

## Dig Your Way Out of Paper

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- *American workers waste six weeks per year searching for lost documents. (Wall Street Journal)*
- *Paper use is growing 6 percent to 8 percent per year. (Research Alert)*
- *It costs about \$25,000 to fill a four-drawer filing cabinet and \$2,100 a year to maintain it. (Ernst & Young)*

I have met lots of sales professionals who suffer from the “Paper Shuffle.” After all, sales people have original signatures on contracts that have to be saved, passed to A/R and retained. They collect a lot of product literature – internal as well as competitors. Salespeople are also notorious for collecting business cards and scraps of paper with phone numbers on them.

The “Paper Shuffle” symptoms are obvious: A load of paper on the desk, lots of file space used, they usually have to “get back to you on that.”

Why does this malady exist?

My experience says that these people have not determined what to do with the paper. Paper is a crutch that causes us to trip instead of support us. The costs of paper shuffling are time and money, which I find are directly related to postponed decisions – people have to maintain a lot of paper as reminders, justifications and “just in case” background material.

The antidote: Make decisions now to save time and money later.

My clients have used this process to reduce the paper shuffle:

- **Look:** Read the paper and ask yourself, “What is it?”
- **Evaluate:** Ask, “Does this require action?” If it requires action, are you the appropriate person to execute?
- **Decide:** “What is the right action step to move the paper forward?” For example, do you need to draft an e-mail response, prepare budget projections, plan a meeting, for instance.
- **Move it:** Write or type the outcomes and the next action steps you are going to take to reach the desired outcomes on a “to-do” list, task pad in Outlook or in a document on the computer.
- **Contain:** Quarantine the loose paper. For example, here are files some of my clients create – to file, to read, waiting for, open invoices, project XYZ. The key here is to put the paper in line for future action if it is necessary and get it off the table if it is merely clutter.

The Paper Shuffle also relates to the quantity of meetings. More meetings = more paper. It doesn’t have to be that way.

Here’s an approach to manage that: Review notes after any meeting, pull out all of your next action items, write them down on your consolidated “to-do” list, then toss the meeting notes.

When the Paper Shuffle is cured, productivity can improve and time can be saved. A strategy and system are the prescription for success. To improve sales performance, stop shuffling papers and start executing...keep your office blood pressure under control.