

# Clearly organised

Learning how to prioritise tasks and organise routines can save you time, make your workload seem lighter, and make you a more effective educator, says **Rebecca Mezzino**.

Imagine arriving at work on time, after a leisurely commute, to find your desk clear of clutter. Your email program signals the arrival of several emails that have arrived overnight, but you deal with them quickly and within minutes the inbox is empty. Another few minutes and you have also dealt with the paper in your in-tray, including the work you took home with you. Slowly but surely you make your way through the day's tasks, crossing items off your prepared daily task list as you go. You get most, if not all, of them done. Whenever someone asks you where something is you can put your hands on it within seconds. You spend a few minutes tidying your desk and emptying your email inbox before you leave for the day. You take a few things home with you to read. You read them and settle down for an evening of relaxation before starting the routine again the next morning.

This kind of day is rare, if not completely out of the reach of most people. Instead many people wade through piles of paper, lose things, forget meetings, run late, overrun deadlines, achieve little on their to-do list and feel completely overwhelmed most of the time.

We are all busy at work these days. We all have more work than we can handle, and we are working longer hours. We take our work home with us, in fact we take our work everywhere with us, but we still don't manage to get it all done. We try multitasking, but find that it impedes our ability to retain information and recall it later, making things even worse.

Despite the digital age being upon us, we collect more paper than ever before. It breeds on our desks, in our bags, in our cars and in our homes and has become increasingly difficult to handle. Add our overflowing email inboxes to that and it's no wonder we're all stressed out!

Never has the old adage 'work smarter, not harder' been more apt, but how can it be achieved?

The short answer is: through smarter use of our time and space. Getting organised and taking back control of your space and time is the key to improved efficiency, effectiveness and reduced stress.

The Clearly Organised workshop run by Innovation and Business Skills Australia helps participants to deal effectively with paperwork, emails, task management and scheduling, and provides strategies for combating procrastination and distractions.

## PAPERWORK

Paper needs to flow through your office. It needs to come in, be processed, and move out again, either into recycling or filing. If you think of paper like water, then your office needs to be a creek, rather than a stagnant pond. You should not need to shuffle papers over and over again, nor search in piles to find the piece of paper you need.

The key to controlling your paperwork lies in having an effective in-tray that does not function merely as a 'pending' or 'too hard' pile, but a true in-tray – where the paper goes in and comes back out again rather soon after. You also need an effective filing system for your current work – the paperwork that needs action or is currently being processed.

Paperwork that does not require action also needs an effective storage solution away from your actionable paperwork. Keeping them separate improves your retrieval and filing times significantly.

## EMAILS

We get so many emails that our inbox is as cluttered as our desk. And a full inbox can be just as stressful as a messy desk. True, Outlook and other email programs have search facilities that make looking for an email a lot easier than looking for a lost piece of paper, but a full inbox will



# Prioritise professional development

Opportunities abound for professional educators, if they prioritise capability development into their busy workloads, writes **Anita Roberts**.

Like the painter's house that is always unpainted and the mechanic's car overdue for a service, professional educators can be prone to neglect their own learning. The focus on other people's learning needs, not to mention administrative demands, all too often condemns professional skill building to the bottom of the priority list.

The sad irony of this situation is that for educators, unlike other groups of learners, the benefits of professional development are twofold. Educators benefit from the content being delivered but also from the opportunity to observe and reflect on the effectiveness of the delivery method and strategies. Professional development for educators is thus a source of new knowledge and skills and a fund of new ideas and inspiration.

Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA) is recognised by the Industry Skills Council and funded by government to advise on the workforce development needs of six key industries, including the education industry. In this capacity, IBSA is acutely aware of the importance of continuous professional development for educators and the wide range of knowledge and skill areas that contribute to professional capability.

IBSA's professional development offerings reflect the diversity of educator skill needs, encompassing expertise in training delivery and assessment as well as the underpinning planning and organisational skills that support successful practice. The current suite of workshops includes learning opportunities for educators to spice up their delivery, overcome dilemmas about recognition of prior learning, reinvent validation and use strategic planning models.

IBSA's mission is to build capability, professionalism and innovative capacity in Australia's workforce. By providing professional development support for educators and trainers IBSA

aims to build the skills of the education workforce and thereby enhance the quality of training delivery to industry more broadly.

Making professional development worthwhile and accessible is therefore a prime objective for IBSA. All IBSA workshops are designed to provide participants with a full day of interactive learning with tangible outcomes. Workshop structures offer opportunities to interact with others and expand personal support networks, and presenters are selected for their recognised expertise and enthusiasm for their field.

To encourage organisational capability building, IBSA provides discounts for group bookings and conducts in-house workshops for groups of employees. Workshops can also be customised to meet specific organisational requirements.

Current IBSA workshops allow participants to build skills in a variety of areas, including:

- reviewing dilemmas around recognition of prior learning and exploring strategies for its use in vocational education and training
- delivering dynamic, persuasive and memorable PowerPoint presentations
- conducting lively training sessions and building group facilitation skills, and
- adding real value to your training organisation through validation processes.

Professional development is a continuous process and effective educators must continue to build their knowledge and skills. IBSA's suite of professional development workshops provides educators not only with skills and knowledge for improved practice, but also with the ability to prioritise and strategically plan their own professional development. Now there's no excuse.

still increase your stress levels. Similarly to paper, emails should flow through your office. They come in, they are dealt with, they move on.

## MANAGING TASKS

Many people find it very difficult to keep track of everything they need to do. Most of the time, it rattles around in their head until it becomes urgent, then it goes on the list for the day. Unfortunately, it's highly unlikely that all of them can fit in the one day. Hence, your to-do list becomes very long,

very difficult to complete and it raises your anxiety levels significantly.

Having multiple to-do lists means that you can keep track of everything that you need to do, rather than just the tasks that are shouting the loudest. You can keep master lists of everything you need to do, then refer to them to build a realistic and appropriately prioritised list for each day or week.

It doesn't matter what method you use to store your to-dos. There is no reason why paper and pencil can't work for you just as well as a sophisticated

software solution. Use what suits you. The key is to have them grouped into categories and review them daily. Keep it as simple as possible – the more complex, the more time you spend planning.

### USING A SCHEDULER

It's very important to have a planner, diary or calendar to record all of your important appointments and meetings. Do not use your planner to store your tasks – that's for your to-do lists. It's okay to make appointments with yourself to undertake tasks, but keep it simple and achievable. If you fill your planner with to-dos and reminders it will only get 'noisy' and you'll begin to ignore the entries.

Try to use only one planner for everything (use different coloured pens for different appointments or split the page in half if you want to use it for both personal and business).

Create a habit of checking it multiple times a day – at the very least at the start and end of each work day.

### PROCRASTINATION

Edward Young said 'Procrastination is the thief of time,' and how right he was! Everybody procrastinates to some degree, even highly organised people, but they tend to do it less often. Some people do it to the point that it completely sabotages their careers. Most of us are in the middle somewhere.

Most reasons we procrastinate are based, in some degree, on fear – from a fear of failure

to a fear of success, a fear of unpleasantness to a fear of not doing it well enough. Another reason is just plain laziness! For those who do it out of fear, identifying that fear can take you a good way toward overcoming the procrastination. Many times it's also a symptom of disorganisation – once organisation is achieved you find you have less excuses to procrastinate!

### MANAGING DISTRACTIONS

Distractions come to us from all angles. Sometimes we look for them (when afflicted by procrastination) but mostly they just come uninvited, most commonly via phone calls, emails and 'the drop-in'.

When we attend immediately to the ringing phone or the pinging email, or when we stop and chat to someone knocking on the door, we essentially hand over the control of our own time to somebody else. By employing some new work practices you can take back control and have at least part of your day to work uninterrupted and get a lot more work done.

#### LINKS:

For more information on upcoming seminars and Clear Space, visit [www.clearspace.net.au](http://www.clearspace.net.au)  
For workshop dates, registration or further information regarding any of the IBSA Professional Development Workshop Programs or to enquire about running workshops in-house for a group of employees, visit [www.ibsa.org.au/events.aspx](http://www.ibsa.org.au/events.aspx)

*Rebecca Mezzino is an accredited professional organiser and founder of Clear Space organising services. She specialises in making people's lives simpler and more enjoyable by offering organising seminars, training, coaching and hands-on home and office decluttering and organising.*

*Rebecca Mezzino will speak at the Clearly Organised workshop run by Innovation and Business Skills Australia, to be held in capital cities in April and May. The Clearly Organised workshop aims to benefit participants both personally and professionally by building the skills to maximise effectiveness in the workplace – freeing up time and reducing stress.*



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