Sometimes fax machines go into a waiting loop and the fax is never sent. Take a look at the printed record of the Send to ensure all the pages sent are accounted for.

Include a cover sheet for your fax with:
- Your contact information -- name, phone, fax, email
- Name of the person you are faxing
- Number of pages, including the cover sheet
- The subject of the fax
- A confidentiality statement
- Type of action you wish the receiver to take

Faxes should be short. Don't fax a ream of paper, unless it is "virtual," using fax software. Otherwise, the chances of problems increase and the receiver's fax will be tied up with printing a large document. Try overnight service for these large documents.

Handling Snail Mail

- Sort your mail over a recycling bin. Dump your junk mail directly into the bin -- don't waste your time opening it. You can usually tell the junk mail from the envelope.

- Use the Direct Marketing Association (http://www.the-dma.org/) and go to the Consumer Assistance page. Mail in the completed form to the Mail Preference folks.

- If all that is required is a simple response, write it on the original and send it back.

- For your bills: put the bills into a folder system or rack that has 31 slots. Put the bill into the slot for the day in which you need to pay and mail the bill in order to get it in on time. Better yet, sign yourself up for automatic bill payment, or do it through the web.

- Be careful with subscription renewals, as sometimes they will send you a renewal when you have already paid, or the renewal is months ahead of when you need to pay. Keep track of when your subscriptions need to be renewed and ask the parent company not to send you renewals until the actual renewal month (I used to get renewal requests all year long for a particular subscription, until I phoned and asked them to cease).
- Follow the 4 D's of processing mail
  - **Do it** -- does it need a response? Is it a bill? If the effort to handle it is short, then do it, otherwise create a task to deal with it
  - **Delegate it** -- if the information or task belongs to someone else. Route it to them with a short note
  - **Delete it** -- nothing relevant to you or others. Toss it into the recycle bin
  - **Drop it** -- into a read file for magazines and newsletters or a file folder for correspondence, if it will be needed at a later date. Don't just file everything. Most documents that are filed are NEVER looked at again. Keep your file drawers clean -- don't add extra paper just in case. Try scanning docs and storing them online instead.
- Use good filing techniques
- Get yourself a book on organizing and follow the suggestions

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