

Sure, I'm Organized—I Can Do Ten Things at Once!

“When you are disorganized, you are always in a rush, always scrambling to meet a deadline, and in danger of missing deadlines,” says productivity specialist Denise Landers. “You are stressed and you don’t sleep well. And when you miss getting a good night’s sleep, your IQ can drop 10 points the next day. It’s not surprising that lack of organization can keep a graduate or professional student from achieving educational and professional goals.”

As owner of Key Organization Systems, Inc. and the author of “Destination: Organization,” Landers helps people and companies create systems for handling their business and personal lives more successfully.

Multitasking—A Myth

Many students as well as working professionals believe that the ability to do several things at once means they are organized, Landers notes. “The myth of multitasking is that it makes us more productive. In fact, the opposite is true. We are not geared to multitask. Doing several things at once can physically damage our short term memory, and can cause even 20-year-olds to have ‘senior moments’ of forgetfulness.”

Finding Time

One of the most common excuses Landers hears is “I don’t have *time* to get organized!” That’s the worst excuse of all, she says. “I use the story of a boy on the way to school, pushing his bike. When he’s asked why he doesn’t just get on the bike, he replies that he doesn’t have time to stop and get on.”

“The average person wastes up to two hours a day due to disorganization,” Landers notes. “We lose time when we can’t find things, when we don’t plan, and when we get interrupted. People don’t realize that it takes 20 minutes to get back on track after an interruption. Being better organized can help us regain control of a frantic, stressful life.”

Making good use of even small intervals of time can create big improvements.

“One of the things I wish I’d known during college and graduate school was how to break down my studying into manageable chunks of time,” says Kenneth Ziegler, productivity and effectiveness expert and author of “Organizing for Success.”

“I pulled a lot of all-nighters,” Ziegler admits. “I was the Olympic champion of procrastination. Knowing what I know now—that it takes one and a half times as long to study at night as it does in the morning, and that 80 percent of productivity gains happen before noon—I’d have done a lot more studying earlier in the day, and made use of the time in between classes to study.”

The Veggie Principle

Ziegler has developed the “Veggie Principle,” a technique for focusing first on the tasks that matter most.

“A veggie is a task, activity, or project that’s good for you, your school success, your career or your personal life, but you have a hard time doing it first,” says Ziegler. “Most of us can relate to the behavior of a child who puts off eating the vegetables on their dinner plate until they’re cold and unappetizing. We do the same thing when we put off difficult but important tasks.”

“To apply the Veggie Principle, make it a point to tackle first thing in the day the action items that directly impact your highest goals and priorities. For students, that might mean an hour of studying before a morning class, or before work. It can be a real psychological boost. Motivate yourself with the fact that you can dramatically decrease the amount of studying you’ll have to do at night, when you are least able to concentrate. It’s a strategy that will save you time, build self-confidence and improve your end results.”

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