

A fresh start through spring cleaning

Want to give your workplace a fresh boost of energy? Consider devoting time this March to spring cleaning. Benefits your company stands to gain by the spruce-up:

- Additional space from getting rid of unnecessary items
- Improved focus by removing clutter and distractions
- Saved time because things are organized and easier to find
- Increased morale from a more appealing environment
- Better health from decreased circulation of germs and allergens.

Unsure how to start? Block off a few hours on everyone's calendar to tackle the following areas. (*Tip: Let them dress super casually and order pizza.*)

Individual workstations

Before embarking, set out cleaning supplies and arrange for extra recycling and garbage bins. Likewise, designate a room or corner as a drop-off point for things people no longer want. A co-worker may appreciate your old lamp, and unclaimed items can be donated.

Much of the work will be in the form of sorting, filing and discarding. You'll also likely discover a variety of belongings that should be brought home. (Do you really need three umbrellas?)

Look too for ways clutter might be controlled in the future. Scanning receipts and documents keeps them at the ready electronically while reducing paper, and sites such as PaperKarma and Catalog Choice can help eliminate junk mail.

As for the physical cleaning, consider these suggestions from Meg Roberts, president of Molly Maid:

- Clean the room from top to bottom, moving left to right to ensure you don't overlook door frames and window sills. Use a microfiber cloth—it is reusable, dust and dirt stick to the fabric, and it works great on computer monitors.
- Dust first, and then vacuum.
- Clear out all cabinets and wipe them down with a disinfectant or a combination of vinegar and water.
- Phones can contain thousands of germs per square inch. Use a disinfecting wipe to clean the keypad, headset and mouthpiece.
- For crumbs in your keyboard, tip it upside down over the trash can and shake. For serious dust, use a can of compressed air or a cotton swab dipped in a disinfecting solution.

Virtual clutter

A clean computer is just as important to focus and productivity as a tidy desk. Tasks in this area may include:

- Tackling email through a combination of deleting, sorting into folders to be read later, unsubscribing to unwanted newsletters and updates, and filtering out garbage (a program such as SpamDrain can help).
- Updating your address book with current information.
- Eliminating unnecessary icons/sites from your desktop, tool bar, and bookmarks list.

Communal areas

Finally, get the rest of the workplace looking as good as those individual cubicles by addressing problems in shared areas. Have everyone look at the office from an outsider's perspective and jot notes. Perhaps nobody is quite sure who should toss that wilted plant in the reception area or what that mystery piece of old equipment in the copy room really does.

Quickly run through the lists as a group to voice any objections; then, set people loose to make the changes. And buy a replacement green plant when the cleaning is done—this is spring, after all.

Should it stay or go?

Maura Thomas—founder of RegainYourTime.com and author of *Work Without Walls: An Executive's Guide to Attention Management, Productivity, and the Future of Work*—presents three questions to think about while contemplating the future of papers, emails and office items.

1. Will I need it? You can't predict the answer, and that's the whole point! But look at it this way: If you think you might need it at some point in the future, but you didn't have it, what's the worst that would happen? When I pose this question to my clients, the response I often get is a shoulder shrug and "Eh, I probably wouldn't bother" or "Well, it might take me a few extra minutes." If you feel rather ambivalent toward not having it, you may not need to keep it. If the thought of not having it makes you upset, then you should probably keep it.

2. Can I get it? If you thought you needed it at some point in the future, but you didn't have it, would it be easy (and cheap) to get it again? Does it exist on the web? Does the relevant service provider or organization have another copy? For example, if you needed a financial statement from three years ago, could your bank get it for you?

3. Is it serving me? Think about the last time you used the item. If it's not serving you, it's clutter.